

Interviewing Basics

There are two perspectives in an interview: yours and the applicant's. It is important that you spend time thinking about both. Your goal should be to provide information about your program and to learn more about the candidate. *An interview is not the time to convince someone to become an AmeriCorps member.*

Preparation for interview

- Review application and resume – check for incomplete information as well as problems or confusion.
- Do not keep the applicant waiting/avoid interruptions.
- Keep dynamics of telephone interview in mind – how will this work best for YOU – what do you need to know and how can that be achieved.

Structure of the interview

- Set tone – comfortable but professional. Suggest that they may want to save questions until the end of the conversation as this will keep interview focused and save time.
- Set time limit – e.g., "I have blocked out an hour for this interview which should allow plenty of time for questions."

Information gathering

- Ask comprehensive, open-ended questions. It may be helpful to set up a role play of sorts i.e. *Let's imagine I am your old friend from school – tell me about this AmeriCorps position for which you're applying.*
- Beginning with broad questions then moving to more specific ones will help you to draw out and give specific information. i.e. *from the scenario above you may move in many directions depending what the person says. It may become clear that individual doesn't have enough or accurate information about your organization or AmeriCorps and you can fill in the necessary gaps.*
- If the applicant is unclear, summarize and restate what you hear to make sure you have understood the information correctly.

Providing key information

- Your applicants should be aware of key elements related to your position that is probably contained in information that should have been reviewed by applicant prior to interview, but it is essential that you discuss this with each applicant. Topics should include:
 - Expectations of a full-time commitment and specific hours
 - On-the-job training requirements as well as the need for out-of-town pre-service orientation.
 - Discuss travel reimbursement procedures
 - Provide the exact amount of the subsistence living allowance and discuss the candidate's ability to manage on that amount considering paying rent and outside loans, car insurance etc.
 - Discuss cost and availability of suitable housing (especially important for out-of-town and nationally-referred applicants)
 - Point out taxes and deferment of student loans

Interviewing Basics

- Explain other benefits that may be part of your program and how it works, e.g., medical insurance. Give applicants a written copy of the benefits so they can review them after leaving.

Closing the Interview

- Be honest and as specific as possible in describing the job and work environment. It's better that the applicant expectations are in-line regarding challenging aspects of the position
- Inform the applicant of what will happen next in the process
- If you have questions or doubts about a candidate's ability to perform required functions of the position, spell out your concerns and let the person respond, e.g., *Will you be able to meet the travel requirements for conducting site visits?*, or *Will you be able to do night and weekend events?*

Sample Questions to Assess Candidate's Qualifications for:

Motivation (Assessing why applicant wants to serve/reason for joining)

- What do you like best about your present situation?
- What was the most ambitious goal you set for yourself in the past and how did you accomplish it?
- Describe your finest accomplishment
- What are your specific goals in joining AmeriCorps?
- Tell me about the greatest effort you have put into a project or task. Did you accomplish the project? Why/why not?)

Cues to look for:

- Is the candidate a self-starter on projects?
- How much and what kind of volunteer work has the person done?
- Consider the types of questions the candidate asks during the interview; do most deal with the project or AmeriCorps benefits?
- Is the individual flexible and adaptable?
- Has the person taken care in filling out the application?

Commitment (Assessing the applicant's knowledge of program and ability of complete term)

- Tell me about the organizations you are involved with, and the extent of your involvement.
- Describe the activity you have been the most committed to; what was it, why were you so committed and how did you show that commitment?
- Tell me about the time you sacrificed most for a commitment.
- Tell me about the most frustrating or difficult project/social situation you have ever encountered. The most satisfying? What did you learn?
- Describe the last time you encountered a problem and how you resolved it.
- Describe any concerns you have about being an AmeriCorps member.

Interviewing Basics

- What do you think will be the hardest thing about being an AmeriCorps member on this project? The most exciting?
- How do you feel about living on the AmeriCorps monthly allowance?

Cues to look for:

- Consider previous commitments.
- Look for enthusiasm, readiness for challenge and ability to deal with adversity.
- What was a difficult and challenging commitment the candidate made and met?
- Did the person fail to meet goals and if so, why?
- How has the candidate been involved with other organizations?

Maturity (assessing skills and experience, social/cultural sensitivity, ability to adjust)

- Why do you want to join AmeriCorps?
- What strengths can you bring to the position?
- What is an area you'd like to work on or receive training in?
- Tell me the last time you were working on an important project and were confronted by an obstacle.
- Can you give me an example of a project you initiated?
- Tell me about a time you felt like an outsider.
- Tell me about a time you worked with people from a different racial/ethnic/social/economic backgrounds.
- Tell me about something (preferably work-related) that didn't turn out the way you thought or hoped it would.

Cues to look for:

- Has the person given examples of persevering in the face of obstacles?
- Was he or she engaged in answering your questions?
- Has the candidate accepted responsibilities in the past which were above and beyond the norm?
- Has the individual taken initiative?
- Has he or she thought out reasons for joining AmeriCorps?
- Have responses to questions been clear and thoughtful?
- Has the candidate asked relevant questions?
- Has the person provided specific examples of his or her adaptability?
- Has he or she given evidence of the ability to work with a wide variety of people?

Throughout the interview, you should look for the specific qualifications you have developed as “knock-out factors”—items that you will use to screen out unqualified applicants. Once you have narrowed the applicants in this manner, you can focus more sharply on quality. At this point in the evaluation process, the notes you took during the interview will likely serve as the most important source of information in making your final decision.