

## **Screening and Interviewing Volunteer Applicants**

There was a time when many organizations would gladly accept any volunteer who walked through the door and expressed a willingness to assist. Those days are over. For reasons of insurance and legal liability, organizations must carry out due diligence in their volunteer selection process.

The need for volunteers to undergo a criminal background check is now a common requirement with many organizations, and if the volunteer position involves working with children or those with disabilities, then the background check needs to also include a ‘vulnerable sector’ search.

Organizations that require a background check should be aware of the requirements of their local police department, and take steps to simplify the process for the volunteer. Some police departments will waive their fee if the volunteer provides a letter from the organization they are intending to serve with. If there is a fee for the background check, organizations should let volunteers know upfront if they will be reimbursed for their expenses. Some volunteers will already have completed background checks in order to coach minor sports or to volunteer within their church or a community organization.

Asking for a background check and vulnerable sector search is something that can be done toward the end of the initial screening and interviewing process, once you are satisfied that the volunteer applicant is the right fit for your organization. This is also the appropriate time to ask the volunteer applicant to provide names and contact information for references.

Prior to making the decision to bring a volunteer onboard, a thorough interview should take place. During the interview, ask questions that will allow you to determine why the person is interested in volunteering with your organization, and how they hope to make an impact with the organization and those whom it serves. It is also important to carefully review the job description to ensure that all parties are clear on their obligations and expectations. You will also want to have a general discussion about the prospective volunteer’s background, previous work experience, education, interests, hobbies, etc. After gaining a better sense of the person’s skills and interests, you may wish to modify the job description to better fit their abilities.

Some tips for an effective volunteer interview:

- Prepare questions and review the job description prior to the applicant arriving
- Begin by introducing yourself, your role, and purpose of the interview

- Listening carefully and use open, non-leading questions that invite discussion
- Seek to get an understanding of the volunteer's passions and reasons for applying
- Before closing the interview, ask if the volunteer applicant has any questions
- Outline the next steps of the process, including when the volunteer can expect to hear back from you, and whether there will be a requirement for a criminal background check
- Thank the volunteer for attending the interview, and then promptly write any notes and follow-up tasks that need to take place as part of the next stages of the screening process

#### QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES:

- What are the most important qualities or characteristics your organization looks for in a volunteer?
- How would you go about informing someone that you do not consider them to be suited for the volunteer position they have applied for?
- What have you found from experience, or what do you feel would be some of the most effective interview questions when meeting with a prospective volunteer?

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2. Recruitment and Marketing
3. Screening and Interviewing Volunteer Applicants
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