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# Virtual Volunteering Project Archive (online volunteers working with clients)

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## first steps:

### online volunteers working with clients

(including online mentoring programs with students)

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## I. 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.

## II. Access Your Group or Agency's Mentoring Experience

Does your agency already involve volunteers with clients, students or the public? Do staff have experience facilitating groups, managing a mentoring or tutoring program, or other face-to-face volunteer and client program? Again, you will need to have this offline expertise in-house before beginning any steps to set up a direct contact virtual volunteering program.

## III. Virtual Volunteering Basics

Determine if your organization or group is [ready to involve volunteers virtually](#), regardless of the type of service online volunteers will perform. Our [online self-evaluation](#) will help you determine if your potential program has the resources and expertise necessary to ensure success. For instance, **it is of paramount importance that your staff is already comfortable communicating via e-mail**. If your staff finds reading and responding to e-mail "bothersome", and even avoids using it, then managing an online mentoring is not going to be right for your organization at this time.

## IV. Setting The Groundwork

Once you've determined that your organization is [ready for virtual volunteering](#), it's time to [build the internal groundwork](#): becoming experienced in online communications, getting staff buy-in and participation, developing an implementation plan, training staff and volunteers, etc.

## V. For Mentoring Programs: Access 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 necessary for online mentoring programs as well.

Another good resource is the listing of [Quality Assurance Standards for Mentoring Organizations](#), by the Texas Governor's Mentoring Initiative. These standards are what the Texas mentoring field considers the essential elements of any high-quality mentoring program.

Only after completing ALL of the aforementioned steps is your organization ready to start exploring how you will bring volunteers and clients (students, mentees, the public, etc.) together online.

The Virtual Volunteering Project has information on monitoring/supervising online interactions between volunteers and clients, screening and evaluating volunteers that will work with clients virtually, guidelines for bringing together youth and adult online volunteers, and safety guidelines for direct contact volunteering. See our guidelines for [Safety in Online Volunteering Programs](#) for more information.

The Project has also compiled an index of [Resources for Volunteer Moderators and Facilitators of Online Discussion Groups](#). These resources -- some by the VV Project, but most by other organizations -- can help both volunteers and staff moderate (approve all posts) or facilitate (keeping the discussion flowing) online discussion groups, either via e-mail or via a chat/real-time platform.

The Project has also compiled information about various [telementoring/teletutoring programs](#), highlighting materials that can help other agencies engage in similar activities.

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