Selecting the Volunteer

The Selection Process

You are not always going to find the perfect, experienced, highly-qualified candidate. You should rank potential candidates based on how well they meet the required qualifications. Additional training may be an option. Be flexible, but try to select the best person for the job.

Many inappropriate volunteers will screen themselves out once they understand the role and the commitment required. The self-selection process is an important step in volunteer screening. Applicants should not feel like they have failed if they decide to drop out in the process. Assure them from the beginning that it's okay to drop out if they decide they do not want the job. Think of other ways to channel the applicant's interest -- perhaps helping with the newsletter or a fundraising event.

The placement of a volunteer must be based on the information gathered in the screening process. It must be done with the consensus of both the volunteer and the position supervisor. Summarize so that both parties understand any decisions and actions that have been agreed upon. Finally, the decision must be made with the understanding that both the volunteer and the supervisor can change their minds if the placement is not working out.

It is suggested that you consider contracting with your volunteers. This simply means creating a written agreement between the agency and the volunteer which defines what both parties are committing to for the volunteer job. The job description can serve as a contract. It should include both the volunteer's and the agency's responsibilities in the volunteer relationship. A contract is an excellent reference point for settling disagreements, and it also forms a basis for evaluation. While it is not a legal document, it should be respected as a good faith effort by both parties.

The final step is to send an official letter offering the candidate the position and outlining the terms and conditions of volunteering. Don't fail to let the applicant know the results of his or her evaluation. If the person is turned down, notify the applicant by letter or phone. Although the applicant deserves the courtesy of follow-up, be careful when you explain the reasons why he or she was turned down. Check with an attorney to see what information you can and cannot reveal.
Saying "No"

One of the most important abilities the program director or volunteer coordinator must have is the ability to say "no." As hard as it may be, turning down an applicant is much better than risking harm to the program or its recipients. You must also consider your liability risks, and the reputation of your program in the community.

Although your planning committee has created very specific criteria for accepting volunteers, sometimes the determination may depend on your "gut feeling." An applicant might meet all written qualifications, and give appropriate answers in the interview; however if you do not feel right about accepting the person, it is best to go with your intuition.

When an applicant is evaluated as not being suitable for a position, it does not necessarily mean he or she cannot be involved in the program. Many potential volunteers may find they are more suited for other functions in the organization. Someone who is not an appropriate volunteer for teaching classes might make an excellent gift shop volunteer. An applicant who may not be right for advocacy in court might be able to edit your newsletter. Think of alternatives for applicants who do not meet the criteria for the particular position; support can come in many forms.