

Good Practice Guides: Building Foundations

No. 8 – Selection and Screening

Key Points

As a follow on from your organisations' volunteer recruitment plan, a well planned selection and screening procedure is an important process to get right. This process will allow you to match the needs of your organisation with the needs and skills of the volunteers. It will also prevent a volunteer from being placed in a role that does not match their wants, or that they are ill-equipped to fulfil, all of which would lead to an unhappy and unproductive experience for everyone.

General Points

- Keep it simple; try to keep the process for your organisation the same for all volunteers. Keep it straightforward and appropriate for the roles within your organisation.
- Look at what will help to draw out the best from your volunteers and ways in which will make it a fair process.
- If possible, try to steer away from the more formal approach of application and interviews. There are many methods you can use, so it is worth investing time to make the process accessible and suitable to your organisation.

Gathering an Applicant's Information

Usually, organisations seek to gather information via an application form. Although useful, forms can often spiral out of their intended use and can begin to ask many questions that for most volunteers are better answered in person. We would always advocate meeting your applicants in person, so when gathering information, consider the following:

- Don't let the form be the first thing a volunteer sees; if possible include it in a pack of interesting information about your organisation and the roles.
- Forms shouldn't be used as selection processes so when you send a volunteer the pack and form, make an appointment to see them there and then.
- Think about what information you need and why and about what you can ask them when you meet them. You should not need to ask about age or qualifications.

- Equal Opportunities - If you need ask specific personal questions, explain why you need them and include this on a separate sheet.
- Think about layout and language. Try and use plain English and consider how the layout of your form will be interpreted by individuals who do not have English as their first language or that have a visual impairment (see our Good Practice Guide on Marketing Your Opportunities for guidance on layout and fonts)

Meeting with Your Applicants

We recommend always meeting with applicants and we tend to shy away from using the term 'Interview' when describing what is usually an informal meeting anyway. Over formalising the selection process will put some volunteers off and can create unnecessary pressure.

Meeting with your applicants should be a chance to:

- Be a welcoming experience into your organisation
- Be a chance to see what you do, who you are and possibly meet some of your beneficiaries
- Be a chance for potential volunteers to ask questions about volunteering with you and your organisation
- Be a chance for you to find out about them

Finding out about your applicant:

This time will be the opportunity to find out about your applicants and ask them questions. What you need to ask should be dependent on the role but some basic areas to cover should be:

- What skills, experience and knowledge they have
- What interests them about volunteering with your organisation
- What they hope to gain from volunteering with you
- What level of commitment they can make (time, days and for how long)

You then need to think about what your applicant needs to know about you and your project/organisation, so consider:

- Your organisation, who it's beneficiaries are, its projects and its future plans
- What role your volunteers play
- Specifics about this volunteer opportunity (if applicable)
- Details of any training, support and expenses offered to volunteers
- Time commitment
- The process from here e.g. references, disclosure checks etc

Screening your applicants

Your responsibility to your organisation is to ensure that anyone coming in to your organisation is suitable, safe and appropriate. To ensure you fulfil this duty of care, suitable screening processes should be in place.

With any form of screening it is important to make your applicants aware that this will take place at the earliest opportunity. Also remember that you can use your knowledge of volunteers to screen and select for example using a trial period or compulsory training as a means of screening your volunteer's suitability.

References

We recommend the use of references for volunteers, however to minimise any barriers consider the following:

- Who will you accept references from? Don't insist that one be from a former employer these are often irrelevant for the role and difficult to obtain. Don't insist that a referee be known for a minimum of two years, again, difficult for some volunteers. Let your applicants know who you will accept references from.
- When contacting referees, give them information about the role and your organisation and ask them specific questions, you will have more chance of receiving a reference if you give them a prompt
- Consider accepting a phone call or email as a reference, this can often speed up the reference and make it easier for the referee to respond.

Disclosure Checks

It is important to make clear to applicants that having a criminal record should not exclude someone from volunteering as this is often a worry for many volunteers that enquire about roles. The legislation that covers working with children and young people The Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003 (POCSA) outlines that an organisation has a responsibility to check if an individual is on the Disqualified from Working with Children list, applying for a disclosure is the only way to obtain this information.

All voluntary sector organisations that work with children, young people (18 and under) or vulnerable adults, can access free disclosure checks for their staff and volunteers via the Central Registered Body in Scotland (CRBS) www.crbs.org.uk We recommend contacting the CRBS to discuss any specific queries you have for your organisation's staff and volunteers.

Saying No to Applicants

Saying no to an applicant should be something that anyone recruiting for volunteers should be prepared for. We would recommend also that if a volunteer does not suit, don't just leave it - tell them. If a volunteer is not suitable for you it doesn't mean that they are not suitable elsewhere and this could seriously put them off enquiring about other volunteering opportunities.

Consider:

- What skills, knowledge or aptitudes are necessary for the role and cannot be accommodated without.
- Look at where support and/or training could help a volunteer if they do not immediately match the role's requirements
- If they are not suitable for the role; are they suitable for a role elsewhere within the organisation?
- If an applicant is still unsuitable, give them the reasons why in as positive a way as possible and help them to consider their options. |

More help?

If you would like more help or advice in relation to this factsheet please contact the Volunteer Centre Edinburgh on the following details:

Tel: 0131 225 0630

Email: admin@volunteeredinburgh.org.uk

Or you can drop in and see us:

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