



**Volunteer**  
**Toronto**

# **Volunteer Selection**

## **Resource Guide & Workbook**

Compiled by the Engaging Organizations Department

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## Using this Resource Guide & Workbook

The Volunteer Selection resource guide & workbook has been compiled by Volunteer Toronto to help community groups, non-profits and charitable organizations with the basic tools to effectively screen, interview and select volunteers.

Each resource has been selected to give you an idea of the straightforward needs of each step of the process. It is important to remember that these are guidelines informed by best practices; you can adapt them to your situation as needed.

## Volunteer Selection

Your organization has planned and prepared for volunteers becoming part of your programs and projects. You've created position descriptions and posted for recruitment. You now have volunteer applicants and it's time to begin the selection process! Whether you're new to interview and selection or looking for extra tips and pointers, learning more about the specialized aspects of **Volunteer Selection** is always helpful.

This workbook will start with the interview process and ensuring you are properly prepared to being volunteer interviews. Additionally, there are a number of resources to help you with the decision making process – sometimes the most difficult part of volunteer selection. There are two main sections for this workbook:

### Interviewing Volunteers

- Volunteer Selection Checklist *Page 2*
- Behaviourally-based Interviewing *Page 4*
- Interview Question Ideas *Page 4*
- What are you looking for Worksheet *Page 5*
- Interview Record Worksheet *Page 7*

### Making Decisions

- Screening Based on Risk Analysis *Page 15*
- Clarifying Responses Technique *Page 16*
- Reference Check Form *Page 17*
- How to Say No *Page 18*



**YOUR MISSION**  
Whenever your organization is engaging volunteers, it's important to remember your organization's mission. It's your goal as a volunteer coordinator, manager, or supervisor to ensure that your volunteers contribute to the mission and goals of your organization in whatever role or capacity they hold. This will make it easier to justify further volunteer involvement and recruitment and to increase their impact across your organization.

## Planning, Recruiting & Selecting Checklist

This handy checklist will help you follow all the right steps covered in this workbook and get you engaging with volunteers quickly and efficiently. Following all the steps that are relevant to your selection process will help you make sure that you're choosing the best volunteers for your program.

Before	
	Ensure that the position description is current and complete
	Determine extent of commitment required
	Determine what knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities will be assessed in the interview
	Determine how you will evaluate the potential volunteer's knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities
	Write questions, create scales, and describe desirable answers
	Prepare and pre-test skill tests
	Determine who will be interviewing and how
	Determine if targeted recruitment is necessary & establish where and how to reach this population
	Develop recruitment message that clearly states requirements of the positions
	Explore option of having open information sessions to recruit and inform potential volunteers
	Clearly state that volunteer engagement in the agency is based on the successful completion of the selection process
	Post position on Volunteer Toronto's online volunteer database, on your organization's website, or in other locations where potential volunteers will see it



### PLANNING IS KEY!

By planning out the recruitment and selection process for your volunteers, you can also keep track of important timelines related to volunteer involvement. If you need a volunteer sooner rather than later, then plan for the time needed to check references or meet other requirements. Make your own planning, recruiting & selecting checklist to meet the needs of your volunteer program and the specific roles you are recruiting for.

### Initial & In-Depth Interviewing

	Respond to initial enquiries
	Pre-screen based on initial conversations (email, telephone) and bona fide requirements
	Conduct interview(s); assess knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities
	Rate fit between position and potential volunteer
Inform potential volunteer of results: If appropriate make a <i>conditional offer</i>	
	Check references
	Check credentials
	Get police reference check, driving record or medical examinations if appropriate to position requirements
	Provide information on probation period
If not, inform the potential volunteer of other options if appropriate and provide feedback if requested	

### Complete critical paper trail

	Ensure that a file (paper/electronic) is created with application or information form
	Include all appropriate release forms related to position description, including: police checks, medical information, confidentiality forms, volunteer policy agreements, reference results, etc.

### Orientation & Probation

	Inform about specifics around probation (how long, what will be assessed & how)
	Provide ongoing feedback & supervision
	Get police reference check, driving record or medical exams if appropriate to position
	Document results
	Confirm end of probation

## ORIENTATION & PROBATION

Introductory orientation is an important aspect of volunteer engagement, and will be covered in further detail in the **Orientation & Training workbook**. Probation is a period of time to allow for adjustment/accommodation and ensure the volunteer is the right fit. The length of the probation period is at the discretion of your organization.





## Behaviourally-Based Interviewing

### Rationale

This approach to conducting an interview is based on the premise that the way the person has responded in the past will help predict how they will respond in similar circumstances in the future.

