

What to Look for When Hiring a Volunteer Coordinator

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Let's face it – the volunteer coordinator position can be a rotating door. There's typically a lot of work and responsibility placed on this role; yet, oftentimes in today's difficult economy, salary and budget constraints make recruiting a volunteer coordinator quite challenging.

In this article, we'll offer our tips for recruiting and hiring the **perfect volunteer coordinator** for your organization.

Doing Your Preliminary Work

Once the decision is made to bring on a volunteer coordinator, the next step should be to write a detailed job description. The key here is to take it seriously and be realistic. Many agencies make the mistake of either rushing through the description just to get something on paper, or they write lofty and often vague documents. Put yourself in the candidate's position. Wouldn't you want an accurate assessment of what your job would be? Also, being up-front with both the good and bad parts of the job will persuade many candidates to "weed themselves out" before you waste time and money researching, hiring, and training them.

Use the job description to get the word out when recruiting candidates. What sources you use is entirely up to your agency. Those with larger budgets tend to go the monster.com and/or careerbuilder.com route. Others use free sites like Craigslist or Kajiji. Don't forget that viral word-of-mouth goes a long way. Make sure you put the word out on Twitter, Facebook, and Linked-In. Finally, don't overlook those close to you. You may have a current volunteer that would be perfect for the job.

Exploring the Candidates

Now that you've recruited some solid candidates, it's time for interviews. Depending on your style, you can do something completely structured or absolutely unscripted. A structured interview's advantage is that it is the most objective. Having the same set of questions for all interviewees helps make sure the interviewer doesn't fall into some bias traps. On the other hand, a non-scripted interview is open-ended, and you can discover much more about a candidate as a whole. Through actual conversation, you may find that he or she has valuable skills that may not have come through in a boilerplate interview.

During the interview process, there are several points to keep in mind. Since part of a volunteer coordinator's job is to track volunteer hours and other statistics, many interviewers may focus on a candidate's attention to detail. But superior volunteer coordination takes much more than that. He or she must have strong written and verbal communication skills for tasks such as recruiting new volunteers and spreading the word about new volunteer opportunities. On top of that, generally a

volunteer coordinator should be a “people person,” especially if part of the job description includes interviewing potential volunteers, networking in the community, and being a leader and/or trainer of volunteers.

Making the Decision

Now that you’ve heard from all of the candidates, it’s time to make a decision. When possible, have more than one person weigh in on the final verdict. The fact that a mis-hire can be very costly justifies the need to make sure you’ve picked the right person. Be sure to do your due diligence. Naturally, you’ll want to check references, but these almost always come through as glowing because they are handpicked by the candidate. In order to get a more realistic view, you’ll want the applicant to give you the okay to talk with past supervisors. Keep in mind that many will only verify employment, but the ones who elaborate will give you a clearer picture of work habits than the other references an applicant lists.

If your choice has cleared all of these hurdles, it’s time for the last step in the process: the background check. For the sake of your employees, your clients, the community, and your agency’s reputation, a criminal background check is necessary. This is one area where you don’t want to cut corners. If an incident occurs where one of your employees behaves inappropriately, you don’t want to find yourself in court explaining why you didn’t properly vet your candidate.

These are just a few easy suggestions to keep in mind when choosing your next volunteer coordinator. If you feel you need more assistance in this area, it may be a good idea to talk with a human resources consultant who specializes in recruiting and hiring. In the end, when your volunteer campaigns are paying dividends, you’ll be glad you made the investment.

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