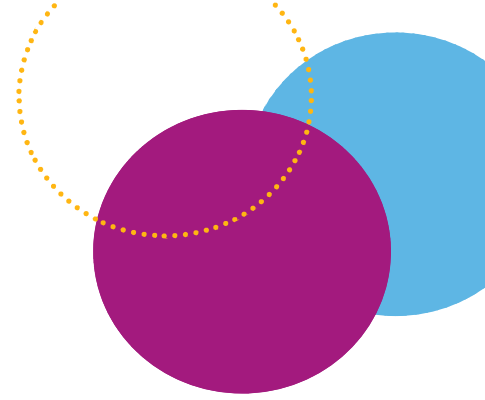


8

Interviews and references



Interviewing volunteers

Interviewing potential volunteers can:

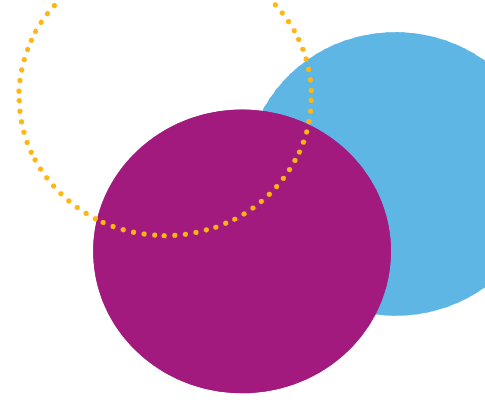
- Provide you with a chance to explain more about the work of your organisation and how volunteers fit into its activities
- Give you the opportunity to assess the suitability of volunteers and enable you to make sure they have the skills and qualities that you need, or to match their skills most effectively to a suitable role
- Give volunteers a chance to decide whether your organisation is the right one for them
- Help to ensure that all volunteers are treated consistently, and given the same opportunity to find out more and to demonstrate their suitability for the role

The aim of the interview is to match the right person with the task. It is useful to try and find out what motivates each volunteer as this helps in making sure there's a good match between volunteer and role. A good interviewer will give the volunteer an opportunity to 'self-select', i.e. to reject the role if they feel it is not right for them.

Before the interview it is a good idea to address any fears that volunteers may have, and explain whether it will be a formal selection process or just an informal chat.

Planning an interview

- Make sure that other colleagues know that a potential volunteer is coming and ensure that someone is available to welcome them.
- Have any background information to hand as the volunteer may ask you questions.
- Draw up a list of questions in advance based on the volunteer task description. Remember the interview is your main selection tool.
- Use open questions, such as 'What experience do you have...?', 'What is important about...?', 'How did you...?'. As an interviewer you should be doing more listening than talking (except when giving information).
- If you are interviewing several people, you may need to take notes. It is less intimidating if you explain to the volunteer why you are making notes, just in case they think they have said something wrong.
- If you are not going to make a decision during the interview, then tell the volunteer when you will let them know the result.



References

Some form of independent verification is good practice for most regular roles. Some organisations ask for references in writing; others prefer telephone references. It is sensible, both for practical and equal opportunities reasons, to have a standard list of questions to ask. If taking up telephone references, keep a written record of points raised, the name of the referee and the date.

The questions asked should verify in what capacity the person has known the volunteer, and for how long, and could ask specific questions which relate to the task description and required skills for the role the volunteer will be performing. You might also want to ask whether the referee would have any concerns or doubts about offering the person this role. When asked specific questions, it is much harder for a referee to conceal any doubts or concerns than it would be in a bland, general 'character reference'.

Beware of general written references produced by a prospective volunteer. They may have been supplied as a way of encouraging the person's exit from their previous role/post, and are also open to forgery.

You will need some guidelines on who you will accept as a referee, and how long they must have known the person. Some volunteers, especially if they have been ill or out of paid work for a while or if they have recently come to the UK, may find it difficult to suggest a referee, particularly if they assume you expect an employment reference. You might have to suggest alternatives such as a teacher, tutor, social worker, health professional, volunteer manager or neighbour.