



Tech Lead - External

What is a Tech Lead at Focused Labs?

The Tech Lead is the technical leader for the Focused Labs developers on a project team. They are a contributing developer to the team with additional responsibilities and authority that is accountable for the technical success of the engagement. The role is a combination of **technical**, **consulting**, and **leadership** skills.

Tech leads are accountable for:

- The technical quality of the software delivered
- Ensuring that the team is following Focused Labs core development practices
- Consulting the client organization on the best technical approach
- Maintaining the technical context of the project and being able to explain the 'why's' behind architectural decisions.

The individual in this role is not solely responsible for accomplishing all of the tasks listed above. Instead, their main responsibility is to guide the team's technical decisions and ensure that ownership is delegated effectively while maintaining accountability for Focus Labs's high standards of execution.

The allocations team determines who the Tech Lead is for a project. This is a project-specific title that a developer holds only for the duration of that project.

Technical

The tech lead should not make decisions alone or hoard all technical project context. Instead, they should work to align the team's technical direction and incorporate feedback from other developers in order to make the strongest technical decisions possible. The tech lead does not need to be an expert in the tech stack or domain when they start a project, but are expected to learn quickly and leverage their team and existing knowledge to make informed decisions.

The tech lead should lead by example and is expected write code and actively participate in development. They should spend at least 80% of their time pairing with the rest of the team. This is critical for preventing knowledge silos, guiding decisions in the codebase, and maintaining a high level of quality.

Consulting

The tech lead is not only a technical leader but also a trusted technical partner whom the client seeks out for advice, perspective, and concrete solutions. They should expand their sphere of influence beyond the core team and build relationships with other client teams. This is critical for understanding the client's technical landscape, so that the tech lead can make the best technical decisions based on the client's current position.

Leadership

Leadership on a team is shared with other roles. The product manager and designer collaborate on *what* to build while the tech lead is accountable for *how* to build. The tech lead guides the team's technical direction, delegates responsibilities effectively, and is accountable for Focused Labs's high standards of execution. They generate consensus when then can, and make decisions when necessary.

Responsibilities of the Tech Lead

- Ensuring that the team is following core Focused Labs dev practices, including always delivering working software, TDD, CI/CD, pairing and pair rotations, managing technical debt, preventing knowledge silos, etc.
- Ensuring that the product is production-ready by making sure that cross functional requirements are met, including performance, security, scalability, monitoring, logging, documentation, etc.
- Understanding the technical requirements of the product and client, and working closely with PM and design to ensure they are prioritized in the backlog supports continuously shipping working software
- Ensuring architecture decisions fit product and client needs
- Consulting the client on technical best practices and advocating for XP core practices

- Growing their sphere of influence outside of the core team by establishing and maintaining relationships with client technical teams and enterprise architects, including teams working in the same product area, DevOps, security, etc.
- Communicating technical risks, wins, and allocation needs to the Delivery Lead

Most Effective Tech Leads...

- **Delegate responsibilities rather than doing everything themselves.** Although the Tech Lead is accountable for the success of team initiatives, it is unlikely that they will be able to effectively do everything by themselves. Tech Leads should seek to empower their team by removing obstacles, transferring ownership, and avoiding micromanagement. They use authority tactfully and hold team members accountable.
- **Collaborate closely with their cross-functional peers and client leadership.** Success is rarely tied solely to technical outcomes. Effective Tech Leads work with product, design, architecture, and other teams to make informed decisions. They are a technical *partner* and make informed decisions in the context of a client's technical landscape.
- **Contribute to a healthy team environment by setting an example.** Good leaders seek feedback often to make course corrections. They have a good sense of team morale and promote open communication among team members to proactively prevent interpersonal conflict. They address team issues directly and escalate when necessary.
- **Act as a *primary* point of contact but not the *only* point of contact.** An effective Tech Lead manages their time well. They build client relationships while balancing their time as a technical contributor. This means being selective about the meetings that they need to attend and looking for opportunities to volunteer team members in their place.

Logistics

Role Requirements

- Senior+ software developer on pathways

- Has been on at least one previous Focused Labs project

Tech Lead Rotations

- Tech leads are typically allocated to a project for at least 8+ months (or the duration of the project, if it's a shorter engagement).
- Large (3+ pair) projects and projects that have a tech lead who is scheduled to rotate will have an appointed secondary tech lead. The secondary tech lead will pair with the tech lead, in order to gain context on both the role and on the project.

Becoming a Tech Lead for the first time

- Talk to your manager about your interest in the role
- Be appointed as a secondary tech lead on a project and shadow the current tech lead

Secondary Tech Lead

- This role is a specifically appointed developer who is a pair to the current tech lead
- The purpose of the role is to:
 - Up skill a new tech lead by giving them the opportunity to learn from an experienced tech lead on a project.
 - Transfer knowledge and context from an existing tech lead when they are scheduled to rotate off of a project.

▼ Future Ideas & Next Steps

- Guidelines and metrics around measuring the technical success of engagements
- Additional tech lead training