



Minds Matter Volunteering: Frequently Asked Questions

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What does Minds Matter do?

Minds Matter connects driven and determined students from low-income families with the people, preparation, and possibilities to succeed in college, create their future, and change the world. Our program provides social-emotional learning, tutoring and test prep, mentorship, and many other resources, in order to maximize their chances of **academic success** in high school, **getting accepted into college**, and succeeding in both **higher education** and their **career goals**. We work every day to deliver progressive and tailored programs that empower dreams, cultivate growth, and tackle challenges. We unite behind the dreams of our students!

Who runs Minds Matter SoCal, and how is it organized?

Minds Matter is a national non-profit organization headquartered in New York, New York, with chapters in 14 major cities across the U.S. Each chapter operates in collaboration with the national organization to ensure a standard of excellence while also fulfilling its mission statement under the local leadership of an independent Governance Board, Advisory Board, and Leadership Team. Minds Matter SoCal's leadership details can be viewed on our [Leadership Team page](#).

Like other chapters, Minds Matter SoCal's core program is a three-year commitment, beginning in students' Sophomore year and continuing through their Senior year. Each year of our program is facilitated by its Program Director, and each year is further broken down into 3-4 smaller groups, each of them coordinated by a Team Leader to ensure greater organization and support. Every student in Minds Matter is assigned two Mentors, resulting in what we call a Triad. Each Triad works together, with the support of its Team Leader and Program Leader, to ensure that student's academic goals are being met.

Complimenting our high school programming, Minds Matter SoCal has a robust alumni network and support system in place for our alumni to ensure they are successful throughout their college years. The Minds Matter College Success Team seeks to ensure that all of our students have the resources and support needed to graduate from college. The team checks in with students on a scheduled basis, especially during freshman year to ensure a smooth transition to college. Check-ins might include everything from helping students navigate academic planning, resolving financial aid questions/providing reminders of key deadlines, accessing resources at their college/first-generation student support, and job and internship support. The College Success Team also hosts monthly office hours on topics such as studying abroad, grad school, financial literacy, and job and internship support. The Connections circles that start each Saturday session, part of our social-emotional learning, also continue in college albeit monthly and virtually. These sessions allow alumni to reconnect with each other and have a safe space to talk through challenges in college. Finally, we have our alumni system called Minds Matter Connect where students can stay connected with each other, meet other Minds Matter students, find internships/first jobs, and share resources. It is a powerful community where students can continue their career exploration and professional development.

How can I help?

The SoCal chapter of Minds Matter requires the joint efforts of over 250 volunteers to fulfill its mission statement! If you are interested in the possibility of volunteering with Minds Matter, the role with the highest need is that of a Mentor, as each student gets paired with two mentors. Please read on to learn about the role each team member plays in the academic success of our students.

What do Mentors do?

Each student in our program is assigned **two Mentors** whose purpose is to provide ongoing support for the student's academic goals — both as they relate to Minds Matter, and as they relate to general schoolwork. Mentors can expect to provide their mentees with **guidance** and **feedback** on their Minds Matter assignments, **help with their homework**, and provide **insight, feedback, and support** as students choose which summer programs and colleges to apply to, and as they prepare applications and essays for both. Most importantly, Mentors are sharing their life experiences and helping their student build life skills, and knowledge and gain experience to be successful in their journey to college and beyond. Being a sustained presence in the life of a student can transform them both personally and academically. You will be doing so much more than just volunteering your time. You'll be able to see the tangible impact you have as you see your mentee learn and grow week after week. You may also be surprised at the impact this experience has on your own life.

What is the approximate time commitment of a Mentor?

A Mentor can expect to spend **2.5 to 3 hours per week** supporting their mentee throughout the **duration of the school year** — two hours of which take place in person during our Saturday sessions, and the rest of which takes place during weekly remote check-ins, during which co-mentors provide direct support and feedback to their mentees to ensure that progress is being made on their homework and Minds Matter assignments as well as just generally checking in on your mentee.

Mentors are asked to commit to their mentee for the entirety of their mentee's time in the program until they complete their senior year. If joining as a mentor for a sophomore student, this means 3 years. We know that occasionally mentors may have to leave the program due to life changes, moves, etc., however, our goal is for every student to have the stability of two consistent mentors for their journey to college. Minds Matter SoCal's yearly schedule roughly follows that of Los Angeles County and Orange County public schools, including breaks for major holidays. Mentors can expect each year's Minds Matter schedule to begin in late August or early September, and to end in late May.

