

Step into the future with QRSTF



QRSTF Mentors' Handbook v1

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The Quinte Regional Science and Technology Fair



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OVERVIEW

Mentoring for the Quinte Regional Science and Technology Fair is a chance to inspire young scientists and help them discover what they're capable of. Mentors provide encouragement, guidance, and real-world insight that empower students to explore ideas, build confidence, and develop skills that last a lifetime. By mentoring, you help create an inclusive, supportive environment where every student has the opportunity to succeed.

By mentoring you are:

- **Fostering Critical Thinking and Creativity:** By guiding students through their scientific inquiries or engineering designs, you help them move beyond textbook learning into hands-on problem solving, teaching them how to ask the right questions and rigorously test their ideas.
- **Investing in Local STEM Community:** Mentors play a vital role in supporting regional youth, helping to spark a lifelong passion for science and technology within the local community.
- **Building Communication and Confidence Skills:** Working one-on-one allows you to help students articulate their ideas clearly, preparing them not just for the fair's evaluation process but also for future academic and professional presentations.
- **Mutual Inspiration:** Collaborating with enthusiastic young minds lets you experience firsthand the fresh perspectives, creativity, and unbridled curiosity that students bring to complex modern challenges like environmental sustainability or technological innovation.



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REQUIREMENTS:

Mentoring involves **direct support to youth**, sometimes one-on-one, sometimes outside school hours. That means your committee must treat mentors the same way any youth-serving organization in Ontario does.

1. Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC) – Mandatory

Because mentors interact with minors, a **Vulnerable Sector Check** is required.

Your committee must:

- Provide an **official volunteer letter** (unpaid role, working with youth).
- Direct applicants to Belleville Police Service or OPP depending on residence.
- Track completion and expiry (valid for 3 years, but best practice is annual declaration).

This is the single most important compliance step.

Fee Exemption: Under Ontario's *Police Record Checks Reform Act*, standard police checks for volunteers are free of charge, though processing steps still apply.

2. Formal Mentor Application

You need a basic intake form that collects:

- Contact information
- Relevant background (STEM area, experience with youth)



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- Availability
- Languages (English/French)
- Agreement to follow QRSTF's youth-safety policies

This becomes part of your internal record.

3. Reference Checks (Minimum Two)

Ontario youth-protection guidelines require two non-family references.

You should ask references about:

- Reliability and communication
- Suitability for working with youth
- Professional conduct
- Any concerns about boundaries

Keep a short-written record of each reference check.

4. Short Interview (15–20 minutes)

This is not a job interview – it's a safety and suitability screen.

You confirm:

- Communication style
- Expectations
- Comfort working with youth
- Understanding of boundaries
- Ability to follow the "Rule of Two"

This step protects both the student and the mentor.

5. Youth-Safety Policy Agreement

Mentors must formally agree to QRSTF's safety rules, including:

- **Rule of Two** – no unsupervised 1-on-1 contact
- **Approved communication channels** (email with parent CC'd, no texting/social media)
- **No transportation of students**
- **No private meetings in homes or vehicles**
- **No photography of students without parental consent**

This is essential risk management.

- **Rule of Two / No Unsupervised 1-on-1 Contact:** Mandate that all mentor-student interactions occur in transparent, supervised environments (e.g., during school hours, in public libraries, or in virtual calls where a parent/guardian is CC'd or present).
- **Communication Guidelines:** Mentors and students should only communicate through approved channels (e.g., official email with parents CC'd or a dedicated platform), avoiding private text messaging or personal social media.
- **Parental Consent & Waiver:** Parents must sign an explicit mentorship agreement acknowledging the program's scope, communication rules, and meeting guidelines.
- **Code of Conduct:** Require mentors to sign a Code of Conduct defining clear boundaries, social media restrictions, and mandatory reporting protocols for safety concerns.

6. Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Before pairing a mentor with a student, parents must sign a consent form that outlines:

- Purpose of mentoring
- Communication expectations
- Meeting guidelines
- Safety rules
- How to report concerns

This protects the committee and ensures transparency.

7. Clear Program Structure

Even with vetting, the program must be designed to minimize risk:

- Meetings occur in public spaces, schools, libraries, or supervised virtual calls
- All communication includes a parent/guardian
- Mentors support *process*, not *project ownership*
- Mentors cannot handle chemicals, tools, or equipment with students outside school settings

This keeps the program safe and fair.

Transitioning to an online environment (video chats, email) slightly shifts how risk is managed. While digital interaction eliminates physical proximity risks, it introduces new online safety considerations.

ONLINE MENTORING

Under Canadian youth protection guidelines, digital environments require specific safeguards to protect both the students and the mentors.

