

# Volunteer Interviewer's Notebook

An eclectic guide  
to the effective placement of  
volunteers in programs.

The purpose of an interview with a prospective volunteer is to determine the suitability of the applicant for volunteering in your program and to select an assignment in which the needs of both the program and the individual are satisfied. Such an interview is essential, since the success of your entire volunteer program depends, to a large degree, on finding the right person for the right position.

Consequently, every applicant should have an interview, no matter how well s/he may be known to you. In many instances the interview serves another purpose: It becomes the first step towards orienting and training the volunteer who accepts and is acceptable to your program.

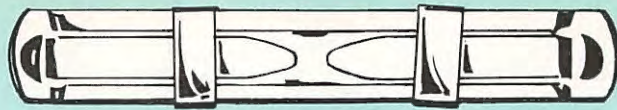
## CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

### Consider the Setting

1. Arrange the office so that there is an atmosphere of comfort, warmth, and informality. Flexibility and a choice of seating should be provided.
2. Try to ensure privacy; divide the room by using a screen if others are present.
3. Cast aside unfinished business and concentrate on the job at hand. Few people can read their mail with one eye and carry on an interview with the other.
4. Allow for at least one-half hour of uninterrupted interview time.

### Are You Prepared?

1. You should have an application form which has areas covering educational and occupational experience, training, hobbies and time preferences.



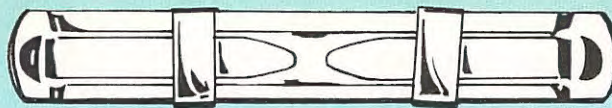
2. Information should be available on all present volunteer positions (preferably in the form of detailed job descriptions).
3. In the case of volunteers who may be unsuited to your specific program, it is also handy to have information on other possible areas of community involvement.

## Things to Do During

1. With a smile, a handshake and a friendly word of greeting, introduce yourself and anyone else who is present at the time (i.e., secretary).
2. Clarify the purpose of the interview (to obtain general information, discuss interests and match with volunteer position).
3. Complete the application form with the prospective volunteer, adding any additional information gathered in the interview exchange.
4. Explore such areas as:
  - What have you enjoyed most in previous volunteer assignments? What have you enjoyed least?
  - Why are you interested in doing volunteer work? What are your long-range objectives?
  - What are your personal and work goals that would be important in choosing a volunteer job?
  - What type of people are you most interested in working with (co-workers or clients)? Are there types of people you feel you would be unable to work with?
  - What do you feel would be your greatest contribution to our volunteer program?
5. Give the applicant enough time to consider your questions and answer them at his/her own pace. Do not hesitate to ask for clarification on any points that you don't understand.
6. Present your information clearly and concisely so that it is easily understood. Allow the applicant an opportunity to express any concerns about the suitability of the jobs available.
7. Encourage the prospective volunteer to develop a personal plan of action with the job available. Assist him/her in deciding what is most suitable by clarifying areas of concern and setting things in perspective (i.e., point out both the positive and negative aspects of the jobs being considered), but leave the final decision to the volunteer.
8. Anticipate future areas of confusion and prepare the prospective volunteer for these (i.e., confidentiality, flexible hours, etc.).
9. Don't extend the interview past the point of satisfaction.
10. Ask the volunteer to tell any friends who might be interested in your program to contact you. Your best form of public relations is an active, enthusiastic volunteer.
11. Express your appreciation for having had this time with the prospective volunteer. If the result of the interview is that s/he will be doing volunteer work for your organization then you would move directly into orientation.

## Things to Do After

1. Take time to make notes on the interview after the interview is over. Enter the results in your filing system.
2. Don't forget the volunteer. Make sure you follow-up, and see how things work out and how the volunteer feels about the placement.



## FOR THOSE MAKING REFERRALS

It might be noted that there are two types of interviews involving prospective volunteers. One is done by specific organizations and groups with the aim of presenting the prospective volunteer with the one or several volunteer opportunities offered within the organization or group. The other type of interview is similar to that done by a Volunteer Bureau where the prospective volunteer is presented with the various volunteer opportunities offered by all the organizations or groups in the community. The result is a referral to one or two of these organizations or groups.

While all of the above pointers about interviewing apply to both types of interviews, a word should be added about the referral process.

1. After identifying two or three referrals with the prospective volunteer, by reviewing job orders and matching them to his/her interests, telephone the organizations and inform them of the volunteer available. Introduce the volunteer coordinator and the volunteer over the phone, and request that they set up an appointment time and date.
2. If the organizations cannot be reached by phone, leave a message to have them call the volunteer. Give the volunteer a card with the organization's name and the person who will call. Alternatively, you could give the volunteer the name and number of the organization and have him/her phone later on.
3. Encourage the volunteer to phone you anytime problems arise regarding his/her placement.

## PROBLEM SITUATIONS

You may occasionally encounter problems in the interviewing situation.

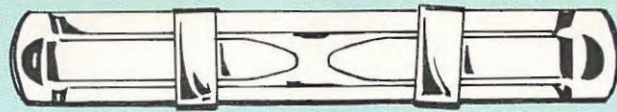
These may arise in the form of a prospective volunteer with a mental health problem, or someone who, in your judgment, is not suitable for your program due to physical limitations or lack of specific skills. In any of these cases it is essential that you not leave the volunteer without an alternative plan of action.

Be sure to have available:

- Descriptions of other volunteer programs in your area and the names of volunteer coordinators.
- General information on counselling programs, mental health teams, legal and financial services.