### Using this interview technique effectively

- For this to be a useful approach, the interviewer needs to first identify the knowledge, skills, behaviour or 'competencies' necessary for success in the position.
- In discussion about a past experience where the situation and task were comparable, the interviewer asks the applicant to describe the action taken and the result of that action.
- To maximize the effectiveness of this approach as a predictor of future success, the interviewer then asks the applicant about any 'lessons learned' or how they might handle a similar situation differently in the future.
- This takes the behavioural interview to the next logical step by developing questions that take a look at future performance.

## What to Ask During an Interview

Interviewing potential volunteers can be a valuable step when trying to find the right person for a volunteer role. When deciding which questions to ask during your interviews, there are a few tips you can keep in mind:

- Focus on the skills and traits necessary for the position.
- Focus on past experience and behaviour.
- Only ask questions relevant to the position.
- Be consistent; ask candidates the same questions.
- Ask mainly open-ended questions.

The questions you choose to ask should always depend on the requirements of the specific volunteer role, but here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Tell me about a time when you had to solve a problem creatively. How did you decide what to do?
- Can you give me an example of a time when you successfully resolved a conflict?
- Why do you want to volunteer in this role?
- Describe a time when you had to work as part of a team. What did you do to contribute to the team's work?

### Determining What You're Looking For

Using this tool, you'll be able to identify the skills, attitude and knowledge you're seeking in a volunteer candidate. On this page, you'll find an example already filled out. Look for red flags that might cause an issue for this candidate. On the next page is a blank worksheet you can use when interviewing candidates.

#### SAMPLE POSITION: HOST PROGRAM VOLUNTEER

	What am I looking for?	Basic	Good	Excellent	What questions/ tests might help me discover this?
<b>Skill</b>	<i>Ability to speak French</i>	Can understand words and meaning of questions, spoken slowly with one repetition if necessary. Can understand and ask basic questions on the phone in French. Pronunciation is understandable.	Understands words and meanings of questions with no repetition and mostly correct grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Can answer questions with little time for premeditation.	Speaks French fluently. Can speak very comfortably on the phone. Vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and written French are correct.	Pourquoi désirez-vous devenir bénévole? Où avez-vous entendu parler de notre programme? Pourquoi désirez-vous être bénévole avec des personnes nouvellement-arrivées?
<b>Attitude</b>	<i>Patience</i>	Can cite a situation, not related to newcomers, demonstrating patience while offering assistance. Indicates importance of listening to point of view of the other.	Understands culture differences and how these affect basic understanding of certain situations.	Has a 2+ years of experience with this specific type interaction. Mentions using different words or examples to facilitate understanding.	Lead question: Describe a situation where you had to demonstrate patience, particularly in a situation with a person who was a newcomer? Probe: How were you trying to help? What did you do? What were the results?
<b>Knowledge</b>	<i>Knowledgeable about activities &amp; services in Toronto, particularly those of interest to newcomers</i>	Capable and willing to research information (can name three sources of information and how to access these). Is knowledgeable about and can get around easily with the TTC.	Enhanced knowledge of low cost leisure activities in Toronto (can name 5). Good knowledge of low cost stores and services in Toronto and where to get specialty foods.	Excellent knowledge of free activities in Toronto (can name more than 5). Excellent knowledge of service agencies geared to newcomers. Has positive previous experience helping newcomers to learn about Toronto.	What type of activities do could you do with a newcomer that would be low-cost and interesting? How would you go about finding activities that you could do together?

**RED FLAGS** - Greater desire to learn French than to help newcomers

- Unwilling to make 6-month commitment

POSITION: \_\_\_\_\_

	What am I looking for?	Basic	Good	Excellent	What questions/ tests might help me discover this?
Skill					
Attitude					
Knowledge					

RED FLAGS



## Example Interview Record for Volunteer Placement

Candidate Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Potential Position: Gallery Tour Leader

Interviewed By: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Score \_\_\_\_ divided by 35 points = \_\_\_\_%      **Recommended:**    Yes            No

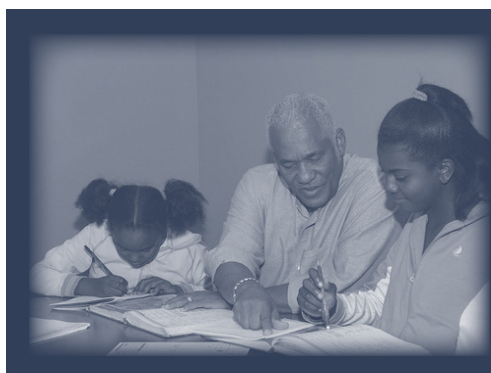
### Rating Scale - Sections 2 through 8

5	Outstanding	Multiple examples of a high level of competence in this area. Most criteria (80%) observed in full with no significant omissions.
4	Good	Clear unambiguous evidence of competence. Many criteria (60%) observed in full and others partially.
3	Developmental	Some positive evidence, but needs further development. Some criteria (40%) were fully or partially observed, but others were omitted.
1-2	Poor	A few, partially achieved criteria (20%) were observed, but many were absent.
0		The interview produced no opportunity to observe this competency.

