

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

**How to Succeed With Volunteers-In-Parks**  
60-Minute Module Series



# INTERVIEWING Training Guide

**National Park Service  
Volunteers-In-Parks Program**



# HOW TO SUCCEED WITH VOLUNTEERS-IN-PARKS

## 60-Minute Module Series

Program Preparation  
Program Planning  
Motivation  
Needs Assessment  
Designing Jobs  
Recruitment  
Interviewing  
Orientation  
Training  
Safety Management  
Supervision  
Delegation  
Performance Reviews  
Recognition

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>Training Guide</b>	<b>Page</b>
	Introduction . . . . .	I
	Purpose and Learning Objectives. . . . .	2
	General Notes to Trainer . . . . .	3
	Workshop Outline . . . . .	4
	Trainer's Notes, with Keys to Transparencies, Handouts, Timing . . . . .	5
	Suggestions for Expanded Activities . . . . .	I3
	Resources . . . . .	I4
<b>II.</b>	<b>Transparencies</b> . . . . .	<b>T</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>Handouts</b> . . . . .	<b>H</b>

# INTRODUCTION

Interviewing candidates for a volunteer position is imperative to ensure that the organization is selecting the most qualified person. A key outcome of conducting an interview is the mutual acquaintance of the volunteer applicant and the prospective volunteer supervisor. Thus, if a prospective volunteer first receives a screening interview from the Park Volunteer Program Manager, it can/should be followed by an interview with the person who will eventually serve as the volunteer's supervisor.

The interviewer guides a discussion to determine if there is a good match between the interests and needs of the park and the volunteer. This often involves some mutual negotiations so that both parties are winners. Without this significant screening step, many misplaced or inappropriate volunteers begin to work for parks, and both the volunteer and the park staff become dissatisfied. When the wrong person is in the volunteer job, the efforts of volunteer supervision are often distracted to the inevitable problems of poor performance, volunteer dissatisfaction, staff complaints, etc.

Because the National Park Service needs to be concerned about risk management related to volunteers, effective interviewing and screening are key to a well run volunteer program. When asking staff and volunteers to interview other prospective volunteers, however, we must provide training in effective interviewing. This module provides introductory training in this significant skill.

# PURPOSE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The **Purposes** of this module are to examine the need for interviewing volunteers and to share the basic processes and skills necessary to do it effectively.

## Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

1. Discuss the importance and purposes of having interviews with prospective volunteers.
2. Identify the four key steps in the interview process.
3. Design relevant interview questions and understand the essential role of listening during the process.

# GENERAL NOTES TO TRAINER

1. This workshop is in a suggested format. Feel free, however, to personalize it with your own stories. Also, phrase questions and activities in a manner most attuned to your participants.
2. Although the focus of this module is interviewing volunteers, the skill is a generic one which may have broader applicability to the participants.
3. Most people have had many experiences where they have been poorly interviewed. Having participants recall personal experiences of being interviewed effectively will immediately begin to reinforce the art and skills involved.
4. It is important to reiterate that this is a cursory overview of the skill of interviewing. Practice will be necessary to develop the skill. We especially recommend role playing as part of the training for interviewing.
5. Because there are three concepts to cover, presentations and facilitation must be crisp and timed. If participants want more information, use this as an opportunity to ask for future additional training time on the topic.

# WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Transparency Handout	Section	Method of Presentation	Time
T-1 T-2 T-3	H-1 <b>Introduction</b> Introductory Activity and Comments Learning Objectives Key Concepts	Activity/Presentation Lecture	10 minutes
T-3 T-4	H-1 H-2 <b>Concept 1</b> Interviewing is an opportunity	Presentation/Discussion	5 minutes
T-3 T-5 T-6 T-7 T-8	H-1 H-3 <b>Concept 2</b> Stages in interviewing	Presentation Facilitated Discussion	20 minutes
T-3 T-9 T-10	H-1 H-4 H-5 H-6 <b>Concept 3</b> Skills in interviewing	Presentation Activity	20 minutes
T-3	H-1 <b>Summary/Wrap - Up/ Evaluation</b>	Summary Remarks	5 minutes

**TOTAL TIME: 60 minutes**

# TRAINER'S NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

Time: 10 minutes

### T-1: Interviewing Activity

#### Opening Exercise

To get the participants thinking about good interviewing skills, start with a light-hearted role play to demonstrate how **not** to conduct an interview.

