



## Good Practice Guide 12: Volunteer Interview Process

*This document is an example of how you may set up a process for volunteer interviews within your own organisation or group.*

### Key Points

Volunteer interviews are a key recruitment tool and it is essential to make sure that both the interviewer and the potential volunteer get the most out of the experience. Any interview with a volunteer is a two way process, an opportunity for both parties to find out more about each other. You should plan for your volunteer interviews and make sure that they are structured and organised, but informal.

### Why have volunteer interviews?

Everyone deserves to have a fair and equitable chance of applying for a volunteering role. However, this is not the same as interviewing an employee. Instead, it should be a much more informal and relaxed experience, giving both parties an opportunity to find out about each other.

### Suggestions to consider in your approach to developing a fair and inclusive volunteer interview process:

Your volunteer interview process will vary depending on the nature of the organisation or group, and the way in which volunteers are involved. Some organisations have more people wanting to volunteer than they can take on so need to be selective; others need to screen potential volunteers carefully because of the work that they are doing, and some organisations are able to take on anybody who is interested in volunteering with them. Whatever your organisation's recruitment approach, it is important to develop a system that suits your needs, and that does not place unnecessary barriers in people's way.

You do not have to include everything, but it is a good idea to consider some of the following points:

### Top tips for a fair and inclusive volunteer interview process

- Do not adapt develop the volunteer interview process from the way that your organisation recruits paid staff. This approach is rarely appropriate and an overly formal application process may discourage potential volunteers.
- The volunteer interview should be a two way process. It is as much about the volunteer deciding whether they like the organisation, as the organisation deciding to take on the volunteer. An ideal process will reflect both.
- Create a recruitment flow chart and share this with your potential volunteers, it will help to explain your interview process and the timescales involved, especially if there is any training required in advance of taking up a volunteer role.

### Initial volunteer enquires

- Sometimes organisations launch volunteer recruitment campaigns without planning what they will do when potential volunteers get in touch. Most potential volunteers will make



initial contact via the telephone or email, so it is important that enquiries are dealt with promptly and efficiently. Consider this as the early stage of your interview process. Make sure that whoever is answering the telephone, or responding to emails, knows how to respond, or who to refer the call or email to. If no one is immediately available, it is better to take a contact number and explain that someone will respond soon.

- Potential volunteers may have commitments during the day and may contact you outwith your working hours. You should consider including instructions for potential volunteers on your answer phone message or an automatic email reply. If you say that you are going to call back within an agreed timescale it is important that you do.
- Try not to ask potential volunteers too many questions by email or over the telephone. Some people can find these methods of communication difficult without eye contact or body language. However, you may want to check that they know anything that is essential, for instance if you only need volunteers over 18 years of age, or with a drivers license, then this should be made clear at the first stage of enquiry.
- It is a good idea to have a volunteer information pack ready to send to potential volunteers. This could contain a welcome letter, information about the organisation, the volunteer role(s), practical information about expenses and training, and information from existing volunteers about the benefits of volunteering with your organisation. Try not to include formal policies at this stage as these are better dealt with during induction. You should view the volunteer information pack as part of your recruitment material.

#### Volunteer expression of interest form and application form

- Some organisations or groups ask volunteers to complete a short expression of interest form and then gather more detailed information when they meet the volunteer in person.
- Having a lengthy formal application form to complete can be a barrier to potential volunteers. This can be for a variety of reasons: English may not be their first language, they may lack confidence in their literacy skills, they may have a visual impairment, limited confidence or no access to a computer.
- An expression of interest form can be a useful way of recording basic information such as the person's name, address and other contact details. An application form, which can be completed at the informal interview, can then provide a more rounded picture of the potential volunteer, their motivations and skills.
- Ensure that any form developed does not ask for more information than is needed, or is appropriate.

#### Setting the scene for the your volunteer interviews

- At the earliest opportunity find out if the person coming in has any support needs or accessibility requirements, so that you can make any appropriate arrangements.
- If you have the resources, it can be helpful to invite potential volunteers to come and visit your organisation. This may give them the opportunity to talk to existing volunteers. Those volunteering for the first time, or new to your organisation, may be nervous so giving this informal opportunity to visit without making any commitment, can be helpful.
- If you send out an invitation to a potential volunteer for an informal interview, make sure that you provide a map with parking instructions and a contact telephone number that they can call on the day if needed.



- Make sure that the person on reception, or nearest to the entrance, knows to expect the volunteer and welcomes them on behalf of your organisation or group. First impressions count.
- Be read: print off copies of everything you might need such as a role description, volunteer information pack, volunteer application form and perhaps a copy of your annual report.
- Make sure that a quiet area is available for your discussion, rearrange the furniture so that it is informal. Make sure you are not disturbed and have allocated sufficient time.
- You may like to create a brief list of areas to talk about with potential volunteers. Depending on their response, you may want to ask some questions, so that you can gain a more rounded picture of what each individual has to offer.
- Take time to introduce the potential volunteer to staff, other volunteers and enable them to meet your service users or observe some of the volunteering in action, where appropriate.
- Again remember that the volunteer interview process is a two way process and is as much about the volunteer deciding whether they like the organisation, as about the organisation deciding to take on the volunteer. An ideal interview process will reflect both.

#### Format of the informal interview

As well as outlining the volunteer role, you should provide some background information about your organisation or group. You may want to discuss:

- the aims of the organisation and the role of volunteers;
- the service users or clients, as appropriate;
- the role description and types of tasks;
- training and support offered to volunteers, including any compulsory training;
- how the volunteer will be supported in their role;
- your expectations of volunteers;
- the days and times available. If there is a time limit on the role (for example, a project with a fixed timescale), then you should explain this too;
- resources available to volunteers whilst they are volunteering for you.

You may want the potential volunteer to tell you:

- what attracts them to volunteering with your organisation or to take part in this kind of activity;
- what they hope to gain from volunteering;
- relevant skills, interests and experience;
- time availability;
- any additional support needs;
- names of potential referees;
- when they would be able to begin volunteering, or start any required training.

#### At the end of the interview

- Check if the volunteer has any additional questions
- Reimburse any expenses incurred in travelling to the informal interview, such as a bus journey.



- You should stress that not every volunteer opportunity suits every potential volunteer and sometimes you will have to say no. If so, you may be able to offer an alternative volunteering opportunity, or refer on to something more suitable elsewhere
- You should always follow up your discussion with a letter or email confirming in writing the volunteering opportunity offered and explaining what happens next. You should make it clear if you need to wait for satisfactory references and a PVG disclosure before the volunteer can begin and what the expected timescale is for this.

## Need extra help?

If you would like more help or advice in relation to this good practice guide please contact Volunteer Scotland:

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