

Set 2

InfoSheet 2.5

Recruitment and Selection

Application and Interview Processes

Application Forms

It is a good idea to ask your volunteers to fill out a brief application form so that you have some basic information about them.

Think about the reasons why you need your volunteers to fill out application forms. It's not usually a good idea to use the same forms as you would use for your paid staff as these tend to demand detailed information that you wouldn't necessarily need to know for recruiting your volunteers. Job applicants are in competition and this is not usually going to be the case when it comes to selecting volunteers. Think about what you need to know about the person in terms of their skills, experience and background and avoid asking for excessive information. Your volunteers may need to have some previous experience (for example, when volunteering for a counselling helpline), but think about the minimum experience a volunteer would need and what training you could provide to allow that person to become a volunteer and ask applicants for information relevant only to your minimum criteria. If you need to ask for certain information, for example, the volunteer's age, always state why you need to know this.

You may decide that you can obtain all the details you need by meeting the volunteer in person. Asking people to fill out long application forms can put people off and you may be putting barriers in their way, for example, people who have sight problems, whose first language is not English, or people who do not have a high level of literacy. Throughout the application process your goal should be to enable people to give their very best – written application forms may not be the best format. Your form should state that you are happy to give support to people who experience difficulty with filling out the form or want to ask questions – make sure you give appropriate contact details for this.

If you do decide to use application forms you will need to decide what information you need and why. You probably wouldn't need in-depth information about previous employment, unless your volunteers are going to be working with children (see Set 2, InfoSheet 2.6, Vetting Procedures). You will probably need your volunteers to give a summary of their skills and interests, both formal and informal (i.e. experience in managing the household budget, looking after children at home, etc.) so that you can pick up on these at interview, allowing you to show a real interest in what the volunteer has to offer. The key thing is to keep your form as short and informal as possible.

You should also collect information for equal opportunities monitoring purposes, so that you can assess whether you are reaching a diverse range of volunteers and take appropriate action if you are not. This information should be collected on a separate form and certainly never used as part of your selection process.

Interviews

Volunteer interviews are a very important part of any volunteer recruitment and selection process, but avoid conducting interviews in the same way as you would for paid staff. Formal interviews can create unnecessary stress for volunteers and are unlikely to allow you to create a good impression of your organisation or allow volunteers to give their best.

Try to make the interview process as informal as possible and avoid sitting behind a desk, firing questions and taking long notes. Let the volunteer know that the interview is a two-way process with the aim of allowing you both to get to know each other. Tell volunteers that the interview is confidential and make sure you have asked whether individuals have any accessibility requirements or other needs before you invite them along.

Plan carefully, making sure you have everything you need to hand, including information about the placement, role, induction training and any policies you need to point out. Make sure you have a quiet room where you will be free from interruption.

Explain the purpose and process of the interview early on so that your volunteers know what to expect and plan your questions carefully to ensure that you are not asking for irrelevant or excessive information. Remember that the interview is a two-way process, so make sure you give your volunteers all the information they need and say you are willing to answer any questions. Don't just go through policies and documents though, work through them with your volunteers, asking for input, for example, asking how your volunteers feel about your task descriptions and working within your equal opportunities policy.

The information you would like from volunteers might include: what made them want to volunteer with you and where did they hear about the opportunity; what they know about your organisation, service users or client group; what support needs they have; what skills or experience they have; what their expectations are from volunteering. It's a good idea to ask 'open' questions (beginning with 'when', 'where', 'what' and 'how') as these invite your volunteers to give more information about themselves and their skills rather than just simple yes or no answers.

It is important to have a good ending to the interview that gives a clear way forward. At the end of the interview you may want to discuss with the volunteer whether or not they want to go ahead with volunteering with you and whether you are both happy for this to happen. It is important to be honest with the volunteer, particularly where you feel the person may not be suited to any particular role. Never criticise the person, focus instead on why you feel they do not have the necessary skills or experience and make suggestions about where you think they could better utilise what they have to offer – this may involve signposting to other organisations or Volunteer Bureaux. You may not, however, be able to give the volunteer a decision at this stage. You may want to think about whether you can adapt the role to make it more suitable or whether you want to build in a trial period. Whatever you decide always make sure volunteers know when you will contact them with a decision and what the next steps in the process will be (for example, placement agreements, induction training, planning a start date, etc.)