#### Some ideas:

Interviewer can be very nice and friendly, but at the same time forgets about appointment, doesn't remember person's name, hasn't reviewed application beforehand, doesn't apologize, hasn't set aside time or place, asks closed questions, fails to gather useful information relating to applicant's skills, interests, time availability, doesn't listen, etc. End interview after 5 minutes with a general statement like "I'm sure you'll be fine." Ask interviewee to start next week and refer to him/her to someone else to contact when they arrive.

#### Ask participants to share:

What were the good/bad skills and qualities of this interviewer?

You may wish to record responses or have a recorder write them on a flip chart.

**Remember**, an interview is a conversation with a purpose. We will be talking about purpose and about how to get the most out of that conversation.

#### Share learning objectives of workshop

This training is built on **three Key Concepts**.

(Show transparency with all concepts on it. Indicate that during the workshop each concept will be examined together with relevant material.)

### T-2: Learning Objectives

### T-3: Key Concepts

### H-1: Key Concepts



## CONCEPT 1

Time: 5 minutes

Interviewing is an opportunity to determine if the volunteer is appropriate for an identified volunteer position in the park, as well as a chance to screen for evidence of risk.

### T-3: Key Concepts

### H-1: Key Concepts

### H-2: Interviewing

### T-4: Importance of Screening

#### Presentation:

1. Paraphrase: It is important to understand that during an interview, there is **mutual screening** (i.e., the agency is discovering if they have the right person and the volunteer is evaluating whether his/her desires, needs and skills can be met in this volunteer opportunity). No longer can we as agency people say, “Here are our needs — can you fill them???” The process, if done well, is one of negotiation so that both are winners.

2. Ask participants to mention (or you may present) other reasons that screening through interviewing is important to the organization.

Touch on screening for potential risk factors relating to:

- Paid staff and volunteer morale
- Park visitors
- Park resources
- Agency reputation

## CONCEPT 2

**Time: 20 minutes**

The key steps in the interview process are preparation, opening, body and closing.

### T-3: Key Concepts

### H-1: Key Concepts

### T-5: Preparation

### H-3: Stages in the Interview Process

### T-6: Opening

### T-7: Body of Interview

#### 1. Preparation

Ask participants what they do to prepare for an interview.

Add the following information if not mentioned and if pertinent to your situation:

- Review all information about the applicant.
- Review pertinent information on the job(s).
- Formulate or use prepared questions to bring out desired information to screen for suitability for the job(s).
- Schedule adequate time and arrange for a private, comfortable place to do the interview.
- Cast aside all distractions!

#### 2. Opening

Ask participants to suggest essential elements of the opening.

Add the following if not mentioned:

- Welcome applicant, introduce self.
- Put applicant at ease, establish rapport.
- Clarify purpose of interview (“to determine if we have a match”).
- Establish appropriate time frame for interview.

#### 3. Body of Interview

Share three basic sections of an interview:

(1) Interviewer provides general information on program, agency, group, etc., if the volunteer is unfamiliar with it.

## T-8: Closing

(2) Applicant shares information about himself/herself in response to thoughtful questioning. Explore such things as may be appropriate:

- skills
- interests
- experience
- time availability
- work or leadership style
- motivation for wanting this job

(3) Interviewer shares information on appropriate volunteer jobs.

### 4. Closing

Share key elements of the close of an interview:

(1) Review and summarize interview

(2) Discuss next steps:

- If mutual acceptance - discuss how volunteer can become active.
- If no match - encourage honest sharing / refer person to other agencies utilizing volunteers.

(3) Express appreciation for his/her time

#### Exercise:

Have participants pair off and exchange the volunteer applications they each filled out previously. Assign one person to conduct the interview, using the application filled out by the other person. Use the volunteer job description developed in a previous exercise as an example of one job that is currently available. Spend no more than 10 minutes conducting the interview, being sure to work through all four of the key interview steps. Ask someone with little prior interviewing experience to describe what went wrong/right with their interview.

