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Virtual Volunteering Project Archive ("How do I know if my organization is ready to involve online mentors?")

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"How do I know if my organization is ready to involve online mentors?"

Before an organization says it's ready to involve online mentors, apply the following evaluation to both the entire organization and EVERY site where those to be mentored are located. Based on our own experiences and feedback from [other online mentoring programs](#), we strongly suggest your organization and ALL sites meet the following criteria before you attempt to involve online mentors:

- Your organization staff should already have some kind of **experience in a traditional, face-to-face mentoring programs**, either in managing or participating in such a program. There should be in-house expertise on the basics of volunteer recruitment, screening, matching to assignments, management, feedback and evaluation.
- **Determine How This Program "Fits"**. Before an agency staff starts a program that will bring together online volunteers with clients, students or the public, consider how such a program will fit within the organization's mission; how will this program be an extension of the agency goals? You will need to be able to answer this question before beginning any steps to set up such a virtual volunteering program at your organization.
- The online mentoring program manager, site managers (including teachers) and anyone who might work with online mentors or youth involved in this program must be **committed to reading and responding to e-mails within 48 hours of receipt**. All of these program managers and coordinators must be **comfortable using e-mail** as well. If managers can't make this commitment, or if managers find reading and responding to e-mail "bothersome", your organization is not ready to involve online mentors.
- Each site for those to be mentored (such as a classroom) **MUST have a minimum number of computers with fully-functional Internet access** BEFORE the program begins. What that number of computers is depends

on your program, but define a number that would allow every student to be online every week, and make that number a requirement for site participation.

- Each site for those to be mentored **MUST** have a **minimum number of people (students, for instance) that are ALREADY involved in your program**, know how to use e-mail and browse the web, and whom the site manager thinks would be appropriate for this program. What that number is depends on your program goals, number of mentors you think you can recruit, and resources to manage the program and keep track of participants.
- **How are those to be mentored currently using Internet access?** What activities are they already engaging in online through your organization or in their classroom? If a site manager, such as a teacher, can't answer this, they aren't ready to work with online mentors or help students participate fully in such a program.
- **Why does each site want to participate in this program?** Have every site manager or teacher submit an answer to this question. If they can't, they aren't ready to work with online mentors.
- Is there a **person at each site who will help those to be mentored write their messages**, as needed? This person would also have responsibility to make sure all of those to be mentored are writing regularly.
- **Has every task listed on "Key administrative and management tasks for an online mentoring program" been assigned and communicated?** If this list seems too much to do, or if only one person is in charge of all of these items, your organization is not yet ready to involve online mentors.
- **Assess if your organization has the elements of effective practice.** The National Mentoring Partnership defines the **Elements of Effective Practice in Mentoring Programs** on its web site and in offline materials. It includes recommended **requirements of a responsible mentoring program** and a **nuts and bolts checklist for mentoring programs**. The Virtual Volunteering Project endorses these effective practices as fundamentally necessary for online mentoring programs as well.

If you feel you meet all of the above criteria, you are ready to start looking into [setting up and managing an online mentoring program](#).

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