

Tips for Screening Potential SHIP Volunteers

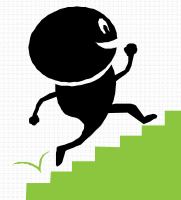
It pays to screen prospective SHIP team members! Take the time to thoroughly screen applicants and you'll see major results:

- Increased volunteer retention
- Increased volunteer satisfaction
- Fewer volunteer management issues
- Better fit between volunteers and their SHIP roles
- More realistic expectations for both you and your volunteers

The Five-Step Screening Process

A thorough screening process involves several steps through which you can learn more about applicants. Each step is a new opportunity to evaluate the fit between prospective volunteers and your SHIP.

- Step 1: The Initial Conversation
- Step 2: The Application
- Step 3: The Interview
- Step 4: The Reference Check
- Step 5: The Background Check (if applicable)



At any step, you (or the applicants) might decide that the fit is not right. That's OK! You don't have to accept everyone who wants to volunteer. You may find that some individuals are not well suited for your SHIP or that your program does not need the skills they have to offer. Recognizing these issues early and can save you time, energy, and money!

Step 1: The Initial Conversation

The first step in the screening process is having a candid initial conversation with each prospective volunteer. These conversations could occur when interested individuals approach you at outreach events, call you in response to a volunteer recruitment advertisement, etc.

Use this opportunity to share general information about SHIP and learn about prospective volunteers. Discuss potential [volunteer opportunities](#) and the benefits of working with SHIP. Let them know how much training is required and whether you ask for a minimum time commitment (e.g. 4 hours per month for at least 6 months). Help them paint a realistic picture of what it means to be a SHIP volunteer and set reasonable expectations for a potential volunteer experience. This reduces the chance they will dropout after initial training or be disappointed later on. It is one of the keys to turning interested individuals into happy, productive volunteers!

Step 2: The Application

After the initial conversation, ask interested individuals if they'd like to complete a SHIP Volunteer [Application](#). Walk through the application with prospective volunteers and address their questions or concerns. Then, you can either complete the form together or have them fill it out at home.

The application gives prospective volunteers a formal opportunity to identify the positions in which they might be interested and the times they might like to volunteer. It collects detailed information about applicants, including their contact information, education, and experience. The application also may include items that screen for potential conflicts of interest (e.g. insurance or criminal background) or give you permission to complete background or reference checks.

Review the application to learn more about prospective volunteers' interests and any applicable skills. Check to see whether applicants have identified any potential conflicts of interest. Then, think about whether they'd be a good match for a SHIP volunteer position and decide whether to proceed to the next step: the interview.

Step 3: The Interview

Invite promising applicants to your office for a formal, in-person interview. Through effective interviews, you can:

- Assess applicants' abilities and motivations for volunteering
- Make sure they understand and embrace the SHIP mission
- Discuss questions and concerns
- Review job description(s)
- Determine whether there are any conflicts of interest
- Refer them to another volunteer opportunity if SHIP is not a good "fit"

Additionally, the interview can serve as the first step in the orientation process. It is an opportunity to show prospective volunteers around your agency and introduce them to other SHIP volunteers and staff.

Take time to prepare before the interview! Review completed applications and note anything on which you'd like to follow-up. Develop a list of [interview questions](#) and use those same questions during each volunteer interview. Make sure to include open-ended questions that will allow applicants to do most of the talking. Your primary job during the interview is to listen. After listening to prospective volunteers, you'll be in a good position to decide two things: (1) whether they might be a good fit for SHIP, and (2) which volunteer positions might best suit them.





There are a few topics you're not allowed to discuss during an interview:

- Race, national origin, or birthplace
- Age, height, or weight
- Marital status
- Child care arrangements or pregnancy
- Religious affiliation
- Arrest record
- Military discharge
- Credit card information or home ownership
- Length of community residency
- Personal health
- English language skill

Step 4: The Reference Check

By this step, you probably have a fairly good idea of whether the prospective volunteers would be a good fit for your SHIP. But, it can also be important to hear from people who know and have worked with the applicants.

Call at least two personal references or employers listed on each application. Find out what they think about the applicants' strengths, weaknesses, character, or work ethic. Again, it's a good idea to develop a short list of questions to ask each time you complete a reference check. Tell the references about SHIP and ask whether they think the applicants would be a good fit for a SHIP volunteer position. Then, take these opinions into account when deciding whether or not to continue to the last step of the screening process: the background check.

Step 5: The Background Check (if applicable)

Completing background checks can help you be sure that applicants do not pose a [risk](#) to your clients or your SHIP. This step is especially important since SHIP volunteers have access to sensitive personal information and sometimes visit clients in their homes. However, whether or not you complete this step may ultimately depend on the requirements of your agency or state SHIP program.

Criminal background checks are often available for free or low cost through your state or local police department. You can also purchase more thorough (and expensive!) background checks from the FBI and other sources. When you complete criminal background checks, look for any past crimes that could indicate prospective volunteers might hurt, exploit, or otherwise harm your clients or your SHIP. Additionally, you may also want to check with your state department of insurance to make sure applicants are not licensed insurance agents or brokers.