Tips for Developing Interview Questions

Interview questions should be developed well before the interview. Questions should elicit the information necessary for you to make a clear judgment as to the volunteer's suitability. Questions that elicit “yes” or “no” answers should be avoided. Open-ended or behavior-based questions will garner the most information from which to evaluate the applicant.

Open-ended Questions
Open-ended questions that require more than a “yes or no” response will provide important information about the applicant. The interviewer should carefully listen to the answers. The applicant's philosophy will often emerge during this portion of the interview. By hearing about past experiences, you can often gain insight into the motivation and/or attitudes this individual holds. This does not mean you should automatically reject someone if they have been involved with a program whose philosophy is in conflict with your organization's, but it might indicate that this person needs further investigation to determine his or her ability to function successfully in the program.

Good open-ended questions might include:
- Describe your previous volunteer experience?
- What job have you had that you enjoyed the most?
- What do you hope to gain from this volunteer experience?
- What kind of work environment do you like?

Behavior-based Questions
Behavior-based questions are questions that present to the potential volunteer a situation they may have dealt with in the past or a hypothetical one that they may have to deal with in this volunteer position.

Examples of behavior-based questions:
- Tell me about an experience where you had to deal with an irate client.
- Tell me about a time that you had to complete a job with short deadline.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work with people vastly different from yourself.

Ask structured questions that will elicit information about personal values and motivation. These are similar to questions you may have asked on the volunteer application, but a personal interview will give the applicant a chance to elaborate on his or her feelings. The purpose of this portion of the interview is to screen
for any biases or strongly held values that may hinder objectivity. You are looking for red flags.

Make sure the applicant understands what your organization is and what the volunteer does -- and does not do. The applicant must understand the requirements of the job, so a review of the position description is often an effective way to begin the interview. If the applicant seems confused about specific requirements, they should be clarified immediately.