



Core Standards

for mentoring programs

Founded in 2000 by two philanthropists who were seeking a proactive way to make a difference for children and families in Vermont, The Permanent Fund for the Well-Being of Vermont Children is a supporting foundation of The Vermont Community Foundation. We operate based on the knowledge that children live in families, and families live in communities. Our working style is to develop collaborative relationships with non-profit organizations, other funders, community leaders and policy makers.

Since our inception, we have focused resources on increasing the quantity and quality of adult-to-child mentoring matches in Vermont. In addition to our experience in the field, a growing body of national research has identified program characteristics that, when present, lead to positive outcomes for children in mentoring relationships. In an effort to articulate what has been learned, both in Vermont and nationally, the Permanent Fund developed these core standards. We will incorporate these standards into our review of mentoring programs.

Core Standards

1. Designated Mentoring Program Staff
2. Training & Support to Matches
3. Program Planning
4. Safety Practices
5. Program Monitoring and Evaluation
6. Program Sustainability

The *Core Standards* were identified upon careful review of mentoring research policies and the experiences of The Permanent Fund. Special attention was given to the *Elements of Effective Practice, 2nd Edition*, published in 2003 and the *Research in Action Series* published in 2007, both by the MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. These are *minimum requirements* which are not meant to supplant a program's effort to implement more rigorous, research-based standards. Consider this is a working document. As more is learned through research and mentoring program experiences, changes may be made.

What is Mentoring?

The Permanent Fund defines mentoring as:

- **One on one adult-to-child relationships.** One of the 40 developmental assets identified by the Search Institute includes having non-parent adults actively engaged in a child's life. These assets build resiliency in children and help them become caring, responsible adults.
- **Frequent and consistent contact** between the adult mentor and the child. "Frequency" and "consistency" will be individually defined by each program, however, every program should strive for a *minimum* of four in-person hours per month.
- **Length of relationship** is a *minimum* of one year (or one school year).
- **Focus is child-centered and developmentally appropriate.** The *primary purpose* of a mentor is to establish a trusting, safe and supportive relationship in a way that is meaningful to the child. The role of the mentor is as an adult friend, not as a counselor or social worker. Though a program may have an established thematic approach to mentoring (such as literacy or career planning), the relational needs of the child comes first.



Core Standards for mentoring programs at a glance

1. Each mentoring program has designated and trained mentoring staff.
 - Each mentoring program has a designated mentoring program staff whose responsibilities are outlined in a job description.
 - Designated program staff engage in relevant professional development activities to effectively implement core quality standards.
2. Programs provide training and support to mentors.
 - Each program has a volunteer mentor description that clearly outlines expectations and responsibilities of the mentor.
 - Mentors receive a comprehensive orientation.
 - In the first three months, matches receive an intensive schedule of check-ins by program staff; check-ins occur on a frequent and predictable basis from that point forward.
3. Prior to program implementation, programs have a plan based on community needs and resources, with a set of clear goals and strategies.
4. Programs adhere to the safety standards outlined in the addendum: *Core Safety Standards*.
5. Data is collected to track program quality and effectiveness.
6. Programs are sustainable.
 - Each program has a budget and a financial sustainability plan that includes strategies to diversify funding sources.
 - A mentoring program advisory committee of local leaders is in place to engage the community for purposes of recruitment and fundraising.

“The principal challenge facing the incipient mentoring movement, one essential for its development and survival, lies in finding an alternate route, one that one that might be called fervor with infrastructure. Taking this route will require a balancing act that moderates fervor while bolstering infrastructure to strike the healthy equilibrium between marketing and programming so lacking at present, and so essential for mentoring to flourish.”

*~ Mark Freedman, *The Kindness of Strangers: Reflections on the Mentoring Movement**



Core Standards

for mentoring programs
details

1. Designated Mentoring Program Staff

- a. Each mentoring program has a designated mentoring program staff whose responsibilities are outlined in a job description.
- b. Designated program staff engage in relevant professional development activities to effectively implement core quality standards.

Why these are important:

Considering the many ways mentoring program staff influence the experiences of mentor matches, it is critical there be a designated person responsible for the overall functioning of the program. A successful program requires continued oversight and nurturing by a knowledgeable and skilled manager to not only keep up with best practices and advocate with their state peers for high standards, but also to keep the mentoring program from getting lost within the many functions of a larger organization.

Staff consistency within this role leads to greater consistency and sustainability of the program. When staff are clear about their responsibilities and are well trained, they are more likely to remain in their position and contribute to the program's long-term success.

