



Altrusa International, Inc.

**VIRTUAL CLUB GUIDE
FOR THE 2017-2019
BIENNIUM (JULY 24, 2017)**

Created by the Altrusa International Membership Committee Virtual Club Sub-Group members:
2015-2017 Virtual Club Task Force Chair Robin Hall, 2017-2019 International Membership Chair Beverly
Luedke, 2017-2019 International President Leanne Milligan

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assisting us with the development of the Altrusa International, Inc. Virtual Club Guide. Many of our
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Altrusa: Leading to a Better Community®

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A VIRTUAL CLUB?

Altrusa recognizes that outreach is important to its membership in order to grow and remain relevant in our international environment. Our brand drivers are “Clarity, Flexibility and Inclusion”. With that in mind, our organization is charged with offering multiple options of being an Altrusan.

Technology is an important tool for communication and maintaining connections with members and prospective members. During the 2015-2017 biennium, a definition was created by the Virtual Club Task Force (Chair Robin Hall, Vice Chair Kathleen Howard, Helen Kupeli, Linda Davis.) and the Bylaws committee; voted upon by the membership at the 2017 Nashville Convention; and included in the Draft Club Bylaws.

Club Bylaws: Article 1. Name, Section 2. Virtual Clubs: A virtual club refers to a group of individuals who work together from different locations and interact using technology or other methods of electronic communication and are committed to the principles and purposes of Altrusa. By its very nature, members of a virtual club communicate through regularly scheduled meetings and may never have a face to face communication.

PROCESS AND ASSUMPTIONS

During the summer of 2017, the 2017-2019 virtual club sub group worked together to develop guidelines for Districts to offer a non-traditional club format to its members. The focus of the guidelines was to incorporate the previous work of the 2015-2017 Virtual Club Task Force and the best practices of other successful service organization models (i.e. AAUW). The virtual club format appeals to different age groups and lifestyles because it provides members with more Altrusa membership and participation choices.

In order for the Altrusa brand to remain relevant in today’s society, the Virtual Club model is an option to the traditional club model that has been the core and spirit of Altrusa for the past century. As the mobility of our membership increases and our membership continues to age, it’s important to offer options that allow opportunities for continued retention and growth.

Technology is continuously changing and our current infrastructure will ultimately be upgraded or replaced. As we work through the virtual club concept, our brand drivers will routinely keep us focused on changes to be made. It needs to be emphasized that the Virtual Club model is a supplement, not a replacement, for the traditional club model. The community impact and personal networking provided by the traditional club are impossible to replicate in an environment that connects primarily in cyberspace. However, the Virtual Club model can be a bridge to develop the close connections and powerful networks represented by traditional clubs. It is our hope that this model will provide a base for us to experiment with a variety of future options.

ASPIRATIONS OF AN ALTRUSAN – MAMIE L. BASS

Let me always be open minded, that I may recognize good for Altrusa wherever it may be. Let me be ready always to put aside my personal opinions for the greater good of the greater number. Let me see principles and personalities, and discerning them, let me serve them wholeheartedly through every cloud of doubt and discouragement.

Let me have faith still that the voice of the majority is the voice of good, and let me lend myself sincerely to the working out of what the majority chooses. Knowing that the organization is but the individual multiplied by many and that the organization reflects not only the constructive good, but the mistaken ideas, the short-sightedness, the failures of the individual, let me still adhere to the will of the majority, knowing that time will reveal the better way and lead our footsteps aright if we tread with purer motives and unselfish hearts.

Let me be conscious of the shortcomings, the mistakes, the failures of myself and my associates only that I may learn to correct them, and let me rather see with uplifted face and stalwart soul the unblemished beauty, the high ideal of Altrusa, which exists upon the earth to uplift women to higher things, to make real in business and in our daily lives the things of the spirit.

Let me be patient in defeat and humble in success. Let me seek not for rewards, for appreciation, or even for understanding, but let me seek rather to do the work that lies before me, and to find in the right doing of the work the joy and satisfaction that passes understanding, until I, too, may say, I know what pleasure is, for I have done good work.

Mamie L. Bass

TRADITIONAL VERSUS VIRTUAL CLUBS

FUNDAMENTAL TRAITS

Fundamental Traits of a traditional club

- In-person meetings on a regular schedule.
- In-person projects that address the needs of a specific community or fundraising activities to raise money for Altrusa initiatives.
- In-person networking opportunities that strengthen members' ties to our mission and each other.

