

SECTION NINE: INTERVIEWING POTENTIAL VOLUNTEERS

An interview is an exchange of information between a potential volunteer and a paid or volunteer staff member of the Red Cross. An effective interview will---

- Determine the prospective volunteer's skills and motivation for volunteering.
- Encourage the prospective volunteer to ask questions and describe his or her interests.
- Provide information on the scope of available positions, the duties and skills related to them, the time required, the training needed, and any uniform requirements.
- Help match skills, knowledge, interests, and motivation to various job opportunities.
- Explain the role of the volunteer administrator and the volunteer administration office.
- Provide a referral to another agency if it is obvious that the Red Cross cannot use the prospect's services.
- Help identify undesirable candidates. Careful attention at this time may eliminate later problems and possible termination.

Planning the Interview

The time and place of an interview should be set up for the convenience of the prospective volunteer. Flexibility is important and "on the spot" interviews may be needed occasionally. A sense of privacy during interviews is also important.

A screening interview should be arranged as soon as possible after an individual has indicated interest. A good volunteer may be lost if kept "dangling." The screening interview should---

- Be conducted by the volunteer administration office.
- Gather basic information about the potential volunteer.
- Give basic information about the Red Cross and current volunteer opportunities.

From the screening interview, the interviewer should be able to gain a sense of the interviewee's motivation, skills, interest, and time availability. Referrals for a placement interview should then be made to the service and/or the person who is responsible for supervising the particular volunteer job. The purpose of the placement interview is to determine whether the person is appropriate for a specific job. The placement interview should be scheduled within one week of the screening interview.

A good first impression of the Red Cross can persuade a person to become a volunteer. The way a potential volunteer is greeted and the way his or her questions are answered very often determine whether he or she will join the organization. Usually a person is still deciding whether or not to volunteer with the Red Cross when he or she is interviewed. Attachment 9.1 offers suggestions on creating a positive first impression about your unit for potential volunteers.

Effective Interviewers

The individuals who are responsible for interviewing prospective volunteers should be well trained and prepared for this process. Units should recruit experienced interviewers or obtain information on training programs regarding interviewing. A self-assessment tool for beginning interviewers is included as Attachment 9.2. Whenever possible, interviewers should be volunteers, since satisfied volunteers can most effectively communicate with potential volunteers. An effective interviewer should be---

- Accepting of people from diverse backgrounds.
- Willing to listen to other people and allow them to make their own decisions.
- Enthusiastic about volunteerism and the Red Cross.

The interviewer will also need some basic tools to conduct an informative interview:

- Locally developed application form
- Form for recording the interview
- List of open-ended interview questions
- Detailed information about current volunteer opportunities

See Attachment 9.3 for a sample application form.

Interview Questions

During the interview, be sure to ask open-ended questions that will encourage the potential volunteer to talk about himself or herself. Prepare a few possible scenarios or problem situations that a volunteer might confront in the position that is being discussed. You might ask---

- How would you respond in this situation?
- What would you do if ...?
- Have you ever had to ...?

There are a number of questions that you may not legally ask during interviews. Any paid or volunteer staff person who has the responsibility of interviewing potential volunteers should be fully aware of these questions. Questions that may not be asked during an interview include---

- Race, national origin, or birthplace
- Age, height, or weight
- Marital status
- Child care arrangements or pregnancy
- Religious affiliation
- Arrest record
- English-language skill
- Discharge from military service
- Credit card or home ownership
- Length of residency in community
- Health of the interviewee

In general, do not ask anything not directly related to the ability of the applicant to perform the specific volunteer job. If the volunteer position requires the ability to perform a specific physical task, such as lifting 50 pound objects, and that requirement is specifically listed on the job description, the interviewer can ask whether the potential volunteer is able to meet that specific requirement. The interview question must be limited to the specific requirements listed on the job description, rather than general inquiries regarding health.

Positions Requiring Further Screening

A volunteer position may require reference and/or criminal record checks, especially those involving work with vulnerable populations or requiring the volunteer to drive. During the placement interview, if the potential volunteer has indicated an interest in a position requiring additional information before placement, you must explain this requirement and obtain a signed waiver and consent statement.