2. Training and Support to Matches

- a. Each program has a volunteer mentor description that clearly outlines expectations and responsibilities of the mentor including:
 - time commitments,
 - frequency of meetings, and
 - the length of the match.
- b. Mentors receive a comprehensive orientation.
- c. In the first three months, matches receive an intensive schedule of check-ins by program staff; check-ins occur on a frequent and predictable basis from that point forward.

Why these are important:

The duration and strength of mentoring relationships contribute toward positive outcomes for mentees (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002; Herrera et al, 2007). Mentors who receive more pre-match and on-going training report a higher level of closeness with their mentee and are more likely to mentor the child into a second year.

Core Standards

for mentoring programs

details

Pre-match training and orientation as well as on-going training contribute to more satisfying and impactful relationships (Dubois et al, 2002; Herrera et al, 2000). Additionally, research indicates that frequent staff contact and nurturing of mentoring matches, particularly in the first few months of the relationship, leads to the longevity and overall success of mentoring relationships, while short-term relationships (less than three months) have the potential to do harm (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Karcher, 2005).

3. Program Planning

Programs have a plan based on community needs and resources, with a set of clear goals and strategies. While each program develops their own plan, *examples* of program goals include:

- determining the type of program your community needs (e.g. supervised site-based, etc.), how large it needs to be, and who the program intends to serve;
- recruiting new mentors to reach your goals;
- increasing retention of mentors from year to year;
- planning regular review and updates of policies and practices (including the management of grievances and the maintenance of records);
- coordinating with other mentor programs;
- planning mentor supports and trainings; and
- enhancing closure practices between mentors and mentees.

Why this is important:

Programs with more structure result in stronger mentor relationships of greater duration, and mentors better prepared to make a commitment and offer empathy to their mentees, than those with little structure (*MEE Report, 1992 as noted in The Kindness of Strangers, Freedman*).

4. Safety Practices

Programs adhere to the safety standards” outlined in the addendum: *Core Safety Standards*.

In order to assure safety issues receive priority consideration, The Permanent Fund has adopted minimum safety standards, including:

- a written policy on screening practices and interpreting results;
- a standardized volunteer mentor application;
- a written policy on how to respond to safety concerns;
- insurance coverage*;
- in-person interviews;
- reference checks;
- criminal background checks;
- fingerprint-based background checks (when indicated);
- National Sex Offender Registry checks;
- Vermont Child Abuse & Neglect Registry checks; and
- Vermont Motor Vehicle Driver Record checks*.

* Requirements may vary based on the type of program.

Core Standards

for mentoring programs

details

Why this is important:

First and foremost, we all want children to be safe. When volunteers are not properly screened, an organization exposes its mentees to potential exploitation and victimization. Such risks can be minimized through thorough screening: an important part of an overall volunteer management program (*Who's Lending a Hand*, National Center for Victims of Crime, 2008).

Secondly, comprehensive screening and adequate insurance coverage help to ensure the long-term viability of organizations because a program can be found liable for harm caused by volunteers and thus be subject to damages and rising insurance costs. In the very least, programs must be prepared to respond quickly, properly and strategically to accusations, suspicions and knowledge of abuse and neglect by a mentor, family member or other person in order to protect the interests of both the children and the adults.

5. Program Monitoring and Evaluation

Data is collected to track program quality and effectiveness.

Examples of relevant data include:

- Staff and mentor retention rates
- Average length of mentor relationships
- # of matches lasting less than 3 months
- Longest and shortest duration of mentor relationships
- Rate of eligible mentees transitioning into other mentor programs after aging out or moving out of the program catchment area.
- The length of time the designated mentoring staff has been in his/her position.

Why this is important:

Without actually conducting an evaluation, programs can sometimes draw on findings that have been linked to outcomes of similar programs (Grossman & Johnson, 1998). In other words, it is not necessary to continually evaluate the impact of mentoring: we already know that mentoring works! What is important to track is *how well* mentoring programs do their work: the quality of programs matters greatly. So, if data collected indicates the elements effective practice are well implemented, one can assume the program is achieving positive outcomes for children.

Core Standards

for mentoring programs

details

6. Program Sustainability

- a. Before program implementation, each program has a budget and a financial sustainability plan that includes strategies to diversify funding sources.
- b. A mentoring program advisory committee of local leaders is in place to engage the community for purposes of recruitment and fundraising.

Why these are important:

Sustainable funding is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges facing mentoring programs . . . or any non-profit organization. Building local support and local sources of revenue have proven to be effective ways to sustain a mentoring program. Relying on government grants for the majority of a program's budget has not.

