



Handout 1

The 4 Key Concepts of Interviewing Volunteers

1. The primary purposes of interviewing volunteers are to determine a mutual fit between the candidate and the organisation and to screen for risks to the volunteer, the organisation, and the clients if the prospective volunteer is chosen.

2. There are four Key Steps in the interviewing process:

- Preparation
- Opening
- The Body
- and Closing.

3. Two essential skills in interviewing are:

- Designing and asking questions based on an analysis of the position and required qualifications.
- Reflective listening assuring that both individuals are hearing and
- Understanding.

4. It is important to prepare for special challenges that might present themselves during the interview.



Handout 2

Why Interview?

The purpose of the interviewing process is for the applicant and the interviewer to become mutually acquainted so that each can determine if there is a good match between their interests.

Without this significant screening step, many misplaced or inappropriate volunteers begin to work for organizations, and both the volunteer and the organization find dissatisfaction in the long run. When you have the wrong person in the volunteer job, the efforts of volunteer supervisors / leaders are often distracted by the inevitable problems of poor performance, volunteer dissatisfaction, staff / volunteer complaints, etc.



Taking the time to interview and screen volunteers enables you to determine:

1. If the volunteer has the needed skills, experience, and motivation to do the job well.
2. If the volunteer will fit into the culture of your organization.
3. If the volunteer's motivational needs can be met.
4. If your recruitment program seems to be attracting the best people for your organization and for available positions.

It is important to screen volunteers because:

1. It protects clients.
2. The agency reputation is affected by volunteers.
3. The potential impact on the morale of the staff.
4. Volunteers suffer if they are misplaced.
5. You can recognize high-risk and high-potential volunteers.



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Key Steps in the Interview Process

Step 1: Preparation

Preparation for the interview includes:

- Reviewing all available information about the applicant. It often helps to have the applicant fill out an application ahead of time.
- Reviewing all pertinent information on the organization and volunteer positions.
- Formulating questions to bring out the desired information you need to screen for suitability for the position(s).
- Scheduling adequate time (generally 30 minutes) & a comfortable, private place for interviewing.
- Casting aside your other work and distractions, and asking for your calls to be held.

Step 2: Opening / Greeting

Opening the interview includes:

- Putting the applicant at ease (warm greeting, introductions, establishing rapport).
- Clarifying the purpose of the interview.
- Establishing timeframe for the interview.

Step 3: Body of the Interview

If the interviewee is not familiar with your organization, you may wish to give some overview at the beginning of the interview. Otherwise, you may wish to begin the interview with questions that access information about the person's hobbies, interests, past jobs, motivators, dislikes, etc.

- If you have several applicants for the same position, be sure to ask each of them the core questions you have developed, so that you have comparative information with which to make your selection later.
- After getting a clear picture of the applicant (and assuming you wish to move forward), selectively share information about the possible volunteer positions for which he/she might be suitable. (If you conduct the interview in the reverse order, prospective volunteers may simply tell you what they think you want to hear in order to get an available position.)
- As you focus in on which position this applicant is likely to be suited for, give all the necessary information: position requirements, hours of service, place and conditions of work, training needed, purchase of uniform (if required), opportunities offered, supervision to be expected, etc.
- Be careful to explain the full requirements of the job; a common mistake is for interviewers to undersell the job or its requirements. You may want to offer an opportunity for the volunteer to observe the activity before committing to it.
- Take time to answer the applicant's questions.
- The prospective volunteer may offer an unexpected skill or talent, or have an idea for contributing time to the organization in a way that has not previously been considered. It is important to listen for what a volunteer might bring to the organization that might become formalized into a new volunteer position.



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Key Steps in the Interview Process

- Ultimately the proposed idea and the organisation's need for that skill must be fully explored. It may involve having a second interview with the potential volunteer to fully determine mutual interests in developing a new volunteer position.

Step 4: The Closing

The closing should be concise and upbeat. First review and summarize where you have been in your interview, and then share what the next steps will be.

