

Guide to Interviewing Volunteers



The interview is an essential step in the volunteer screening and selection process and provides an opportunity for both the organisation and volunteer to learn more about one another. The interview is invaluable in assessing if the applicant is a good “fit” for your organisation. It is important to remember that an interview is a two-way process and, even though a volunteer attends an interview, it does not mean they have fully decided to volunteer with your organisation. Therefore, you should outline the benefits of volunteering with your organisation, the supports you can offer, and how the volunteer can help further your mission and aims.

Before the Interview

1. Decide in advance if the interview will be an informal chat or a more formally structured discussion.
2. Decide whether it will be a panel or a one-to-one interview. Typically, it is a good idea for at least two people from your organisation to interview a volunteer.
3. Agree on a suitable location and time for the interview. If you are meeting with multiple applicants, you may decide to meet with them consecutively, in order to utilise your time more efficiently. Group interviews are proving increasingly popular with many organisations, and may also help you manage your resources more effectively.
4. Designate a confidential meeting space where you will not be interrupted.
5. Determine how long the interview should be e.g. 20 minutes.
6. Decide if you will take notes during the interview and, if so, who will do this. Remember that under the Data Protection Act a person has the right to access their information so any notes you make can be requested. It is courteous to ask do they mind if you take notes.
7. If appropriate, decide if the applicant should bring samples of their work and give adequate notice to collate a portfolio.
8. Prepare how you are going to present the role and decide on relevant interview questions in advance. Remember, each applicant should be asked the same set of questions. Questions should always relate to the role. Avoid asking ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions. Instead, ask open-ended questions to enable the applicant to elaborate and offer more details.
9. Decide on the selection process, e.g. will you use a scoring method or decide by general consensus?

For more information contact your local Volunteer Centre or go to www.volunteer.ie

During the Interview

1. Put the volunteer at ease as interviews can be stressful! Start the conversation and welcome the volunteer.
2. Have refreshments available, e.g. water, tea or coffee.
3. Introduce the interviewer(s), describe their roles and explain the running order of the interview.
4. Take time to tell the volunteer about your organisation and the role itself. This is an important first step. It gives you an opportunity to set the tone and helps put people at ease.
5. Always allow time for the applicant to ask questions at the end.
6. Let the applicant know when they can expect to hear from you, e.g. within two days, a week.
7. Thank the applicant for coming and for their interest in your organisation.

After the Interview

1. It is best not to select an applicant on the spot even if you think they are suitable. This gives you time to reflect on their suitability and allows them time to consider the commitment involved.
2. Invite successful applicants to join your team, but also give them time to accept or decline. If they accept, explain the next steps, e.g. garda vetting, reference checks, training, induction etc.
3. Provide unsuccessful applicants with reasons why they were not successful, e.g. a large number were interviewed for a limited number of positions; you were looking for someone with specific skills and experience. This makes saying no easier, and more professional.
4. It is extremely important to contact all unsuccessful applicants to thank them for their interest and time. This can be a simple email, letter or a phone call.