Mentor/National Mentoring Partnership has identified mentoring advisory committees as one of the *Elements of Effective Practice* that leads to program sustainability. In the case of a stand-alone mentoring program, the organization's board of directors acts as the program advisory committee. For programs that are part of a larger organization, such as school-based programs, a separate advisory committee is required.

In general, program advisory committees have two primary areas of responsibility: 1) they act as ambassadors to the community; and 2) they bring resources to the program through the recruitment of mentors and mentees and through fundraising and other initiatives related to program sustainability.

Thank You

We would like to extend our gratitude to the many people who both assisted and guided us in the development and review of the *Core Standards*. Though we have learned from all of you, we would especially like to thank the following:

- *Big Brother Big Sisters of Bennington County/UCS*, Betsy Rathbun-Gunn & Megan Brooks
- *Community Friends Mentoring Program of Howard Center for Human Services*, Kristen Hayden-West
- *Everybody Wins! Vermont*, Amy Cunningham
- *Girls/Boyz First! of Community Connections*, Wendy Farber & Ginny Burley
- *Mentor Connector*, Sandy Cohen
- *Mobius*, Andrea Torello
- *Starfish Mentoring Programs of Three River Valley Regional Business & Education Partnership*, Marie Gelineau
- *The Golden Rainbow of NEK Community Action*, Bobbi Higgins
- *Watershed Mentoring of Franklin County Caring Communities*, Bob Atherton & Beth Crane



Core Safety Standards

Addendum

for mentoring programs

The Permanent Fund designed the following *Core Safety Standards* to make certain the mentoring programs we support do everything possible to ensure the safety of the children and youth they serve. In short, mentoring organizations are responsible for:

- screening prospective mentors,
- determining their appropriateness to the program,
- placing approved applicants with the most suitable mentee, and
- managing the safety of the mentor matches.

Careful screening is critical; it not only improves the quality of mentor relationships, it helps ensure the safety of the children involved while also managing your organization's level of risk and liability. While criminal background checks are vital, they are not the only component of a careful screening process. A robust practice of reference checks, sex offender registry checks, driving record reviews (when relevant), personal interviews, and an overall evaluation of risk must also be a part of your organization's screening procedures. Ongoing monitoring of the mentor/mentee relationship is also essential to prevent and address safety issues.

These standards, while required for financial support from the Permanent Fund, can be adapted to meet the unique needs and circumstances of your program or organization. Many programs already have these components in place. In fact, we are learning from you! Please consider this a working document and continue to inform us as you uncover practices that work best, create efficiencies, and enhance safety so we may modify these standards based on what is learned. The minimum safety standards are:

1. Pre-Screening
2. Insurance Requirements*
3. Reference Checks
4. In-person Interviews
5. Criminal Background Checks
6. National Sex Offender Registry
7. Vermont Child Abuse and Neglect Registry
8. Vermont Driving Record Check*

* Requirements vary based on the type of program

Core Safety Standards

for mentoring programs

1. Pre-Screening Standards

Before you even begin to recruit mentors, there are basic documents your program must have that will help standardize your volunteer mentor selection and guide your response to any safety concerns that may arise. They include:

- A standardized mentor application
- A written policy on screening and interpreting results
- A written policy on reporting safety concerns

Standardized mentor application

Each mentor program has a standardized written or on-line mentor application. At a *minimum*, the application includes:

- Basic personal information (such as name, address, age, etc.);
- Employment history;
- Drivers information (if applicable, license number, auto insurance, etc.);
- At least two references: one personal (non-relative) and one professional (when applicable);
- An indication as to whether or not the applicant has ever been convicted, pled no contest, or had adjudication withheld in a criminal offense, felony, or misdemeanor or has any criminal charges pending against him/her other than a minor traffic violation;
- A signed release statement agreeing to a background check.

Written policy on screening practices and interpreting results

Each mentoring organization has a written policy documenting the screening processes they will use to accept or disqualify an applicant as a mentor. The policy includes a list of records and reports reviewed as well as clear instructions for interpreting results and for selecting or disqualifying applicants as mentors. *Under no circumstance* shall a mentoring program accept as a mentor an individual who has been convicted or has plead guilty to sexual abuse of a minor, child abuse, aggravated assault, murder, or a serious drug offense.

Written policy on responding to safety concerns

Each mentoring organization has a written safety policy documenting, at a *minimum*, processes for managing accusations and reporting suspicion and/or knowledge of abuse or neglect (of a mentor, family member or other). Abuse is defined as physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and cases of severe emotional abuse that constitute willful or unjustifiable punishment of a child.