Key Vetting Adjustments for Online Mentoring

- **Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC) Still Applies:** Even in fully remote roles, mentors who have direct, repeated access to youth online still occupy a position of trust and authority. A standard VSC remains necessary.
- **Verify Identity During Interview:** Ensure the applicant's official photo ID matches the person appearing on screen during the virtual interview, and that the address matches the jurisdiction issuing their VSC.

Essential Technical & Safety Protocols

1. Mandatory CC Rule for All Written Communication

- Mentors must **never** send 1-on-1 direct emails or messages to a student.
- Every email, schedule update, or document shared must explicitly CC the student's parent/guardian and a dedicated QRSTF program coordinator email (e.g., mentors@qrstf.org).

2. Virtual Meeting Safeguards (No Closed Doors)

- **Open Meeting Links:** Virtual calls (via Zoom, Google Meet, or Teams) should be generated through an official fair account or require a parent/guardian to be present in the room or on the call.

- **Recorded Sessions:** Require mentors to host calls where recording is enabled, or explicitly state that random spot-checks by science fair administrators may occur.
- **No Private Messaging/Social Media:** Mentors must agree in writing not to communicate via personal phone numbers, texting apps, or social media platforms (e.g., Discord, Instagram, WhatsApp).

3. Standardized Meeting Tools

- Use platform features that safeguard privacy, such as custom virtual backgrounds (to keep personal living spaces private) and disabling 1-on-1 direct chat features during group webinars.

Recommended Parent Consent & Agreement Additions

Update the standard parent consent form to include a specific **Digital Media Waiver**:

1. **Parent Acknowledgement:** Parents sign off knowing that interactions occur over video/email and agree to monitor their child's side of the video calls.
2. **Scheduled Hours Only:** Establish a window during which mentoring interactions can occur (e.g., between 8:00 AM and 8:00 PM EST). No late-night video chats or emails.
3. **Reporting Mechanism:** Provide parents and students with a clear, direct "Report a Concern" link or contact line to report any boundary oversteps or uncomfortable interactions immediately.

Mentor Bilingual Mentoring Checklist:

Step 1 — Initial Contact & Application / Premier contact et demande

- ☐ Provide mentor with **official QRSTF letterhead** confirming volunteer status and unpaid role. → Fournir au mentor une **lettre officielle de la FRSTQ** confirmant le statut de bénévole non rémunéré.
- ☐ Send **Mentor Application Form** (fillable PDF or online form). → Envoyer le **formulaire de demande de mentor** (PDF remplissable ou formulaire en ligne).
- ☐ Confirm mentor understands **Rule of Two** and communication guidelines. → Confirmer que le mentor comprend la **règle de deux** et les directives de communication.

Step 2 — Police Screening / Vérification policière

- ☐ Instruct mentor to obtain a **Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC)** from local police service. → Demander au mentor d'obtenir une **vérification du secteur vulnérable (VSV)** auprès du service de police local.
- ☐ Attach QRSTF letter to waive fee under Ontario's *Police Record Checks Reform Act*. → Joindre la lettre de la FRSTQ pour exempter les frais selon la *Loi sur la réforme des vérifications des antécédents policiers*.
- ☐ Verify authenticity and record completion date. → Vérifier l'authenticité et consigner la date d'obtention.

Step 3 — Reference Verification / Vérification des références

- ☐ Request **two non-family references** (e.g., employer, professor, supervisor). → Demander **deux références non familiales** (p. ex. employeur, professeur, superviseur).
- ☐ Contact each reference and document responses. → Communiquer avec chaque référence et consigner les réponses.
- ☐ File notes securely with mentor application. → Archiver les notes de façon sécurisée avec la demande du mentor.

Step 4 — Interview / Entrevue

- ☐ Schedule a **15-20 minute interview** (virtual or in-person). → Planifier une **entrevue de 15 à 20 minutes** (virtuelle ou en personne).
- ☐ Confirm mentor's communication style and youth-safety awareness. → Confirmer le style de communication du mentor et sa sensibilisation à la sécurité des jeunes.

- ☐ Record interviewer name, date, and summary outcome. → Noter le nom de l'intervieweur, la date et le résumé des résultats.

Step 5 — Approval & Documentation / Approbation et documentation

- ☐ Review all materials (application, VSC, references, interview notes). → Examiner tous les documents (demande, VSV, références, notes d'entrevue).
- ☐ Committee chair signs off on **mentor approval**. → Le président du comité approuve officiellement le mentor.
- ☐ Store documents in secure digital folder. → Conserver les documents dans un dossier numérique sécurisé.

Step 6 — Mentorship Setup / Mise en place du mentorat

- ☐ Ensure **parental consent form** is signed before pairing. → S'assurer que le **formulaire de consentement parental** est signé avant l'appariement.
- ☐ Confirm **supervised or transparent meeting settings**. → Confirmer que les rencontres se déroulent dans un **environnement supervisé ou transparent**.
- ☐ Provide mentor with **official communication channel**. → Fournir au mentor un **canal de communication officiel**.
- ☐ Log mentor-student pairing in tracking sheet. → Inscrire l'appariement mentor-élève dans la feuille de suivi.