## CONCEPT 3

Time: 20 minutes

Two essential skills in interviewing are asking good questions and using reflective listening.

### T-3: Key Concepts

### H-1: Key Concepts

### T-9: Questioning Skills

### H-4: Critical Skills in Interviewing

### H-5: Common Interviewing Mistakes

### H-6: What Can We Ask?

### T-10: Listening Skills

Discuss and lead activities regarding the two key skills:

#### 1. Asking questions

- The most important skill is learning to word questions in a way that will elicit the information you need to make decisions as to the suitability of a prospective volunteer.
- It is best to use open-ended questions (those not answered by one or two words) to get expanded information.

#### Activity/Example to support learning:

Ask participants, “If you want to ascertain whether the person you are interviewing can work in a busy, noisy office, how would you phrase the question?” (Give participants a minute to suggest a question and have a few share their suggestions.)

Possible participant response: “Describe an ideal work setting which best suits your working style.” If the prospective volunteer answers, “Alone in a quiet room,” you know you don’t have a match!

#### Designing interview questions

Ask participants to suggest several key questions to elicit information needed to determine a candidate’s suitability for a specific job. **Discuss their suggestions.**

#### 2. Listening

Review basic principles of good listening. You may wish to start the discussion by asking participants why it is so difficult to listen. (Answers: you are preparing to respond, distracted, evaluating them or their opinions, not listening for understanding, etc.)

**Exercise:**

Now have the other person conduct a 10-minute interview, using the application filled out by his/her partner. Also use the volunteer job description previously developed as an example of a job currently available. Conduct the interview, taking care to follow the four basic steps as well as to practice the skills of asking good questions and listening.

## SUMMARY/WRAP-UP/EVALUATION

**Time: 2 minutes**

**T-3: Key Concepts**

**H-1: Key Concepts**

**Paraphrase:**

Nothing you do will impact the volunteer program more positively than effective interviewing and screening. When the right people are in the right jobs, the role of volunteer supervisor is a pleasure!

**END 60-MINUTE TRAINING**

# SUGGESTIONS FOR EXPANDED ACTIVITIES

1. Deal with the policies and practices of turning down volunteer applicants and further discuss techniques for saying “No” to a volunteer applicant you are interviewing.
2. Spend more time on designing questions for specific jobs .
3. Allow more time to discuss problem situations that are common in interview situations with your volunteer applicants.
4. End the session with opportunities for people to role play the interview of a volunteer. If the group is very inexperienced, you might wish to demonstrate a brief interview with one of your workshop participants.
5. Allow more time to discuss qualities of good interviewers. There is a great deal of learning potential in this activity.
6. Do a reflective listening activity whereby you get participants into pairs and have one person talk on a designated topic (e.g., how we can improve our visitor services, my opinion on NPS budget priorities) and the other person listens for understanding. The listeners reflect back to the speakers what they understood the speakers to be saying. The speakers give feedback to the listeners as to the accuracy of their summaries. Reverse roles. After the exercise, allow several participants to share what they learned in the experience.

# RESOURCES

1. Graff, Linda L. *Beyond Police Checks: The Definitive Volunteer & Employee Guidebook*, Graff and Associates, 1999. Available from [www.energizeinc.com](http://www.energizeinc.com), [www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org), or [www.bettystallings.com](http://www.bettystallings.com).
2. McCurley, Steve and Rick Lynch. *Volunteer Management: Mobilizing All the Resources in the Community*, Heritage Arts Publishing, 1996. Chapter 6, "Screening and Interviewing" Available from [www.energizeinc.com](http://www.energizeinc.com) or [www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org)
3. Maddux, Robert. *Quality Interviewing*. Crisp Publications, Inc., 95 First Street, Los Altos, Ca. 94022.
4. National Collaboration for Youth, Washington, D.C. 1997. *Screening Volunteers to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse: A Community Guide for Youth Organizations*, 1997. **Reprints available from:** National Collaboration for Youth, 1319 F St., NW; Suite 601, Washington, DC 20004. 202 -347-2080 [www.nassembly.org/](http://www.nassembly.org/)

Other resource that may be available

5. MacDuff, Nancy. *Volunteer Recruiting and Retention: A Marketing Approach*, Points of Light Institute.
6. McCurley, Steve and Sue Vineyard. *101 Ideas for Volunteer Programs*, Heritage Arts Publishing, 1986.
7. Wilson, Marlene. *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs*, Chapter VII - Interviewing and Placing Volunteers. Order by calling 1-800-944-1470.