2. Insurance Requirements

Each organization complies with the *minimum* insurance requirements based on the type of mentoring program in place. Requirements consider whether or not a mentoring

Core Safety Standards

for mentoring programs

program is school, community, or site-based; if it rents or owns office or program facilities; and if program mentors provide transportation. (See *Attachment A* for detailed information.) The basic insurance policies required include the following; however, they are subject to change based on funding source or newer best practices. Please make sure you are using the latest version of insurance standards and are meeting requirements outlined in your contract.

- a. General Liability and Property Damage including:
 - i. Premises - Operations
 - ii. Personal Injury Liability
 - iii. Contractual Liability
 - iv. Fire Legal Liability
- b. Workers Compensation
- c. Automotive Liability
- d. Directors and Officers Liability

3. Minimum Screening Standards

Each mentoring organization complies with *minimum* screening requirements based on the type of mentoring program in place. Requirements vary based on whether or not a program is school, community, or site-based, is supervised (has staff on premises at all times), and if mentors are allowed to transport mentees in motor vehicles. (See *Attachment B* for a summary.)

Minimum screening requirements include:

- Reference Checks
- In-person Interviews
- Vermont Criminal Records Background Checks: <http://www.dps.state.vt.us>,
- Fingerprint-based background checks: <http://apps.mentoring.org/safetynet/>
- National Sex Offender Registry: <http://www.nsopr.gov/>
- Vermont Child Abuse & Neglect Registry:
http://www.dcf.state.vt.us/child_abuse_registry_employers
- Vermont Motor Vehicle Driver Record Check:
<http://www.aot.state.vt.us/dmv/violations/drivingrecords.htm>

Reference Checks

At a *minimum*, any personal information on the application is checked out so there is a level of confidence regarding its accuracy. At least two references, one personal (non-relative) and one professional (when applicable), are checked for purposes of confirming the accuracy of the applicant's information and securing additional information regarding the applicant's character, level of commitment, and motivations to be a mentor.

Core Safety Standards

for mentoring programs

In-person Interviews

A face-to-face interview is an opportunity to compare your program requirements with the talents and interests of the person seeking to be a mentor and to gain clarity on any information of concern gleaned from the application.

Criminal Records Background Checks

At a *minimum*, all programs obtain a Vermont Criminal Records Background Check on each considered applicant through the Vermont Criminal Information Center (VCIC). This service is **free to mentoring programs**. Information on all criminal convictions from Vermont District Courts and all serious motor vehicle convictions which occurred after September 1, 1995, are included in the report. By law, arrests that did not end in conviction and pending charges are *not* reported.

As of January 2009, a mentoring program may now access VCIC background checks directly by:

1. Going to <http://vermont.gov> .
2. Clicking the last bullet in the dark blue box: “Obtain Criminal Record”
3. Applying to qualify as a “Vulnerable Populations Agency” by clicking “apply online today” in the second dark blue box.
4. Filling out and submitting the form. In the user information section, you must specifically name the persons - up to a total of 5 - who will have access to this program.
5. Once you receive approval you will be given a password which you can later change.

For more information: Criminal Records Section
Vermont Crime Information Center
103 South Main Street
Waterbury, Vermont 05671-2101
802-241-5237
<http://www.dps.state.vt.us>

Fingerprint-Based Criminal Background Checks

For unsupervised programs, a national fingerprint-based criminal background check must be completed on any applicant being considered where a “red flag” exists. Examples of circumstances where fingerprint-based checks are warranted include applicants with multiple recent addresses, particularly with residences in multiple states; people who travel frequently (E.g. through employment in the airline industry); and applicants with questionable intentions or unexplained gaps in their personal, employment or residential history.

Core Safety Standards

for mentoring programs

A fingerprint-based check is the only way to verify a person's identity and to ensure that the criminal records found are for the right person. Fingerprints can be obtained through your local police or sheriff's offices which are then sent out to a program for background checks. These checks can be accessed through SafetyNET or similar service. **SafetyNET** is a federally funded program through which FBI fingerprint-based background check results are delivered within 3-5 business days at a cost of \$18 each. (This does not include any fee that a local police department may charge to do the fingerprinting, which is usually less than \$5.)

For more information: MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership
1600 Duke Street, Suite 300
Alexandria, VA 22314
703-224-2266, safetynet@mentoring.org
<http://apps.mentoring.org/safetynet/>

National Sex Offender Registry

All mentor programs complete a National Sex Offender Registry review on all considered applicants. This is a **free service** provided by the US Department of Justice National Sex Offender Registry that performs a sexual offender search of all states (except for Oregon and South Dakota). It offers access to participating state public information Web sites regarding the presence or location of offenders, who, in most cases, have been convicted of sexually-violent offenses against adults and children and certain sexual contact and other crimes against victims who are minors.