In our current Altrusa environment, most clubs use some form of electronic format to communicate. Email, conference calls, and online discussion groups are examples of ways to connect members in an efficient manner.

What we mean by a virtual club is, then, a matter of degree, not a completely new entity.

Fundamental Traits of a virtual club

Virtual Club clubs differ from “traditional” clubs in a few characteristics

- The area they serve is too large to expect the entire group to meet face-to-face regularly. The area may be a state, a district, a time zone, or the entire world.
- Electronic communications are a key element of the club definition: like traditional clubs, they use email lists and a website, but these are core elements in the Virtual Club. Other virtual resources are used in situations for which a traditional club would “call a meeting”.

However, Virtual Club clubs can also resemble “traditional” clubs.

- Hosting club programs on specific topics, perhaps with a “guest speaker” either
 1. in real time via conference call or webinar, or
 2. in discussions that occur over email lists or in discussion groups, in which people participate on their own schedules.
- Distributing a directory of members that allows individuals to connect with other members.
- Connecting small groups for specific short term projects either virtually or face-to-face in those virtual clubs where some members live near each other.
- Providing a vital link between the members and the district and international organization via newsletters and other communications to encourage participation in district and international projects.

- Connecting virtual members to the other traditional clubs in the district served
 1. as some members of traditional clubs join the virtual club as dual members
 2. with gatherings at district and/or international meetings
- Encouraging members to contribute directly to the District and International Foundation fundraising efforts, especially since there are fewer opportunities for fundraising projects.
- Recruiting members at face-to-face events and projects in their community as well as through personal contacts.
- Working as any other club to raise retention rates, both by connecting with individual members and improving the programming and other services provided to them.
- Having a specific Altrusa mission focus.

VIRTUAL CLUB MODELS

In researching successful virtual club models utilized by other organizations, it was discovered “The American Association of University Women: (AAUW) has offered a variety of virtual club options since 1996. This organization has similarities to our organizational structure and much can be learned from their successes and opportunities.

General Focus/High Engagement

Definition: Resembles traditional club functions, but instead of meeting in person uses email lists or other online tools to connect its members. The virtual club does have an emphasis on club level programs. Most of the AAUW Virtual Clubs follow this model.

General Focus/Low Engagement

Definition: Club that provides minimal club level programming but does support the activities, and can be a way for individuals to increase their connection to Altrusa.

Specific Focus

Definition: Club that organizes around a specific priority of Altrusa, rather than trying to use Altrusa’s broad program to recruit members who may be interested in any of those. Geographic area may be very large.

ONE MODEL DOESN’T FIT ALL: BE FLEXIBLE

Service organizations have been experimenting with Virtual Club membership for years. No organization has the perfect answer on what works best. Some have prioritized membership recruitment but paid less attention to programming. The impact on retention is still an unknown. Some Virtual Clubs have disbanded while others needed to find their second or third set of leaders in order to survive and thrive.



2017-2019 Virtual Club Guide

A key issue for the core group of a new Virtual Club (see section on Virtual Club Formation) is to determine which of the models mentioned seem to fit or what new model needs to be developed. As you choose a model, consider:

- What is the size of your pool of prospects? There is some evidence that a General Focus/High Engagement club attracts those who want more of the organization in their lives, but few are brand new to the organization. This could be the motivation for someone to become a dual member.
- Would choosing a special focus help you improve your marketing pitch and target a broader pool of prospects?
- Is there a sufficient pool of prospects in your District for new Virtual Club building? Do you have previous members who have moved to your district from other districts? Do you have affiliate members who are looking for a club? Do you have members who have moved within your district and now live in a community without a club?

Do try different strategies and share your learning outcomes! You will be helping to create Virtual Club models that will take Altrusa into the future.

VIRTUAL CLUB FORMATION PROCESS

OVERVIEW

A Virtual Club usually starts when active members perceive an opportunity for a new kind of structure to meet Altrusa goals. A Virtual model allows Altrusa to extend its reach, through a virtual community, to more of those who support our mission.

GETTING STARTED, NEED CORE TEAM

Starting a club and keeping it running takes a fair amount of creativity and effort, and a Virtual Club is no different. From figuring out what members want, to finding ways to reach out to prospects, to handling the administrative work of the club, it is important to have a core team in place to decide how to divide these tasks.