Although you are not setting out to solve an applicant's problems, you may find the following ideas helpful:

1. Observe any signs of disappointment or discontent. This may be a clue to the real problems or it may indicate that the interview is covering topics of embarrassment (i.e., questions regarding health or recent illness).
2. Give the prospective volunteer ample opportunity to tell his/her own story. Let him/her talk freely without interruptions if this seems important.
3. Inquire regarding the steps already taken in attempting to solve present difficulties. Determine, if possible, how much interest there is in wanting to find solutions.



4. Keep a friendly, sympathetic, and helpful attitude, but don't assume the responsibility for finding solutions to the interviewee's problems.
5. Name people or community agencies that you may see as being helpful to the volunteer.
6. Expect to meet many problems you cannot deal with alone. Share these situations with other persons who might be helpful or who are already involved with the prospective volunteer (i.e., if the volunteer has been referred by a social worker or doctor, ask the volunteer if you can contact them for further information or arrange a meeting time for the three of you to sit down and discuss volunteer opportunities in your program).
7. Yield to the specialist in areas outside of your own field; follow-up and cooperate with others.
8. If the prospective volunteer's problems are not severe and you feel he/she may be suited to another type of program, ask the prospective volunteer if you may share interview information with any other volunteer coordinator to whom you make a referral.

—From *Volunteers: How to Find Them, How to Keep Them!* by Mike Haines, Voluntary Action Resources Center, 1625 W. 8th Ave, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 1T9, 1977. \$3.60 (U.S. money); \$3.00 (Canadian). Reprinted with permission.

## MORE TIPS

### The More Info The Better

Before making any specific referrals, seek information along the following lines:

- Hobbies and skills in specific areas, such as sewing, dramatics, sports, might encourage a volunteer to want to teach the hobby or skill to someone else.
- Ideas about the kind of person with whom the volunteer wishes to work can be useful. Inquiries about why the volunteer wants to work with children, aged, or handicapped can provide valuable clues about interests and skills as well as personal qualities.
- Questioning about areas of need in the city which may appeal to the volunteer's interest also can be useful.
- Personality traits are important in an effective referral. The interviewer should note:
  - Ease in communicating, since this is important for volunteer

positions relating to the general public.

- Ease in relating to and working with people. This is difficult, but clues can be obtained by noting the relationship to you and anyone in the office with whom interviewee comes in contact; asking if interviewee wants to work directly with people or would rather have a desk job; observing general manner of the interviewee (Is s/he outgoing? Are there any obvious mannerisms which are annoying?); and being sensitive to derogatory comments about groups of people.
- Attitudes: Are comments usually positive or negative? Is there evidence of real interest in and enthusiasm for a volunteer assignment?
- Emotional reactions, especially when discussing jobs that involve sensitive areas. For example, working with emotionally disturbed youngsters or adults



requires a calm, stable personality.

- “Other activities” are important because they yield information about the person’s interests. Many people belong to clubs or other organizations that could possibly be called upon to do a special group project. It is best not to mention this to the person being interviewed, since some will feel that they are committing their group or club. Instead, merely ask the person being interviewed if s/he belongs to any neighborhood associations, business clubs, lodges, etc.

—From “Guidelines for Interviewers,” New York City Voluntary Action Corp., 61 Chambers St., New York, NY 10007. \$1.00. Reprinted with permission.

## Open (Not Closed) Questions

Use questions and positive listening to get the volunteer to tell his/her story. Ask questions to show interest. It is important to bring out facts or to get the reactions you need, and also to keep the interview on the beam. When using questions, state them clearly so the volunteer will understand the information you want. Avoid questions that can be answered by “yes” or “no.” Instead, begin questions with “who,” “what,” “why,” “where,” “how.” This type of question can help you evaluate by showing attitudes, judgments and reactions.

## Ignore Your Impressions

Consider each fact about the volunteer in relation to all others. Avoid basing evaluation on impressions.

- Consider the volunteer’s SKAPATI —Skills, Knowledge, Ability, Physical status, Aptitudes, Traits, Interest.

- Note mental reaction time and organization of answers to questions.
- Note the volunteer’s evaluation of her/himself, what s/he thinks s/he can and cannot do well.
- Note quality of self-prepared application form, handwriting, following of instructions, clerical ability.

Remember, you are not just filling a spot, but matching a person and a job in the best interests of both.

—From “How To” Book for Volunteer Trainers, Los Angeles Voluntary Action Center, 621 South Virgil Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90005, 1976. \$4.00. Reprinted with permission.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY		
Applicant's Name		Telephone
Address		Zip
Interviewer		Date
Family and work restrictions on time available: (Must be home by 3:00, or cannot work weekends, or vacation is in July)		
Attitudes (toward agency's clients; will work directly with clients — or in noncontact assignment; self-concept; will or can take directions; self-propelled, etc.)		
Education, Aptitude, Skills		
Motivation (Why he wants to volunteer, other volunteer experience, why interested in this job? leading to a career? trying a new type of work?)		
Health (any physical limitations?)		
Transportation (is this a problem?)		
Interviewer's Comments (limited viewpoint? hangups? growth potential? good ideas? controlled? etc.)		
Action	Withdrew voluntarily	Recommended for another job

—From Step by Step: Management of the Volunteer Program in Agencies by Marie MacBride, Volunteer Bureau of Bergen County, 389 Main St., Hackensack, NJ 07601, 1979. \$4.00. Reprinted with permission.