# TRANSPARENCIES

# Guide to Transparencies

- T-1:** Interviewing Activity
- T-2:** Learning Objectives
- T-3:** Key Concepts
- T-4:** Importance of Screening
- T-5:** Key Stages in Interviewing - Preparation
- T-6:** Key Stages in Interviewing - Opening
- T-7:** Key Stages in Interviewing - Body
- T-8:** Key Stages in Interviewing - Closing
- T-9:** Designing Interview Questions

# Interviewing Activity

What were the skills and qualities of the interviewer?

# Learning Objectives

- Discuss the purpose of interviewing prospective volunteers
- Review four key stages in interviewing
- Design relevant interview questions and understand role of listening

# Key Concepts

## Concept 1

Find out if the prospective volunteer is right for the job.

## Concept 2

The complete interview process includes preparation, opening, body and closing.

## Concept 3

Ask good questions and LISTEN!

# Importance of Screening

- Paid staff and volunteer morale
- Park visitors
- Park resources
- Agency reputation

# Key Stages in Interviewing

## I. Preparation

- Review information about applicant
- Review pertinent information on jobs
- Formulate questions
- Schedule adequate time
- Arrange for private, comfortable place to interview
- Cast aside all distractions

# Key Stages in Interviewing

## 2. Opening

- Welcome applicant, introduce self
- Put applicant at ease, establish rapport
- Clarify purpose of interview
- Establish time frame for interview



# Key Stages in Interviewing

## 3. Body of Interview

- Information on program, agency, etc.
- Information about applicant
- Information about jobs

# Key Stages in Interviewing

## 4. Closing

- Review and summarize interview
- Discuss next steps
- Express appreciation for his/  
her time

# Questioning Skills

- Word questions to get desired information
- Use open-ended questions to get expanded information

# Listening Skills

- Listen for what is meant
- Observe
- Be patient
- Build on what interviewee says

# HANDOUTS

# Guide to Handouts

- H-1:** Key Concepts of Interviewing
- H-2:** Interviewing
- H-3:** Stages in the Interview Process
- H-4:** Critical Skills in Interviewing
- H-5:** Common Interviewing Mistakes
- H-6:** What Can We Ask?

# Key Concepts of Interviewing

**The purpose of interviewing is to determine if there is a mutual fit between the candidate and an identified volunteer position in the park.**

## Concept 1

**Interviewing is an opportunity to determine if the volunteer is appropriate for an identified volunteer position in the park, as well as a chance to screen for evidence of risk.**

For starters, interviewing will help determine if the prospective volunteer is qualified and willing to do the job, and if the applicant's motivational needs are likely to be met. Interviewing will help to surface other indications of a potential match or mismatch, including the potential of risk to the volunteer, park resources, other staff, or to park visitors. Interviewing will also give you feedback on whether your recruitment program is attracting the right people.

## Concept 2

**The four key stages in the interview process are preparation, opening, body, and closing.**

Preparation involves reviewing information on the applicant and the job, formulating questions, and setting aside an appropriate place and adequate time. The opening puts the applicant at ease, and clarifies the purpose and the time frame for the interview. The body is the opportunity to introduce the National Park Service and your specific park to the applicant and to find out more about the applicant's background and interests. Available jobs can also be discussed, giving each applicant the same basic information as found in the written job description. The closing summarizes the interview and clearly outlines what the next steps will be, whether the applicant is to be accepted or not accepted.

## Concept 3

**Two essential skills in interviewing are asking good questions and using reflective listening.**

Open-ended questions are particularly useful in obtaining information. Listening involves hearing both the words and the meaning, and asking follow-up questions, as appropriate, to collect all the information needed. Understand also that some applicants may be very shy, or very talkative, or enthusiastic but not qualified, or well qualified but not interested, etc., so be prepared to get the most out of the interview no matter what.