Are there other ways to help out?

Yes! While the mentor role is our highest need, we also recruit for various other positions to support students on their journeys. These roles include:

- Writing Coaches
- Summer Programs Directors/Leads
- College Advisors
- Social-emotional Learning Facilitators

Additionally, many of our mentors and other volunteers may finish their initial commitment and decide to take on more leadership by becoming Team Leads or Program Directors.

For more information on open roles, visit: mindsmatterla.org/volunteers/open-volunteer-roles/

What qualifications are required for me to volunteer?

Minds Matter SoCal requires that volunteers have an undergraduate degree, however, there are no other professional credentials necessary in order for someone to volunteer with our organization. If you are specifically interested in the SEL Facilitator role, that one can be done while you are still in college but all others require you to have your undergraduate degree. Before someone joins as a volunteer, we conduct group information sessions to answer any questions individuals may have about Minds Matter and the various volunteer roles; and once an individual applies to volunteer, we will conduct a one-on-one interview as well as a background check to ensure that the individual is a good fit for the organization.

What if I don't feel qualified to be a Mentor or Tutor?

Most of our volunteers come into the program **without extensive experience** as mentors, tutors, teachers, or in other academic roles — and **that's just fine!** If Minds Matter feels you are a good fit for the organization, we will provide you with **all the training and support you need** to fulfill your role. Minds Matter is a group effort, and with the support of your **Program Director, Team Leader**, other team members, and our handy **Volunteer Handbook**, you will learn everything you need to know to fulfill your role both adequately and admirably.

"The word 'mentor' can sound very weighty, and you might feel like you don't know enough, aren't 'successful' enough, or don't have the 'right' kind of experience to mentor a student — but I promise that you do!

It might be scary at first, you might have imposter syndrome at first — but quickly you will remember that what teenagers need most is a little undivided attention, a little accountability, a little encouragement, and a little perspective."

- Benjamin, Minds Matter Volunteer

What should I expect to get out of my experience as a volunteer?

Great question! First and foremost, you can expect to receive the immense satisfaction of knowing you have significantly and substantially contributed to the academic, professional, and personal growth of a gifted young person who is seeking to be their best self. Our students are not only bright, driven, creative, and talented — they are always looking for ways to improve themselves, to be part of something greater than themselves, and to contribute something meaningful to the world around them. Being a part of the support system that enables them to do these things is a deeply rewarding experience that you can expect to take with you for the rest of your life.

Volunteers can also expect to deepen and broaden their personal and professional skill sets in a variety of ways: through leadership opportunities, through providing feedback on essays and other writing and public speaking projects, and through engaging in group discussion of complex social questions. Volunteers can also expect to expand their network through meeting and collaborating with dedicated volunteers from a diverse range of

professional backgrounds, including everything from academics, to communications, arts, finance, marketing, and everything in between.

Finally, we host volunteer appreciation events throughout the year to provide opportunities to build community and have fun! This includes events such as happy hours, bowling, picnics, brunches, holiday parties and occasional perks like Dodger tickets!

"The Minds Matter SoCal program is so much more than I anticipated. The breadth of what the organization provides the kids, the quality of education, the experience, and the passion and commitment of the volunteers are all exceptional.

Plus, I got back so much more than I gave... the experience of watching the youth engage intellectually, see the results of their efforts, celebrating their accomplishments has been the absolute best part."

- Tanya Finks, Director of Writing & Critical Thinking

What if I want to lend specific support and insight from my particular professional or artistic field?

Minds Matter does hold "Career Day"-type sessions during which students have opportunities to learn more about specific fields, industries, jobs, and so on. When feasible, we also attempt to match students up with Mentors whose experience may provide specialized insight for students with a particular interest in a potential career course. However, this is not always possible, and potential Mentors should not expect to be assigned to a student with a particular interest in their field of expertise.

For those who cannot make the commitment to being a mentor but still want to share career expertise with students, we hold an annual "Career Incubator" event in June which hosts panels of professionals from a variety of fields. This event is open to our students and alumni, and is a great opportunity to connect with students who are interested in your field. If you are interested in participating, please reach out to info@mindsmattersocal.org.