Some key decisions for the core team to address:

- How fast does the group expect to grow?
- What key services (programming, networking, communication) will the Virtual Club start first?
- What will the Virtual Club do to find its first new members?
- How will the initial costs be financed? There may be new club building money from district or donations from the core team.
- How, specifically, will the members of the group connect with each other? Will there be an email list, web-based discussion group, scheduled conference calls, or other resources?

The core team should contact the International Membership New Club Building Chair and District New Club Building Chair to seek guidance and inform the chairs that a new virtual club is in the discussion stage. In addition to working with the District Governor, the District New Club Building Chair will provide current materials related to creating a new club including the specific guidelines and required paperwork.

It is recommended that the initial core team, typically 3-5 people, expand the membership before making key decisions about the name and the focus of the Virtual Club. Altrusa bylaws require charter strength to create a Virtual Club. With a Virtual Club, the larger the initial committed group, the easier it will be to keep everyone engaged and ensure sustainability.

Former district leaders and those active in other clubs can be key supporters during this stage, but an effort should be made to ensure that the club is not dominated by dual members, i.e. those whose primary affiliation is with another club. The goal is to find 10 - 15 members who are committed to joining the new Virtual Club as primary members.

FEE STRUCTURE AND REPRESENTATION SUMMARY

- The same that is required for a traditional club. Members who wish to become a primary member pay local, District, and International dues. When a Virtual Club is chartered within a specific District, members are not required to live within that District to have a primary membership.
- Dual members pay local dues to the Virtual Club and local, District, and International dues to their primary club.
- Only primary members count toward charter strength and allowed delegates.
- As with new club building for a traditional club, International shall follow Policy 20 and award to the organizing Virtual Club (or District or individual) a specific amount of money as approved by the International Board of Directors based on pre-established criteria.

OPERATING AS A NEW VIRTUAL CLUB

Once there are 10 – 15 primary members who are committed to joining the new Virtual Club, a first meeting can be used to confirm the Virtual Club name and approve the initial leadership for the club. District and International can be asked for charter approval of the Virtual Club now that it's ready to become an independent club. Review the required paperwork and work closely with the district New Club Building Chair.

Once the Virtual Club is chartered, congratulations! You're now ready to bring your new Virtual Club into the Altrusa community and help its members advance the mission and provide community service.

ALTRUSA RESOURCES FOR CREATING AND MAINTAINING A VIRTUAL CLUB

Start with the Altrusa International Bylaws, New Club Building Manual and Altrusa staff.

- [Altrusa International Official Policies](#) - Revised July 22, 2015
- [Altrusa International Official Bylaws](#) - Revised July 22, 2015
- [New Club Building Manual](#) - Revised 2012
- [Altrusa International Resource Guide](#) (Replaces the Encyclopedia)
- [2011-2013 Service Manual](#) - Revised April 2012
- [Club Treasurer's Guide](#) - Revised April 2013
- [2013 Guide for Club Membership Committees](#) (Revised 2014)
- [Club President's Handbook](#) - Revised July 2016
- [The Altrusa Tradition](#) - Revised 2017
- [Point of Order](#) - Revised June 2015
- [Sample Motion Form](#)



MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The formation of a Virtual Club brings an opportunity to develop membership in a variety of ways. Membership in a Virtual Club may come from multiple target groups.

- Current affiliate members who are not members at the local level.
- Members who have moved away from their traditional club and now live in an area without an Altrusa Club.
- Previous members who resigned due to inability to attend face-to-face meetings.
- Individuals interested in Altrusa's mission who are not members of Altrusa.
- Current Altrusa club members who wish dual membership with a Virtual Club.
- Prospects who feel they don't have time and seek an alternative way to provide service.
- Disabled or physically impaired prospects who might not otherwise be able to participate in Altrusa.

HOW TO RECRUIT MEMBERS

Your elevator speech will need to be fine-tuned for your specific recruiting effort. Below are examples of how other organizations have recruited Virtual Club members.

- Prospects who live in areas where there is no nearby club.
- Prospects who live near clubs, but who find that those clubs are not a good "fit" either because of the time they meet or their program/project priorities. A Virtual Club would allow them to support the Altrusa mission and maintain a loose connection to the nearby club. Be sure the traditional clubs understand that the Virtual Club is an option to offer these prospects. As the new members learn more about Altrusa, they may view the traditional club in a different light.
- Request all District Altrusans to send names of prospective members to the organizing Virtual Club.
- Members of under charter strength traditional clubs. They might band together so they'll have a better chance of finding enough members to form a Virtual Club.
- Dual members who want to supplement their current traditional club membership with a virtual component because, while they support their local club, they have additional Altrusa passions that extend beyond their club's priorities.
- Former District and International leaders who want to maintain connections to the friends they made during that service and continue to share information about Altrusa activities outside the boundaries of their community.