# Interviewing

Interviewing allows the applicant and the interviewer to become acquainted so that each can determine if there is a good match between their interests.

Without this significant screening step, many misplaced or inappropriate volunteers begin to work for organizations, and both the volunteer and the organization find dissatisfaction in the long run. When you have the wrong person in the volunteer job, the work of the Volunteer Program Manager is increased by the inevitable problems of poor performance, volunteer dissatisfaction, staff complaints, etc.

## **Taking the time to interview and screen volunteers enables you to determine:**

1. If the volunteer has the needed skills, experience, and motivation to do the job well
2. If the volunteer will fit into the culture of your organization
3. If the volunteer's motivational needs can be met
4. If your recruitment program seems to be attracting the right people

## **It is important to screen volunteers because:**

1. Volunteers can have an impact on park resources and park visitors
2. The reputation of the park/agency is affected by volunteers
3. Volunteers can affect staff morale
4. Volunteers suffer if they are misplaced
5. You can recognize both high-risk, as well as high-potential, volunteers



# Stages in the Interview Process

## Stage One: Prepare for the Interview

- Review all available information about the applicant. (It often helps to have the applicant fill out an application ahead of time.)
- Review all pertinent information on the agency/park and on available volunteer jobs.
- Formulate questions to bring out the information you need to screen for suitability for the job(s).
- Schedule adequate time (generally one half-hour) and a comfortable, private place for the interview.
- Put aside your other work and distractions and ask that your calls be held.

## Stage Two: Open the Interview

- Put the applicant at ease with a warm greeting and appropriate introductions, and by making him/her feel at ease.
- Clarify the purpose of the interview.
- Establish the time frame for the interview.

## Stage Three: Conduct the Interview

- If needed, give the applicant a brief overview of the National Park Service and your park.
- Ask questions to find out about the applicant's hobbies, interests, past jobs, motivators, dislikes, etc.
- After getting a clear picture of the applicant, it is then appropriate to selectively share information about the possible jobs for which he/she might be suitable. If you conduct the interview in the reverse order, prospective volunteers may simply tell you what you want to hear in order to get an available job.

- If you have several applicants for the same job, be sure to ask each of them the core questions you have developed.
- Give each applicant necessary information about job requirements, hours of service, place and conditions of work, training, uniform (if required), opportunities offered, supervision to be expected, etc.
- Be careful to explain the full requirements of the job; a common mistake is for interviewers to undersell the job or its requirements.

#### **Stage Four: Close the Interview**

- Be concise and upbeat. First review and summarize where you have been in your interview and then share what the next steps will be.
- **When the applicant is acceptable to you, and the job is clearly acceptable to the applicant**, be sure to tell the applicant when and where to go for discussion and determination of the specific assignment.
- **When the applicant is unacceptable**, the interview should be terminated as rapidly as possible, consistent with graciousness and tact. In an impersonal way, be honest in showing the applicant that the job is unsuitable. Avoid the “Don’t call us. We’ll call you” approach. If appropriate, you may wish to refer the applicant to other parks or agencies, or to a local volunteer center for other possible jobs.
- Finally, in closing your interview, you may want to thank the person for his/her time and interest in your organization. It may be necessary to develop some interview termination techniques, since applicants sometimes do not know when it is time to leave. Standing up is usually effective in terminating an interview.

# Critical Skills in Interviewing

## Questioning Skills

Closed questions (“Have you ever volunteered before?”) usually do not elicit explanation or opinion. Asking closed questions may prevent you from getting the information you need. However, closed questions do encourage specific answers such as yes or no. Closed questions typically begin with such words as is, do, has, can, will or shall.

*Can you work in the evenings?*

*Do you type?*

*Do you enjoy children?*

*Are Wednesdays alright?*

Open-ended questions usually require an explanation and are useful in obtaining information. They typically begin with such words as what, when, how, who, where, or which.