How is Your Unit Doing?

Use the following questions to measure the effectiveness of your unit's interviewing process. The more positive answers you have, the better you are doing.

___ Yes ___ No Are all interviewers trained in basic interview techniques, including how to maximize the exchange of information and which questions may not be asked?

___ Yes ___ No Are screening interviews scheduled quickly after the potential volunteer indicates interest?

___ Yes ___ No Do placement interviews follow screening interviews within one week?

___ Yes ___ No Is a volunteer application form completed by all potential volunteers?

**Attachment 9.1
GIVING NEW VOLUNTEERS THE RIGHT IMPRESSION
ABOUT YOUR UNIT**

First Impression	Unit's Preparation
Telephone Inquiries & Referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for all appropriate staff • Script including frequently asked questions and basic information • Telephone "tree" to make appropriate transfer of calls • Phone intake form for consistent data on all calls • Designated staff to reply to Internet inquiries • Standards for maximum time to respond to phone calls and e-mail
Atmosphere of Workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility • Accuracy of directions to site (automobile and public transportation) • Availability of parking • Safety and security • Adequate and welcoming workspace • Evidence of service and volunteer involvement (newspaper clippings, thank-you letters, bulletin boards) • Diversity of staff (Will the potential volunteer see anyone who looks like him or her?)
Greeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for staff about importance of cordially greeting potential volunteers • Reception area that is comfortable and inviting • Availability of Red Cross literature, brochures, newsletters, etc. • Availability of forms (volunteer application, registration) and pens
Responsiveness to Questions & Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate answers to the most frequently asked questions and concerns—prepare handout, train staff • Current listing of volunteer opportunities • Information packets for distribution to all potential volunteers
Availability & Punctuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness of staff to take time to answer questions • Respect for potential volunteer's time, including keeping appointments at time designated

**Attachment 9.2
Self-Assessment Tool for Beginning Interviewer**

INTERVIEW CONTENT	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS:
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BEFORE THE INTERVIEW, do you—				
Review all available information about the applicant (application form, resume)?				
Review your knowledge of the Red Cross--history, philosophy, principles, support, programs?				
Formulate your questions, and make an outline of information you want to obtain from applicant?				
Schedule enough time for the interview?				
CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW, do you—				
Maintain an open, welcoming atmosphere?				
Obtain specifically needed information about the applicant?				
Direct the applicant's conversation toward relevant channels of information?				
Ask open-ended questions?				
Ascertain the applicant's motivations?				
Indicate by brief, relevant comments or questions that you have been listening?				
Realize that periods of silence may be helpful and may encourage the applicant to talk more freely?				
GIVING INFORMATION, do you—				
Give information based on the applicant's interests, skills, and the volunteer programs related to them?				
Give the information that the applicant needs in order to make a decision?				
Give the necessary information about the job to be done and answer the applicant's questions?				
Remember not to undersell the job or its requirements?				
CLOSING THE INTERVIEW, do you—				
Maintain a reasonable time frame for the interview?				
Determine that the applicant is qualified to do the work required? If you have doubts, consult with someone else.				
When the applicant is not acceptable, do you---				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close the interview graciously and with tact? • Suggest a referral to another agency, if appropriate? • In accordance with local policy, either inform the candidate at the interview, or send a letter with the unit's decision not to accept the applicant? 				
EVALUATING THE INTERVIEW, do you—				
Evaluate your listening techniques?				
Ask appropriate questions to get all needed information?				
Evaluate all information rather than focusing on a specific positive or negative impression?				
RECORDING THE INTERVIEW, do you—				
Record only factual material during the interview?				
Review the notes taken and make additions while the conversation is fresh in your mind?				

Summarize the pros and cons of the applicant? Trust your first impressions; quickly write what you think.				
Obtain any additional information needed from other sources?				
Make recommendations of action to be taken?				

Interviewee: _____ Street Address: _____

City, State, Zipcode: _____ Telephone: _____

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Additional Comments:

**Attachment 9.3
AMERICAN RED CROSS VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM**

([Word version](#) of this form available only.)