



How-To Interview Techniques

Why Interview Volunteers?

We interview volunteers for several reasons. We want to make sure the volunteer is going to be a good fit with the organization so we use the interview to gather information from the volunteer. But on top of getting information, we want to give the volunteer sufficient information to decide about volunteering for the organization – the decision to volunteer should be a 2-way street. After this exchange of information, we'll have a better idea of whether there is a match between what is needed/offered by the organization/volunteer.

A formal interview shows that we take the volunteer's involvement seriously. That's extremely important when it comes to recruiting and retaining quality volunteers.

What's the Goal of Interviewing Volunteers?

At the end of the interview, you should know if you want to offer the position or not. You'll know what the volunteers expect from working with your organization, and exactly why they want to get involved.

You should also ask the right questions so you understand what tasks are appropriate for the volunteer (What are the volunteer's interests, skills, knowledge, and experience?) and if there are any limitations that might influence what tasks the volunteer can undertake (include availability).

Remember that during the interview process, candidates are deciding whether they want to work with you just as much as you are trying to decide whether they are a good fit for the position.

Follow these steps:

1. Write down a list of questions that directly relate to the job's responsibilities. Most positions have job descriptions. If you don't have a job description, list the key responsibilities of the position, and then draw up a list of questions that relate to those responsibilities.
2. Ask behavioral questions, as in "tell me about a time when you..." This type of question can be used about conflict resolution, as an example.
3. Review the candidate's resume before the interview. If there is no formal resume, make a list of the candidate's skills and characteristics you are aware of or ask what their work or volunteer experiences has been.
4. Outline the interview structure for the candidate. First, give a brief description of the position responsibilities. Finally, ask the applicant questions. After that, the candidate will have the opportunity to ask you questions. This gives structure to the interview, keeps you both focused, and gives the candidate an idea of what to expect.
5. Don't talk too much during the interview process. Allow candidates time to describe their skills and qualifications during the interview
6. Extend professional courtesies. Make sure that the location for the interview is comfortable and free from distractions.

7. Watch nonverbal signals. Just as you are looking for eye contact and other nonverbal signals, the candidate is looking for those unspoken signals from you. Be sure your tone of voice is appropriate and professional. Clearly articulate the expectations for the position.

8. While being polite and professional, don't get too chummy. Keep all your questions job-related. If you spend the interview chatting, you may make a hiring decision because you liked the candidate versus whether the person is truly qualified for the job.

9. Whether it's by email or phone, follow up to let candidates know whether they got the position.

Suggested open-ended questions to be used during the interview:

What interested you about this position?

Is there an aspect of this organization that motivates you to want to volunteer?

Tell me the story of how you chose your education program OR career path OR life work?

Have you volunteered in the past?

Yes: What have you enjoyed most about previous volunteer work?

No: What have you enjoyed most about previous paid work or other activities?

Are you involved in other organized activities?

What specific skills would you like to utilize as a volunteer?

Are there tasks that you do not want to do as a volunteer?

Can you briefly talk about your experiences as they relate to this position?

What would you say are three of your strengths?

Do you prefer working independently or with a group?

How do you give feedback? How do you take feedback? Provide examples

What would be the ideal volunteer job for you – and why?

Describe your ideal supervisor.

What are your expectations of our organization? Of our members?

What are your personal goals for this experience?

Do you have any concerns about what we expect of you?

Are you willing to make a time commitment of _____? Are you able to commit to the time needed for this project or role?

Are you willing to do training pertinent to this position?

Are you willing to provide training in your area of expertise to others?

Do you have any questions that you would like to ask us?

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