

Volunteer Centre Merton

The benefits of volunteer interviews

For the volunteer:

- To learn more about the organisation and how volunteers fit in
- To learn more about their potential role
 - What it will involve
 - Where they will be volunteering
 - Who they will be volunteering with
- To see how professional the organisation is

For the group/organisation:

- To give the opportunity to explain more clearly to potential volunteers about the work of your group/organisation and how volunteers fit into it
- To gain any factual information you need about the Volunteer Centre Merton to explore the volunteer's attitudes and motivations, as they relate to the volunteer role
- Demonstrates that the group/organisation takes volunteer involvement seriously/respectfully
- A proper recruitment process, including some form of interview, is an important step to recruiting the "right" volunteers for the group/organisation

Interview Questions

Whether you interview over a cup of tea or in a more formal setting, it is best to have a plan for the questions you ask.

1. Know what you want to find out. Have the role description and person specification, and be clear about what you absolutely need, and what would be desirable.
2. Make sure that all the questions are clearly related to the role, avoiding questions about personal circumstances of the volunteer's background. For example, you could ask "Are you free to volunteer in the evenings?" but NOT "Do you have children at home to take care of?"
3. Use open ended questions as often as possible. These are questions preceded by How and What, and to some extent Where and When. This will encourage the interviewee to open up to you, because they cannot be answered "yes" or "no".
4. Use closed questions whenever you need some factual information, ie "Are you free to volunteer for two days every week?"
5. Probe volunteers' attitudes, values or skills by putting some questions into a behavioural context. Give them a scenario (either hypothetical or something that commonly occurs in the role) and ask them how they would deal with it. Their answers will tell you how they behave, think, feel and communicate. Choose a situation that will enable volunteers to draw on knowledge, skills, experience or attitudes that you think are critical to the role they will do.

6. Test the questions out first – on a colleague, existing volunteer or someone you can trust to give a view. Be able to ask the question in another way, or another question, if the volunteer does not understand it.

Bear in mind that there is a limit to what you can learn about a volunteer in an interview. Use an introductory period and consider what criteria you might monitor during induction and training (if relevant).

Some Non-directive interview questions

1. **Opening questions to put at ease**
 - What volunteering have you done before?
 - How did you hear about us?
 - What appealed to you about volunteering with us?
 - What do you enjoy doing in your leisure time?

2. **Questions to determine motivation/attitudes/values**
 - What caught your attention about volunteering with us?
 - What have you done that has given you greatest satisfaction?
 - Why are you interested in volunteering?
 - What do you hope to learn/gain from volunteering with us?
 - What is important to you in a volunteering role?
 - What would be the ideal volunteer role for you? Why?
 - What are your long-term objectives for volunteering?
 - *What kind of support (supervision) do you prefer?*
 - What have you enjoyed most in your past volunteer activities?
 - What have you enjoyed least?
 - What are your personal and work goals that would be important in choosing a volunteer role?

3. **Questions to determine interpersonal skills and relations**
 - When you are part of a team, what kind of people do you find easiest to work or volunteer alongside?
 - Which (of our client groups) are you most interested in volunteering with? Why?
 - How would you describe the way you communicate with others?
 - How do you deal with situations that are difficult for you?
 - Are there people with whom you would feel awkward or unable to volunteer?
 - How would you describe yourself – what do you like best about yourself? And, if you could, what would you improve?