What to look for	Question	Notes on response
<p><i>Section 1</i></p> <p><b>Related Experience/ Education/Training</b></p> <p>(No Score)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication skills</li> <li>• Connections to Art</li> <li>• Positive attitude</li> <li>• Maturity</li> <li>• Relevant education/ experience</li> <li>• Leadership potential</li> </ul>	<p>Why are you interested in volunteering with our gallery?</p> <p>Tell me about past experiences (work, volunteer, school) that bring you to a volunteer placement at our gallery.</p> <p>If applicable, tell me about your involvement with any clubs or associations that relate to the position.</p> <p>Why do you think art galleries are important?</p>	<p>I'm retired, so I have time and I am interested in art.</p> <p>I was a High School English teacher. I enjoy teaching.</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>Art galleries help educate the public about the history of art and culture.</p>

What to look for	Question	Notes on response
<p><i>Section 2</i></p> <p><b>Public Service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying needs and doing whatever is necessary to fulfill that need.</li> <li>Listen for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helpful</li> <li>Recognizes a need</li> <li>Courteous</li> <li>Followed through</li> </ul> </li> <li>Thinks about different cultural interpretations.</li> </ul>	<p>Volunteers at our gallery represent a public institution.</p> <p>What do you feel you would need in order to be a good representative of the gallery?</p> <p>Tell me about the most difficult customer service experience that you have had to deal with (perhaps an upset customer) and what the outcome was.</p> <p>Toronto is one of the most multicultural cities in the world.</p> <p>In your role as a volunteer, how would you make sure that visitors of all cultures enjoy their experience?</p>	<p>Well-dressed</p> <p>Well-mannered</p> <p>Knowledgeable about what is in the gallery</p> <p>That would be the parents of my students, who may not be happy with my evaluation of their child's progress. I would help them see how things could improve.</p> <p>I would treat everyone with equal respect.</p>
Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5		
<p><i>Section 3</i></p> <p><b>Teamwork</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working together</li> <li>Listen for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying roles – led or followed?</li> <li>Taking new responsibilities</li> <li>Acknowledge benefits – information sharing, networking, feedback</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>The definition of a team is, “A group of people working together towards a common goal.” Tell me about an experience you’ve had working with a team.</p> <p>Was it satisfying – why or why not?</p> <p>What role did you play?</p> <p>Which do you prefer: working on your own or working in a group?</p> <p>Have you ever had problems with a superior, at work or elsewhere, or had to associate with someone you find incompatible? How did you resolve any conflict?</p>	<p>I was on a team to evaluate part of our curriculum for the Board of Education.</p> <p>It wasn't. The others didn't listen to my suggestions and I didn't agree with the findings.</p> <p>I prefer working on my own.</p> <p>Not everyone in our English Department was my cup of tea, so I avoided conflict in our staff meetings and gave my attention to the needs of my students.</p>
Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5		

What to look for	Question	Notes on response
<p><i>Section 4</i></p> <p><b>Commitment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reason for goal</li> <li>Did they choose something attainable?</li> <li>Did they persevere to achieve it?</li> <li>Maintained motivation?</li> <li>Flexibility</li> <li>Indicates an interest in keeping current on area of volunteering or product</li> </ul>	<p>How do you determine success?</p> <p>Give me one example of a successful accomplishment for you.</p> <p>What has given you the most satisfaction in a work or volunteer setting? What sort of activity do you dislike?</p>	<p>Setting a goal and reaching it. Instructing my students about how to study more effectively and seeing their marks improve.</p> <p>I enjoy teaching.</p> <p>I do not enjoy committee meetings</p>
Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5		
<p><i>Section 5</i></p> <p><b>Self-Control/Stress Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staying calm</li> <li>Trying again</li> <li>Understanding others' points of view</li> <li>Stating point in different ways</li> </ul>	<p>In every life there are moments of stress – perhaps the result of a bad situation caused by a colleague, client or friend, a physical or technical problem. Can you give an example of a stressful moment for you and how you handled it, or how you wish you'd handled it?</p>	<p>I received word that my cousin's husband was badly hurt in a car accident. I called my cousin to offer my support and asked what I could do to help.</p>
Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5		



## STANDARDIZED INTERVIEW RECORDS

By standardizing questions, competencies and response tracking for each interview of the same role, you are giving all candidates an equal opportunity to compete for the role based solely on their ability to fulfill the duties of the position.

