

The Volunteer Application Form

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No matter what kind of volunteer program you lead, there is a core of information which your recordkeeping system must provide. This is the data that tells you who is volunteering and for what.

APPLICATION FORM

A prospective volunteer application form is necessary for two reasons: to assist in your interview and screening process; and to document basic information about individual volunteers. The form should be seen as a tool to be used as a starting point in an interview. Whereas volunteer programs need to ask for some personal data from potential volunteers, there is no real reason to follow the paid employment application model in designing your form. The most common mistake made in designing application forms is to ask too much in writing that tells you too little about the potential volunteer.

When was the last time you took a good look at the application form you ask prospective volunteers to complete? It's easy to grow accustomed to a tried-and-true form, especially one that we use almost daily. But find a moment to review it just to make sure it is doing its job as effectively as possible.

As well as assessing if the form gives you the data you need, consider its tone. What does the application convey to a prospective volunteer about what's important to your organization? What might a potential volunteer learn about you from completing this form? Are the questions very formal or more colloquial? Does there seem to be interest in who the applicant is as a person beyond the facts of his/her credentials? Do you want to know about past volunteering as well as about past paid employment? What level of education or literacy is implied by the vocabulary in your questions or the number of essay answers expected? If you aren't sure what tone your application conveys, ask some volunteers who have completed it recently. Then consider how you might rephrase or add questions that are more welcoming.

Regardless of how you design your form, the following are elements to include on a basic application:

Element	Considerations
Title of Form	The word "application" does not have to appear on the top of the form, since it can seem unnecessarily formal or even threatening to some individuals. Other options are Prospective Volunteer Profile or Volunteer Candidate Information.

Date It is useful for follow up and filing purposes to have the date of the application visible at the top of the form.

**Name,
Address,
Telephone
Number(s)** Obviously this is important information, but ask for both “permanent” and “temporary” addresses (such as would be applicable to some student volunteers). Also, do you need “day” and “evening” telephone numbers?

E-mail Address It is vital to ask for e-mail address because, as time goes on, this is likely to be the primary way you will communicate with volunteers. You may need to ask for personal and business e-mail address—and which the volunteer prefers you to use. [Note: If your current application form does not include a line for e-mail now, you don’t have to throw out a ream of printed forms. Have a rubber stamp made that says: “E-mail address: _____” and stamp it at the top of every application. Really.]

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