Be confident that Altrusa has a positive image and you can recruit brand new members to the Virtual Club, not just those who are current or previous members of other clubs. However, our name recognition is still a challenge outside of Altrusa communities so it will be important for you to promote the benefits of being an Altrusan.

VIRTUAL CLUB CULTURE

Whether or not a Virtual Club attracts, engages, and retains members is dependent on the club culture that the Virtual Club leaders create. Helping new members feel a sense of belonging may be a challenge in the virtual world, but it is achievable: the club model is a powerful tool for connecting members to the mission and to each other.

While the Virtual Club leadership won't have to deal with "who's providing the snacks and drinks?" many of the other engagement strategies of traditional clubs can be employed. In particular, finding/creating opportunities for members to connect to each other as people can be as important for the Virtual Club as for traditional clubs.

- Have a process for introducing new members to the club.
- Provide an orientation program and/or a "buddy" system for new members
- Make sure members have current contact information for one another
- Members need to be able to find each other on social media
- Build in time for informal chats during conference calls and webinars
- Provide an online tool for members to post a message about their passion to the entire club
- Encourage every member to participate in discussing issues important to the entire club
- Create opportunities for the entire club to meet face-to-face annually. A District Conference and/or International Convention would be a great place to start.

A group dynamic which includes a sense of belonging, worthwhile use of time, occasional fun, and creative discovery builds engagement of new members and a capacity to sustain membership and commitment to Altrusa's mission. Surveying the membership every year or two is a good way to find out what the members like best and encourage their creative suggestions for new ways of connecting and furthering Altrusa's mission as a Virtual Club.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN VIRTUAL AND TRADITIONAL CLUBS

It is helpful for Virtual Clubs to collaborate with traditional clubs to build a continuum of membership opportunities. Virtual clubs are necessary for many reasons including recognition that many Altrusa members are seeking groups that allow participation within the context of busy work and personal lives. Similarly, Virtual Clubs understand that some members may also want to attend face-to-face events. These combined efforts will create successful recruitment and retention strategies.

The International Membership Committee is available to discuss possible fears of membership competition and explore methods to support the clubs.

PROGRAMMING OPPORTUNITIES

Programming for Virtual Clubs which use real time web-conferencing formats may be closer to face-to-face club meetings than other types of Virtual Clubs. A real time environment, in which every participant has speaking and listening ability, makes self-introductions, socialization, and planned programming possible. Skype, Facebook Live, Google Hangouts, and freeconference call would be examples of ways in which clubs could communicate in real time environment. Most web-conferencing environments have a variety of presentation resources, including a visual space for uploading Power Point presentations.

Delivery of content or programming for Virtual Club members is dependent on the Virtual Club format. Content delivery can take several forms, usually with interactive discussion:

- Open discussion format in which members respond to discussion threads after initial postings by virtual club leaders
- Guided discussion format with frequent member interaction and prompts from a leader to move the discussion forward
- Email delivery of content (for viewing, reading, or listening) with real time small group chat line, private Facebook page, or twitter discussions announced for specific times

Another option is for program discussions to occur in email lists over a defined period of time, rather than in real-time. Members can be invited to opt in when a program is offered. Those list discussions are moderated, and sometimes include a guest "speaker," but generally last anywhere between 2-3 days or several weeks, depending on the topic and the members' interest in the topic. Note: Although this method of providing programming is well suited to Virtual Clubs, this type of programming is something traditional clubs could also offer to their members.

Finally, it's important to plan programming that allows all participants to share. An AAUW example of a successful Network meeting was Titled: *Celebrating Women: Our Personal Heroes*. Each submitted a photo of a woman to be uploaded, and the sharing was both inspiring and educational. It also stimulated a sense of belonging among those present most of whom had never met one another face-to-face. The engagement of Virtual Club members in purposeful dialogue (framed by Altrusa's mission) gives a feeling of belonging not only to the small group but also to the international organization.

When Virtual Club members are engaged in meaningful discussion that promotes the work of Altrusa, it promotes connectivity among the club members.