What to look for	Question	Notes on response
<p><i>Section 6</i></p> <p><b>Decision Making/Problem Solving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeks clarification</li> <li>• Seeks permission from supervisor</li> <li>• Base decisions on past experience</li> <li>• Asks when doesn't know the answer</li> <li>• Polite refusal – with reason</li> <li>• Ability to act independently</li> <li>• Problem solve the issue</li> </ul>	<p>As a volunteer, either working with the public or on your own, you may encounter a question or a situation that you are unsure about. How would you deal with this?</p> <p>What if a supervisor were unavailable?</p>	<p>I would make sure that I knew the correct procedures before starting.</p> <p>In the case of something totally unexpected, if I could not refer them to someone else for the answer, I would take the responsibility to make a decision myself based on the information that I had.</p>
Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5		
<p><i>Section 7</i></p> <p><b>Learning/Training/Computer ability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical limitation</li> <li>• Computer skills</li> <li>• Ability to learn/teach</li> </ul>	<p>Do you have basic computer skills?</p> <p>Tell me about the last time you were involved in a training session? What was the topic and what did you get out of it? Have you ever done a presentation?</p> <p>If so, where, to whom and what?</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>A few years ago – it was a summer course to improve my computer skills.</p> <p>As a retired teacher, I've done many presentations.</p>
Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5		
<p><i>Section 8</i></p> <p><b>Interpersonal Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication – initiates conversation, asks questions, speaks clearly</li> <li>• Demonstrates good listening</li> <li>• Respectful – aware of diversity</li> </ul>	<p>No questions – overall impression</p>	
Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5		

## Interview Record for Volunteer Placement

Candidate Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Potential Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewed By: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Score \_\_\_\_ divided by 35 points = \_\_\_\_%      **Recommended:**    Yes            No

### Rating Scale - Sections 2 through 8

5	Outstanding	Multiple examples of a high level of competence in this area. Most criteria (80%) observed in full with no significant omissions.
4	Good	Clear unambiguous evidence of competence. Many criteria (60%) observed in full and others partially.
3	Developmental	Some positive evidence, but needs further development. Some criteria (40%) were fully or partially observed, but others were omitted.
1-2	Poor	A few, partially achieved criteria (20%) were observed, but many were absent.
0		The interview produced no opportunity to observe this competency.

What to look for	Question	Notes on response
<p><i>Section 1</i></p> <p><b>Related Experience/ Education/Training</b></p> <p>(No Score)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>List related experience, education or training</li> </ul>	<p>General questions to learn about related experience, education or training.</p>	<p>Record participant answers.</p>



What to look for	Question	Notes on response
<p><i>Section 2</i></p> <p><b>Competency 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify components of the competency, and what to look for during the interview.</li> </ul>	<p>Questions to learn about the competency.</p>	<p>Record participant answers</p>
<p>Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5</p>		
<p><i>Section 3</i></p> <p><b>Competency 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify components of the competency, and what to look for during the interview.</li> </ul>	<p>Questions to learn about the competency.</p>	<p>Record participant answers</p>
<p>Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5</p>		

What to look for	Question	Notes on response
<p><i>Section 4</i></p> <p><b>Competency 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify components of the competency, and what to look for during the interview.</li> </ul>	<p>Questions to learn about the competency.</p>	<p>Record participant answers</p>
<p>Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5</p>		
<p><i>Section 5</i></p> <p><b>Competency 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify components of the competency, and what to look for during the interview.</li> </ul>	<p>Questions to learn about the competency.</p>	<p>Record participant answers</p>
<p>Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5</p>		

What to look for	Question	Notes on response
<p><i>Section 6</i></p> <p><b>Competency 5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify components of the competency, and what to look for during the interview.</li> </ul>	<p>Questions to learn about the competency.</p>	<p>Record participant answers</p>
<p>Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5</p>		
<p><i>Section 7</i></p> <p><b>Competency 6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify components of the competency, and what to look for during the interview.</li> </ul>	<p>Questions to learn about the competency.</p>	<p>Record participant answers</p>
<p>Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5</p>		
<p><i>Section 8</i></p> <p><b>Competency 7</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify components of the competency, and what to look for during the interview.</li> </ul>	<p>Questions to learn about the competency.</p>	<p>Record participant answers</p>
<p>Complete after interview: <b>Overall Rating</b> 1 2 3 4 5</p>		

## Screening Based on Risk Analysis

In order to help you manage the risks of volunteer selection, you can screen based on the position itself and the elements of the role. Use this chart to help you determine the foreseeable risks and screening steps you can take when selecting volunteers to avoid those risks.

