Virtual Researcher on call (VROC) is an educational program that connects K-12 classrooms with Canadian experts for customized interactive video calls. Classrooms join via Zoom video conferencing software, provided and supported by Partners In Research (PIR) at no cost. Typical VROC sessions consist of a short presentation followed by an informal question and answer period and often include a virtual tour or demonstration.

Participate: PIR VROC sessions connect K-12 students with research, researchers, and facilities at academic institutions and organizations across the country. Video sessions are prearranged with guest experts to ensure the content of the presentation and the individual’s experience connect with fundamental concepts within the Ontario curriculum in a way that is both engaging and informative for learners. Video connections often include a virtual tour of the guest’s facility or examples of their work. An emphasis is placed on the question and answer portion of the video connection to encourage student engagement and active discussion. Here students are exposed to the types of technologies and resources utilized within a post-secondary environment.

Reflect: PIR VROC sessions compliment the curriculum by creating relevant, applied, and innovative learning experiences for students. Our guest experts share their experiences and career paths as doctors, engineers, environmentalists, entrepreneurs, and much more, informing students about the types of opportunities available to them. Students are able to use this information in conjunction with what they know about their own interests, strengths, and goals to answer inquiry questions such as; who am I? What are my opportunities? Who do I want to become? And what is my plan for achieving my goals?

Mentorship: PIR guest experts are available for ongoing mentorship consisting of multiple VROC sessions in which a expert works collaboratively with a classroom to plan, develop, execute, and reflect upon a project, investigation, or curriculum strand. Projects and investigations are discussed in advance between the teacher and expert to establish a set a learning goals and success criteria that are consistent with curriculum requirements. Over the course of 2-4 VROC sessions students present their progress and discuss any issues they may have encountered with the expert. The expert facilitates the discussion encouraging all students to actively participate so that a solution is reached as a group. At each stage of the project guest experts are encouraged to draw connections to their work, providing a relevant and authentic learning experience. During the wrap up stage students and experts reflect on their accomplishments as well as any obstacles they encountered.

Apply: PIR VROC sessions add context to what students are learning in the classroom, bridging the gap between the knowledge-based curriculum expectations and the career opportunities that await them beyond K-12. The experiences of our guest experts often demonstrate career paths that are non-linear, easing student anxiety about choosing their career path early on.