



4A. TIP SHEET 4: INTERVIEW VOLUNTEERS

An interview helps you to understand why someone is interested in volunteering and it helps you identify any misconceptions they may have upfront. It also gives the applicant (i.e., potential volunteer) a chance to ask you any questions they may have and clarify their expectations.

1. STRUCTURING AN INTERVIEW

1. Start by introducing yourself and your position.
 - a. Thank the applicant for their interest and for making the time.
 - b. Tell the applicant the purpose of the interview and how long it is expected to take.
 - c. Let them know there will be a chance to ask questions at the end.
2. Start with an easy, open question as an ice-breaker.
 - a. E.g., "How did you hear about this opportunity?"
3. Move on to the main interview questions. These should cover 3 to 5 topics (e.g., teamwork, coping under pressure), with one or two questions per topic.
4. Finish by letting the applicant know what the next steps in the processes are for them and give them an opportunity to ask questions.

2. INTERVIEW STRUCTURES AND TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Interviews can vary from highly structured (asking every applicant exactly the same questions with very little prompting) to unstructured (questions vary between applicants with lots of prompting for more information) or somewhere in between. Interviews can also vary in terms of:

- » Their length,
- » The number of times you interview applicants,
- » The number of interviewers – a cross section of people from the volunteering group, to form a panel of three or four, can keep responses to applicants on track and objective,
- » How you evaluate the responses, and
- » The types of questions that you ask.

More structured interviews are better for assessing applicants. The more formal nature may feel slightly less friendly, but it will help to keep your process fair and objective. Explaining this to applicants upfront will reassure them.

There are two different types of interview questions that are frequently used to assess skills and attributes.

Behavioural or job-related questions

- » These are designed to assess specific behaviours based on previous experience. Knowing a person's past behaviour will help you predict how that person will behave as a volunteer in your volunteering group in the future.
- » People need to have some relevant experience to be able to answer behavioural questions well, so you will find this type of question most useful for assessing applicants with relevant experience.

EXAMPLE:

"This job often involves working in high stress and high-pressure situations. Can you tell me about a time when you have had to work under pressure in the past?"

- What was the situation?
- How did you cope with it?
- What would you do differently in the future?





Situational questions

- » These are hypothetical questions related to situations that may occur on the job. They are well suited for people with little experience because they talk about a hypothetical situation.
- » Answers are usually assessed against example answers and rated on a 1-5 scale, with a score of 1 reflecting the least desirable behavioural response and 5 reflecting the most desirable response.

EXAMPLE:

"You are part of a team responding to an emergency. The team leader gives you an instruction that would go against what you learned in your training. How do you respond?"

Whichever question format you use, prepare some example excellent, acceptable, and poor responses. You can then compare the examples to the response the interviewee gives to give the interviewee a rating.

The box below shows some examples for the question above:

Example answers:

1 (very poor) = Publicly accepts the instructions from the leader but then encourages the rest of the team not to follow the instructions.

2 (poor) = Publicly tells the leader he/she is wrong and encourage the team not to follow the instructions.

3 (acceptable) = Politely tells the leader that their instructions go against what you have learned in your training and encourage the team not to follow the instructions.

4 (good) = Pull the leader aside and explain to the leader that their instructions go against what you have learned in your training and ask if you could follow your training.

5 (excellent) = Pull the leader aside and explain to the leader that their instructions go against what you have learned in your training, explain why it is important to follow the procedures you were trained in, and ask for the leader's permission to proceed.





Other handy tips:

It is best practice to have more than one person taking part in the interview process. This helps with objectivity and quality control to ensure you are as fair as possible with all applicants. It also gives the applicant the chance to meet more than one other member of the group.

Make sure you take notes throughout the interview that you can refer to later.

Try to get more than one example of the behaviours you are most interested in.

Explore negative information – don't just ask about things they did well, but also explore the negatives or areas they feel they could improve on. You can do this by simply asking what they found most difficult or what they would do differently in the future and why. How someone reacts when things go wrong can often tell you more about them than their success stories.

Use probing and follow-up questions to get more information. Get them to elaborate on answers by asking how, why, or "can you tell me more about that?".

Look out for contradictory answers and compare answers to information from different sources.

Use open questions. Open questions often start with words like how, why, what, or tell me about. Yes/no type questions will be less informative.

Restate and summarise people's responses to make sure you've understood them.

Only ask one question at a time.

Avoid asking double-barrelled questions such as "What was the best part about that experience and what did you find the hardest?"

Do not offer a selection of responses for applicants to choose from.

E.g., "Do you want to volunteer to help the community or learn new skills?" – questions like this limit the answers someone can give you.

