



The recruitment series – 2. Preparing to meet a potential volunteer

A guide to preparing to meet volunteers - it includes an activity on planning conversations about what they could be doing. A [questions template](#) accompanies this guide.

Before reading this guide, you might find it useful to watch our online presentation:

1. [Steps to recruiting volunteers](#)



Also see [C1: Volunteering with us](#) for guidance on recruiting, supporting and recognising volunteers

Our potential volunteers

Everyone volunteers for different reasons. Our volunteer survey tells us that motivations include wanting to meet new people, developing skills for work or study and giving something back for the support they've received.

Volunteering ranges from making a commitment to a role over a period of time to giving a quick burst of energy to a particular activity. All these unique contributions make up our volunteering community.

We have a variety of roles designed to appeal to people wanting to volunteer. Someone may have just moved into the area or they may know your volunteer team well already. They may be a college student or health professional or someone with a new connection to MS. Everyone is welcome.



See our [Equal opportunities policy](#) and [Diversity position statement](#) for more on our commitment to treating everyone fairly.

Why meet potential volunteers

The aim of meeting potential volunteers, whether in person, on the phone or virtually (e.g. by Skype) is to make sure the help you need fits with what the person wants to do. If you've not met before, it's an opportunity to learn about their background and skills, and ask questions about what inspired them to volunteer with us.

Whether a new contact or someone you know already, use the relevant role description, role specifics (brief) and welcome and induction checklist as tools to discuss tasks, skills and ways of working.

Give the person a clear idea of what the volunteering experience might be like and what they can expect. This will help them decide if this is the right type of volunteering for them. By asking them questions, you'll have a better idea of how they can help out, making sure their volunteering fits within the time and energy they're able to give.

In some cases:

- You might suggest another role to the one they originally got in touch about
- You might recruit more than one volunteer to the same role. They can use the role description as a tool to share tasks between them. You can make sure everything gets done.

Exceptions

In some cases, it's not necessary to meet a potential volunteer to agree a role's details. For example, for an Activities Volunteer helping at a single event, a simple email or quick phone call to confirm arrangements will do.

Always send our [Welcome booklet](#) to new volunteers.

Make sure it's a fair process

- Let the person know beforehand how long the meeting will be so they can plan their time
- When more than one person is interested, use the same list of questions with the same success criteria for all the meetings. This way, everyone has the same opportunity to tell you about themselves and you can make a fair choice

- Have an open mind about what people are telling you. Listen to their answers fully and be prepared to change your ideas about how the role might be carried out based on what they can offer or want to do
- If you're not sure about something they've said, take the time to clarify what they mean
- If possible, two people should meet with potential volunteers. You can share questions and offer different perspectives. And if you're choosing between more than one volunteer, the decision is made together
- If it's not possible for a second person to attend, make sure you take notes and involve others in the decision to welcome a new person, sharing out what's involved in supporting them to settle in
- Plan enough time
 - ask an appropriate number of questions for the time you've set
 - allow enough time for people to ask questions
 - make sure you have time at the end to sum up
 - plan any meeting and start dates, allowing enough time for a new volunteer to make any arrangements they need to e.g. childcare.

Success criteria

Decide what you need volunteers to do before promoting a role. Before meeting a new person, be guided by the role description and decide any further particular skills, knowledge or experience most important to what you currently need.

Use the following questions to form your success criteria. Refer to your success criteria when you plan the meeting so that the conversation results in recruiting someone who will be motivated by their experience.



Success criteria

- 1) How will you know the potential volunteer meets the essential criteria set out in the role description?
- 2) If someone doesn't meet the criteria but is willing to learn, how will you support them develop?
 - What is covered in the welcome and induction checklist?
 - What will you need to do?
- 3) Would it be possible for more than one person to share the role? How would that work?

4) What time commitment do you expect from volunteers and how flexible can you be?

Asking the right questions

Planning your questions will help make sure your initial conversation is useful and that you get the answers you need.

Make it manageable

- Keep your questions **short** so it's clear what you're asking
- Ask about **one thing at a time** so the person can answer fully
- Plan **prompts** to keep it a two-way conversation
- Make it easy for them to imagine how they might carry out the role
Offer an **example** or **background information** so they can answer your questions and know what questions they want to ask you.

Use open question

Open questions start with 'What', 'How', 'Why', 'When' or 'Where'. They help start a conversation. Use open questions to encourage someone to give detailed answers about their background or experience e.g. 'tell me how you did that'.

Their opposite, closed questions, start with 'Do', 'Are', 'Is', 'Can', 'Have'. They are defined by only needing a 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe' answer. This closes a conversation or gives the person asking the questions more work to do. Closed questions can be useful when you're bringing a conversation to a close e.g. 'is there anything else you'd like to ask?'

Examples:

- Closed questions – 'Do you want to volunteer?'
- Open questions - 'What volunteering do you want to do?'



Draft your questions

Refer to the success criteria you wrote using the role description

- 1) List the key themes you want to ask about
- 2) Turn these into five to ten open questions
- 3) For each, think about what the ideal answer is, based on the success criteria. Note two or three things you'd want someone to talk about. For some questions, you might also like to think about what you are not looking for.

e.g. We've got a lot going on and need someone who can help organise things. What interests you in the administrator role?

Success criteria – enthusiastic about what we do, interested in developing organisation skills

Remember :

- 'open' and short
- one at the time
- give examples or background information
- prepare prompts



Use or adapt our [Meeting questions template](#) for all volunteer roles.

Key considerations

Accessibility - If you're meeting face-to-face, choose a place that's easy to get to and is accessible, somewhere you can have a private conversation and not be interrupted.

Manage the meeting - Let the person know beforehand how long you expect the meeting to take. If you're meeting on the phone, send them all the relevant documents and offer breaks if talking on the phone is tiring for them.

Safety – Ideally, two people from the group should meet with the volunteer. If you're meeting them on your own, remember to take every precaution and stay safe. You should not meet at their or your home.



See [Lone volunteering](#) for more on keeping yourself safe.



Read the next guides and presentations as part of this series:

- 2.1. [Meeting questions template](#)
- 3. [Agreeing the role](#)
- 4. [Welcoming and inducting volunteers](#)

Was this useful? We'd love to hear from you either way. Please email your comments at volunteering@mssociety.org.uk

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