BUILDING A VIRTUAL CLUB INFRASTRUCTURE

The club website can support club operations by hosting documents such as bylaws and policies, minutes, and financial reports.

COMMUNICATIONS

A Virtual Club must have a web presence. Possibilities include a Facebook page, a page off the district website, and a link on your district website. Make sure your webmaster feels comfortable with the site and it can easily be found via search engines.

E-mail technology will be a primary form of communication and will serve as:

- A resource for leaders to reach all the members, and
- A resource for members to send information to all the others (strongly recommended)

For the first, you may choose to have a broadcast “newsletter” system where only a few people can post, but an email discussion list can be used to serve both needs. Other ways to support communication/discussion include Facebook groups, blogs, ClubRunner, and Twitter.

Real-time communication will be needed more or less often depending on how you choose to run the club. These may include:

- Conference calls (with or without access to shared online documents)
- Online text discussions
- Webinars with shared audio and video

Your choice of real-time meeting options may depend on the experience, abilities, and comfort level of the participants as well as the availability of higher end web conferencing systems. If any members are sight or hearing impaired, do check on what kinds of accommodations will allow them to more fully participate.

HOW TO RAISE MONEY

The Virtual Club is encouraged to be creative with fundraising efforts. Lots of great service project ideas are located in the Altrusa Service Manual and apply to Virtual Clubs as they do to traditional clubs.

Altrusa is committed to the philosophy of unselfishness and the joy of giving rather than getting. Funds collected can be devoted to Altrusa District and International projects or a specific virtual club project.

- Some members may have more money than time and prefer to respond to a direct request for money.
- Previous cyberspace Altrusa group created a cookbook for sale at Convention.

- Do a “challenge or matching grant” to increase individual member contributions. Find several generous Altrusans who are willing to challenge or match the others to meet a designated financial goal.
- Host a phantom ball or tea. Send each member an invitation. The “ticket price” serves as a donation.
- Sell Origami to bring clean water to port countries (Paper for Water)
- Support Haiti doll drive.
- Start crowdfunding with no fees by creating an online fundraiser through “You Caring” or a similar platform.

VALUABLE RESOURCES

Conference Calls - “Free” conference calls usually mean that everyone calls a given number, enters a pin, and is connected to the other callers. However, while the “bridge” is free, it’s normally a long distance call for each of the participants. Since many people now have bundled, cheap or free (via internet) long distance, a long distance phone call isn’t usually a problem. If the long distance is an issue, pre-paid phone cards or upgrading-and paying-to make the free conference line use a toll-free number are options. Here are some popular conference call platforms:

- FreeConferenceCall.com – phone based, offers upgrades for toll-free call-in option. Also offers an online meeting link.
- Skype – computer based. Best if most participants are comfortable using a headset to connect via their computer. Allows conference host to call phones to connect a few additional people.
- Google+ hangout – adds video conferencing to Skype-type connection and provides some web conferencing features.
- Web conferencing – may offer very flexible audio options that allow participants to choose whether to use the telephone or computer to make the audio connection.

File Sharing - Just as at an “in person” meeting, a conference call can be more efficient if participants are sharing documents as they go along.

- Documents can be e-mailed ahead of time or
- Documents can be shared “in the cloud” that all can view during the meeting.
- Dropbox or Google docs (migrating too Google Drive with some Dropbox-like features) can be utilized

Online Surveys - Several online survey tools (e.g. SurveyMonkey, FluidSurveys, and PollDaddy) have free versions.

Email Lists

- Google Groups – <http://groups.google.com>
- Yahoo Groups – <http://groups.yahoo.com>
- Mailman (often included with web hosting platforms)

Comments

- These are all free (assuming you have access to an account that supports Mailman)
- All these systems are preferable to just copying all the members' email addresses onto the BCC line of a regular email because they handle "bounce" processing, allow a configurable subject line (that lets subscribers identify the source of the message), allow subscribers to unsubscribe or change an address, and much more.
- Yahoo and Google are similar. Both also provide a web archive of all messages, and are ad supported. However, Google uses only text ads, and only to those who are using the web interface.
- Mailman has no ads, and while it provides some enhanced features, its administrative interface is less intuitive.

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

There are many Social Media options available today. Each has a different purpose and focus. The Virtual Club, just like all traditional clubs, will need to determine if it wants to use social media, review the types available, and then decide which one is appropriate for the club to use.