

Excerpted from “Are you asking the right questions?” by Charlene Robson. The full text is available on-line at <http://www.cavr.ca/certification/index.html> under certification papers.

Designing Interview Questions

In order to establish the best practice for interviews, administrators of volunteer resources need to look at their individual programs and decide what questions are required by national standards or asked by similar organizations, and what questions are necessary to find an applicant that best suits the organization's program. Some of these questions constitute what are often referred to as tough or hard interview questions. The best format for these questions is behavioural based and open-ended. Questions asked using these methods generate discussion, and give insight into the applicant's personality and how he/she may behave in the volunteer program.

When collecting information about applicants, it is important to consider the applicant's privacy. Is the information that is collected necessary to determine the suitability of an applicant? The construction of a "Necessity Test," can help to justify the need for each question. Apply the test to current interview questions and use it when constructing new questions. The "necessary" component in the test, asks one to consider the following questions suggested by the National Screening Campaign, (1996):

- Why are we asking these questions?
- What effect will asking these questions have on the individual being engaged or hired? Will they unduly or unlawfully prejudice his or her chances? Will this question elicit information that falls within the prohibited grounds of discrimination?
- Is it necessary to establish the applicant's qualifications for the position?

Necessity Test - Example			
Question?	Necessary?	Why?	Satisfactory replies by volunteers to the organization's interview question
Have you given your time previously as a volunteer? Where? Did you enjoy your experience?	Yes	Determines if the person enjoys volunteering or has expectations from a previous experience.	Indicates that the volunteer realizes the commitment and expectation of volunteers.
What are your interests?	Yes	Applicants interests could be incorporated into the volunteer opportunity	Flexible, consider interests in the placement of the volunteer. Inclusion of the volunteer's interests could improve the volunteer's satisfaction of their role.

The documentation of the planning processes is important to justify decisions to others and can be valuable to staff who replace or act in your position. Justification for your questions may be requested to account for previous decisions.

Question Ideas

Volunteer Canada (1999) suggests starting with at least 10 basic questions:

1. How did you find out about this volunteer opportunity?
2. Have you given your time previously as a volunteer?
3. Why do you want to volunteer with this organization?
4. What would you like to get out of the volunteer experience?
5. What are your interests?
6. What skills, abilities, and qualities do you have to contribute to the organization?
7. How long do you think you would like to be involved with our program?
8. Do you have any special needs?
9. Are you prepared to attend training and/or information sessions?
10. Are you prepared to undergo screening and/or a background check for our safety, your safety and our clients' safety? www.volunteer.ca/dev/library/info_vols/10_questions.html (1999)

In addition to using the "Necessity Test," interview policies, procedures and questions should always be evolving to reflect changing laws and changing needs of programs. The following is a sample of some questions asked by organizations in the Vancouver/Lower Mainland area, in their interview process. Although these questions are not suitable for all programs, these questions can be used as a starting point to designing specific interview questions.

Organization	Questions
Hospital	Please describe, from a situation in your life, where you spent time in a hospital as a patient, visitor, volunteer, staff person.
	What would you personally be able to bring to a patient who was seriously ill or dying in hospital?
	Tell me your thoughts about your own death?
	How would your skills or abilities be of benefit to the hospital?
	What do you enjoy the most about working with seniors?
Victim Services	How do you feel about the police department as an enforcement authority?
	Have you ever been arrested?
	A woman calls who has just been assaulted by her husband for the fifth time. She is alone with her three children and strongly wants charges against him dropped. How would you handle the situation?
Community Buddy Program	What do you know about the disability?
	Have you been in situations, work or personal, where you were responsible for the care of another person? Where and in what capacity?
Community Buddy	Program Many children with this disability learn to use the toilet later than typical children, would you feel comfortable assisting a child in the washroom?
	Have you been in a situation where you observed someone with a disability talking loudly and behaving in a manner that did not suit the situation? If yes, what was your reaction at the time? If no, what do you think your reaction would be?
	Have you observed a person with self-injurious behaviours? How does this behaviour make you feel?
Hospice	How would you handle a medical crisis?
	How comfortable would you feel if you had to enforce the house rules?
Theatre	Can you see in the dark?

More questions	How do you separate boundary issues between being a professional and a volunteer?
	Why are previous employers/volunteer assignments not included as references?
	What are your expectations of volunteering and how will it fit into your life?
	Have you received services from this organization in the past 6 months?
	Why do you want to volunteer?
	Volunteers are not permitted to smoke while on shift. Will this be a problem for you?
	Do you have any health/physical concerns that you feel would affect your ability to volunteer in the Children's Centre?
	Have you had any personal life experiences with: cancer/mental illness/poverty?
	What would you do in the situation where....?

(Gathered by Charlene Robson during "Hard Interview Question" Workshops, 1999)

These are only a minuscule sample of the hundreds of potential questions being asked around the world. Asking colleagues for their questions is also be a valuable source for new interview questions.