*Tell me more about...?*

*How did you do...?*

*What did you not like about...?*

*What would you like to be different about...?*

When you are designing your interview questions, make certain that you have a number of open-ended questions such as:

*Why are you interested in this job...?*

*What type of supervision do you like to receive...?*

*What would you describe as your ideal work setting...?*

*How will this volunteer job fit into your life now...?*

## Listening Skills

Listening is another critical skill for effective interviewing. It is distressing to learn that we generally only remember 50% of what was shared with us immediately after it is shared. Why is this, and what practices do we need to learn to become a good listener?

### **Practice Good Listening:**

1. Listen to understand what is meant — not to get ready to reply, contradict, or refuse.
2. Know that what is meant involves more than the dictionary meaning of the words that are used. It involves the tone of voice, the facial expressions, and overall behavior of the speaker.
3. Observe, and be careful not to interpret too quickly. Look for clues as to what the other person is trying to say, putting yourself in the speaker's shoes, seeing the world as the speaker sees it, accepting the speaker's feelings as facts that have to be taken into account — whether the listener shares them or not.
4. Put aside your own views and opinions for the time being. Realize that you cannot listen to yourself inwardly and at the same time listen outwardly to another.
5. Control your impatience by knowing that listening is faster than talking. The average person speaks about 125 words a minute, but can listen to about 400 words a minute. The effective listener does not jump ahead of the speaker, but gives the speaker time to tell his/her story.
6. Do not prepare to answer while you are listening. You should wait to get the whole message before deciding what to say in turn. The last sentence of the speaker may give a new slant to what was said before.
7. Show interest and alertness. This stimulates the speaker and improves performance.
8. Do not interrupt. Feel free to ask questions to secure more information, but not to trap the speaker or force him/her into a corner.
9. Use the technique of linking to build on what the interviewee has already said. This is called probing, and it indicates to the interviewee that you are listening (e.g., "You indicated that your Red Cross volunteer experience was particularly pleasurable. Can you elaborate on why you enjoyed it so much?")

# Common Interviewing Mistakes

1. Asking leading questions.
2. Making decisions too early in the interview.
3. Following a stereotyped pattern of interviewing, without recognizing individual differences.
4. Lacking knowledge of precise job requirements.
5. Letting pressure of duties shorten the interview time.
6. Talking too much, rather than listening.
7. Failing to direct the interview and thereby wasting time.
8. Not knowing what to look for.
9. Tending to be overly influenced by individual factors rather than considering the person as a whole.
10. Lacking skill in asking questions and in probing.
11. Failing to describe the job and organization in sufficient detail.
12. Tending to be too routine, instead of adapting each interview to the individual.
13. Being interviewed by the candidate instead of doing the interviewing.
14. Not following up on placements to see if performance bears out the judgement of the interviewer.
15. Tending to judge the applicant solely on personality, overlooking other important factors, is the most frequent and difficult-to-overcome mistake.

# What Can We Ask?

It may be illegal to ask (without a legitimate reason) about an applicant's

- I. Race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age
2. Height, weight
3. Marital status, number of children, childcare problems
4. English language skill
5. Educational achievement
6. Arrest or conviction record
7. Discharge from the military
8. Indicators of economic status (social club memberships, etc)
9. Personal property
10. Spouse or partner
- II. Physical limitations or disabilities

It is legal to ask

1. Whether an applicant is a citizen. If not a citizen, whether an applicant's permitted residence will be long enough to fulfill the expected commitment (such as a student visa).
2. An applicant's place of residence and length of residence in the city or state.
3. What languages are read, spoken, or written fluently by the applicant, if the assignment requires such skills, and as long as an applicant is not asked to indicate how the skills were acquired.
4. The name and address of a person to notify in the event of an emergency.
5. Whether the applicant has reached a specific age (for example, "Are you 14?" or "Are you 21?"), if minimum age is a criterion for acceptance.
6. Questions about an applicant's employment history.
7. Questions concerning criminal convictions, if relevant to the job functions to be performed.
8. Questions about the applicant's experience in the armed services.
9. Questions about the applicant's prior volunteer experience, hobbies, and interests.
10. How the applicant was referred to the program.
- II. Questions concerning mental or physical disabilities, if they relate to the performance required in a particular assignment.
12. Questions concerning any health problems, if the questions are related to the performance required in a particular assignment.