Step 7 — Ongoing Oversight / Suivi continu

- ☐ Periodically check-in with mentor and parent/guardian. → Effectuer des suivis périodiques avec le mentor et le parent/tuteur.
- ☐ Document any concerns or feedback. → Consigner toute préoccupation ou rétroaction.
- ☐ Renew VSC every 3 years or as required. → Renouveler la VSV tous les **trois ans** ou selon les exigences locales.

APPENDIX: (send it to us to be filled in)

Quinte Regional Science and Technology Fair

[Organization Address / Contact Information]

[City, ON, Postal Code]

[Date]

To Whom It May Concern at [Name of Police Service / Local Detachment],

RE: Volunteer Screening Request – Mentor Position

Please accept this letter as confirmation that [Applicant Name] is a prospective volunteer who wishes to contribute their time and expertise as a **mentor** for the Quinte Regional Science and Technology Fair (QRSTF). In this capacity, they will be supporting students participating in our regional science and technology programs.

As part of our standard volunteer screening and child safety protocols, [Applicant Name] is applying for both a Police Reference Check and a Vulnerable Sector Check.

We kindly ask that you assist them with processing these required background checks. We also note that under Ontario's *Police Record Checks Reform Act*, standard police checks for qualified volunteers are free of charge (though processing steps, procedures, and any applicable regional fees specific to Vulnerable Sector Checks still apply).

If you require any further information regarding the Quinte Regional Science and Technology Fair or the specifics of this volunteer role, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

[Your Name / Authorized Signatory]

[Your Title]

Quinte Regional Science and Technology Fair

[Contact Email / Phone Number]



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Consent Form for Mentors and Parents:

Introduction The Quinte Regional Science and Technology Fair is committed to providing a safe, supportive, and enriching environment for all student participants. To help students develop their science and technology projects, QRSTF occasionally facilitates mentorship connections with qualified professionals and experts. Before a mentor is officially paired with a student, this consent form must be reviewed, signed, and submitted by the student's parent or legal guardian to ensure full transparency and protect all participants.

1. **Purpose of Mentoring** • To provide educational guidance, subject-matter expertise, and constructive feedback on the student's science or technology project. • To help students develop scientific inquiry, critical thinking, presentation skills, and adherence to scientific ethics. • Mentors act in an advisory capacity only and do not complete the student's project; all work must remain the original effort of the student.
2. **Communication Expectations** • All digital or verbal communication between mentors and students must be conducted transparently. • Parents/guardians must be copied (CC'd) on all email communications between the mentor and the student. • Communications must strictly relate to project development, scheduling, and safety guidelines. • Private messaging on unmonitored social media platforms or direct messaging apps is prohibited.
3. **Meeting Guidelines** • **Location:** All in-person meetings must take place in a public, visible location (such as a school library, public library, or virtual meeting platform approved by the parent/guardian). In-person meetings in private residences are strictly prohibited. • **Supervision:** A parent, legal guardian, or designated responsible adult must be present during all in-person meetings, or within immediate visual/auditory range during virtual meetings. • **Scheduling:** All meeting times and locations must be pre-approved by the parent or legal guardian.
4. **Safety Rules & Compliance** • Mentors and students must adhere to all safety and ethics guidelines outlined by the Quinte Regional Science and Technology Fair, including the Ethics/Safety Online Check Form. • Mentors are required to follow youth protection standards and have completed necessary screening where applicable. • Any hazardous materials, specialized equipment, or

experimental procedures must be pre-approved by teachers, parents, and fair officials.

5. How to Report Concerns If a parent, guardian, or student has any concerns regarding mentor conduct, communication boundaries, or project safety, they must report the issue immediately:
- Primary Contact: QRSTF Organizing Committee via email at qrstf@live.com.
 - Immediate safety concerns should also be reported to local school authorities or law enforcement as appropriate.
 - The QRSTF committee will promptly review all inquiries and take necessary corrective action, which may include terminating the mentorship pairing.

Parent/Guardian Acknowledgement and Consent I have read, understood, and agree to the guidelines, expectations, and safety rules outlined in this Mentor Consent Form. I grant permission for my child to participate in the QRSTF mentorship program under these terms.

• Student Name (Print): _____ •

Parent/Guardian Name (Print):

_____ • Parent/Guardian Signature:

_____ • Date:



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The Quinte Regional Science and Technology Fair runs completely on volunteers. We appreciate the time you have given to our fair, and to the youth of our community. It is only with volunteers such as yourself that we are able to go beyond the books and classroom walls to show students that science is all around us in the “real world” and that there are opportunities in the field. We hope that you will take part in next year’s science fair. See you then.