**Position title:**

**Duties/purpose of the position:**

Elements of the Position	Foreseeable Risks	Screening Steps
<i>Client</i>		
<i>Role</i>		
<i>Activity</i>		
<i>Location</i>		
<i>Supervision</i>		
<i>Other details</i>		

## Clarifying Responses - STAR Technique

During the interview, you may need to use some strategies to clarify answers or get more information. For example, you may want to try to include some reflective questions. In other words, try to paraphrase what the candidate has told you to make sure that you understood, or to show them that you're paying attention to what they say. To make sure that you get all of the relevant information about an example of past behaviour, you can use the STAR technique.

### S - Situation

Ask the candidate a situation in which they used one of the required competencies in the past.

### T - Task

Ask probing questions to get more information - what tasks did the candidate complete?

### A - Action

What actions were taken to address the problem or situation?

### R - Result

What were the results of these actions, how did the candidate learn from this situation and result?

### S - Situation

### T - Task

### A - Action

### R - Result



## Reference Checks

Checking references can be a useful step when screening volunteer applicants. If you're going to be contacting references by phone, having a reference check form can help you to be consistent between candidates and to make sure that you don't miss any important questions. The questions you ask should always relate to the specific volunteer role and the requirements for the position, but below are some sample questions to get you started on the right track.

### Sample Reference Check Form

Applicant name:

Position applied for:

Reference name:

Relationship with applicant (e.g., manager, teacher, etc.):

Phone number:

Date contacted:

#### *Confirmation of basic information:*

What is your relationship with [Applicant]?

How long have you known [Applicant]?

#### *Observations of work and behaviour:*

In your experience, how well does [Applicant] work in a team?

What kind of supervision does [Applicant] need? Do they work fairly independently, or do they need a lot of support?

How does [Applicant] handle conflict?

How well does [Applicant] work in a stressful situation?

What are the areas where [Applicant] could use improvement?

#### *Fit for the position:*

Briefly explain the position, the responsibilities, and the necessary qualifications.

Do you believe [Applicant] would be a good fit for this position?

### How to Say “No”

It can be tempting, as a manager of volunteers, to accept every applicant who wants to volunteer with your organization. However, it's important that each new volunteer is a good fit for the position, and for the organization. Sometimes, you have to say “no.”

#### Before contacting the applicant:

- Review the applicant's record: application form, interview notes, reference check form, etc.
- Identify the area(s) where the level of competence does not reach the standard needed.

#### Saying “no” and re-directing the applicant:

- Begin with a respectful approach, thanking them for their time and for their interest in volunteering for your organization.
- Indicate that a high degree of competence in all aspects of the position's requirements is the best predictor of a good fit for the volunteer role.
- Make an objective statement about a competency which doesn't meet the standard required for the position.
- Mention that when an individual's competencies are not a good match for the position, the volunteer experience will not be satisfying.
- Alternative suggestion(s) could include:
  - Re-apply when the competency has improved.
  - Accept a different position within the organization that is a better fit.
  - Contact similar organizations that may be looking for volunteers.
  - Visit Volunteer Toronto's web site to find a position that would suit their interests and skills.



### USING REFERENCES

References are a tricky aspect of any hiring process. It's always best practice to conduct a reference check only if you have made or come close to a decision on the candidate you are going to hire for the position. This way you will not waste time contacting numerous references for volunteers you won't hire.

# Volunteer Toronto

## Volunteer Selection Resource Guide & Workbook

### Next Steps

After selecting volunteers, your next steps are:

- Training, orienting and preparing volunteers
- Managing, supporting and evaluating volunteers
- Retaining, recognizing and motivating volunteers

To continue your volunteer journey, there are a number of other workbooks created by Volunteer Toronto to assist every step of the way:

- **Planning for Volunteer Involvement** – preparing your organization and your program for volunteers
- **Recruiting Volunteers** – how to write and post role descriptions, how to attract specific audiences
- **Orientation & Training** – keeping volunteers informed about the organization, the volunteer program, and how to successfully fulfill their role
- **Performance Management** – coaching, supporting and evaluating for success
- **Volunteer Retention** – recognizing and motivating volunteers, planning for volunteer succession
- **Program Evaluation** – understanding and improving your program's outcomes and impact

This Resource Guide & Workbook has been compiled by the Engaging Organizations Department of Volunteer Toronto, Copyright 2015