- **When the applicant is acceptable**
This is easy. The important thing is to be certain that the final choice is wholeheartedly the applicant's. Have you gently urged the applicant to accept your own decision? If there is agreement, be sure the applicant knows when and where to go for discussion and determination of the specific assignment.
- **When the applicant is unacceptable**
Rejection is not easy at any time, particularly when the would-be applicant is eager to be of help. When the interviewer has reached a decision that the applicant is unqualified for the position in question or for other service in the organization, the interview should be terminated as rapidly as possible, with graciousness and tact.

If the applicant has skills or experience which may qualify him/her for volunteer positions with other agencies in the community, make the referral and, for courtesy sake, call the recommended agency to let them know. If you have a Volunteer Centre serving your area, you may wish to refer the prospect there to learn about the range of available volunteer positions elsewhere. You may also want to refer the volunteer to online registries of volunteer opportunities such as I-VOL (www.volunteer.ie)

Often an inappropriate applicant will verbalize his / her disinterest in the position, in which case you can agree that it does not sound like a "match." But if the person seems to want the position, you must, in a carefully Impersonalised discussion, show the applicant that this is unsuitable for both the individual and the organization.

Subterfuges, such as invoking a waiting list or mentioning vague future dates for contact, disappoint, annoy, and can make enemies unnecessarily.

In either case... Regardless of the outcome of the interview, in closing thank the person for his / her time and interest in your organization. It may be necessary to develop some interview termination techniques, since applicants sometimes do not know when it is time to leave. Standing up is usually an effective cue that the interview is over.



Handout 4

Critical Skills in Interviewing: QUESTIONS

Closed Questions

Closed questions can usually be answered by a simple “yes” or “no” and evoke little explanation. They are useful for obtaining specific answers, but they can prevent getting at needed information. Closed questions typically begin with such words as: is, do, has, can, will, or shall. Some examples:

- Have you ever volunteered before?
- Can you work in the evenings?
- Will you be moving into your new house soon?
- Do you type?
- Do you enjoy children?
- Are Wednesdays all right?

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions usually require an explanation and therefore elicit much more information. They typically begin with such words as what, when, how, who, where, or which. Some examples:

- Tell me more about... ?
- How did you do... ?
- What did you not like about... ?
- What would you like to be different about... ?
- When you design your interview questions, make certain that you have a number
- of open-ended questions such as:
- Why are you interested in this position/organization?
- What type of supervision do you like to receive?
- How would you describe your ideal work setting?
- How will this volunteer position fit into your life with other priorities?





Handout 5

Critical Skills in Interviewing: LISTENING

Listening is another critical skill for effective interviewing. It is distressing to learn that we generally only remember 50% of what was shared with us immediately after it is shared. Why is this, and what practices do we need to learn to become a good listener?

1. Listen to understand what is meant – not to get ready to reply, contradict, or refute.
2. Know that what is meant during an interview involves more than the dictionary meaning of the words that are used. It involves the tone of voice, the facial expressions, and overall behavior of the speaker.
3. Observe all of this and be careful not to interpret too quickly. Look for clues as to what the other person is trying to say. Put yourself in the speaker's shoes, see the world as the speaker sees it, accept the speaker's feelings as facts that have to be taken into account whether you share them or not.
4. Put aside your own views and opinions for the time being. Realize that you cannot listen to yourself inwardly and at the same time listen outwardly to the speaker.
5. Control impatience, knowing that listening is faster than talking. The average person speaks about 125 words a minute, but can listen to about 400 words a minute. The effective listener does not jump ahead of the speaker, but gives him / her time to tell his / her story.
6. Do not prepare to answer while listening. Wait to get the whole message before deciding what to say in turn. The last sentence of the speaker may give a new slant to what was said before.
7. Show interest and alertness. This stimulates the speaker and improves performance.
8. Do not interrupt. Ask questions in order to secure more information, not to trap the speaker or force him / her into a corner.
9. Use the technique of linking to build on what the interviewee has already said. This is called probing and it indicates to the interviewee that you are listening (e.g., "You indicated that your Red Cross volunteer experience was particularly pleasurable. Can you elaborate on why it was so pleasurable?").