This registry cannot guarantee the accuracy, completeness, or timeliness of the information contained in state Web sites. It is possible that information accessed or obtained through this Web site may not reflect current residences, employment, school attendance or other information regarding such individuals. The national sex offender registry is searchable online at <http://www.nsopr.gov/>.

Vermont Child Abuse & Neglect Registry

All mentor programs complete a Vermont Child Abuse & Neglect Registry review on all considered applicants. This is a **free service** through the Vermont Department for Children and Families. This is a database of all *substantiated reports* of child abuse and neglect in Vermont since January 1, 1992.

A substantiated report means there has been a determination that the report is based on accurate and reliable information that would lead a reasonable person to believe a child has been abused or neglected. Differences between Vermont's child protection statutes and criminal statutes make it possible for people to be substantiated for child abuse or

Core Safety Standards

for mentoring programs

neglect even if they were never convicted or criminally charged for the acts for which they have been substantiated. A Child Abuse and Neglect Registry record includes:

- The name of the person substantiated for child abuse or neglect;
- The date of the finding;
- The nature of the finding; and
- At least one other personal identifier other than the person's name, such as a date of birth or social security number, to help correctly identify the person.

Please note: An individual listed on the Registry for at least seven (7) years may ask for a review to remove their name from the registry record. They must show that they are no longer a risk to the safety or well-being of children. The decision to remove a name from the list is the responsibility of the Commissioner of the Vermont Department for Children and Families.

For more information: Child Abuse Registry Unit, Department for Children and Families
Family Services Division
103 South Main Street
Waterbury, Vermont 05671-2401
802-241-2131
http://www.dcf.state.vt.us/child_abuse_registry_employers

Vermont Motor Vehicle Driver Record Check

A Vermont motor vehicle driver record check (MVR) is secured on each considered applicant of mentoring programs that involve the transport of a child by a mentor or program staff. A mentor or program staff *MAY NOT* drive a mentee, alone or in a group, without a favorable MVR. This check provides a history of violations, suspensions and other details about a person's driving history.

At a **cost of \$10** per driver, you can order a driving record via the Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles' (DMV) Website at

<http://www.aot.state.vt.us/dmv/violations/drivingrecords.htm> A list of state DMV offices is available at <http://www.aot.state.vt.us/DMV/ABOUTUS/OFFICES/OFFICES.htm>.

For more information: The State of Vermont
Department of Motor Vehicles
120 State Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05603-0001
802-828-2000

Minimum Insurance Requirements

Host Organizations: The grantee must certify by way of signature that the required insurance policies are in place. If your program is part of a nonprofit agency or school, their insurance policies apply. If your program is its own 501(c)(3), you must secure the required insurance policies in order to receive funding.

	School-Based*	Other Site-Based	Community-Based
General Liability:	✓	✓	✓
<i>Premises - Operations</i>	✓	✓ <i>Only if your program has an office or program facilities independent of a host organization</i>	✓ <i>Only if your program has an office or program facilities independent of a host organization</i>
<i>Personal Injury Liability</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>Contractual Liability</i>	<i>Required only for Mentor Connector, Mobius and LVMP unless specifically requested by The Permanent Fund</i>		
<i>Fire Legal Liability</i>	✓	✓ <i>Only if your program has an office or program facilities independent of a host organization</i>	✓ <i>Only if your program has an office or program facilities independent of a host organization</i>
Workers Compensation	✓	✓	✓
Automotive Liability	✓ <i>Only if motor vehicles are used in connection with this grant</i>	NA	✓
Directors & Officers <i>(for Board of Directors - not advisory committees)</i>	✓	✓	✓

Minimum Screening Requirements

	School-Based*	Site-Based Supervised	Site-Based Unsupervised	Community-Based
Prescreening Safety Standards				
<i>Written Policy on Screening Practices and Interpreting Results</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Standardize Mentor Application</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Written policy on responding to safety concerns</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Screening Safety Standards				
<i>Reference Checks</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>In-person Interviews</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>VT Criminal Records Check</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Fingerprint-based Check</i>	<i>(If unsupervised & otherwise warranted)</i>	NA	<i>(If warranted)</i>	<i>(If warranted)</i>
<i>National Sex Offender Registry</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>VT Child Abuse & Neglect Registry</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Vermont Motor Vehicle Record Check</i>	<i>(Only if transporting mentees)</i>	NA	NA	✓