

Interview Questions for RSVP Tutors & Mentors: A Tool for Project Directors & Staff

Recruiting RSVP volunteers is an important role of project directors and staff. Once potential volunteers have expressed interest, you can learn more about their interests, background, and suitability through a personal interview.

General Interview Tips

To help you plan interviews, the RSVP Operations Handbook provides suggested volunteer interview topics, such as motivation to serve, volunteer benefits and responsibilities, and transportation. In addition to Corporation guidance, familiarize yourself with any requirements of the sponsoring agency and/or volunteer station, as well as guidelines established by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regarding prohibited interview questions.

As you conduct interviews, keep these tips in mind:

- Make the interviewee feel comfortable. Remember, this is not a formal job interview; you want potential volunteers to feel relaxed and welcome.
- Give a clear description of the potential placement. This will help both you and the volunteer determine suitability for the assignment.
- Ask open-ended questions whenever possible. A conversational format will put potential volunteers at ease and help you learn more about them.
- Ask only questions relevant to the placement. Questions regarding race, religion, national origin, disabilities, etc. are prohibited.

Special Considerations for Education Settings

When you are selecting volunteers to work with children and youth in an educational setting, you will likely have additional criteria for assessing volunteer suitability. The questions below can help you focus on issues specific to potential volunteer tutors and mentors. In addition, volunteers working with children will need to have criminal records checks, which may be conducted through the volunteer station or by the sponsoring agency.

Suggested Interview Questions

Many direct questions, especially those about education and work experience, are best asked on an application. Take what you learn from the application into consideration as you prepare for and tailor your in-person interview. It's not necessary to ask all the suggested questions; choose only those that are relevant and appropriate to your situation.

Literacy Skills & Education

RSVP volunteers are often retired professionals, many times with experience in education. Gathering information about volunteers' educational and professional backgrounds can help you ensure they have the necessary literacy skills to tutor children in reading and other subjects.

- Do you have any experience in educational settings and/or teaching? If yes, please describe.
- Are you proficient in a language other than English?
- What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
- Do you have any higher education courses or degrees in education or literacy topics? If so, what are they?

Experience with Children and Youth

Working with children and youth brings rewards and challenges that are different from other volunteer activities. RSVP volunteers may have specific experience, preferences, and expectations that you should consider when making a placement. While there is no minimum time requirement for RSVP volunteers, the 2005 Senior Corps Field Guidance encourages projects to enroll volunteers who serve “weekly, on a regular basis.” Consider asking volunteers to commit to a certain number of hours in order to provide frequency and consistency in their tutoring and mentoring relationships.



- What experience do you have working with children and youth?
- Tell me what you most enjoy about working with children. What are some of the challenges?
- Describe any experience you have as a tutor or mentor.
- Often people have a favorite age group to work with. What is your favorite age group to work with? Why? Are there any age groups that you prefer *not* to work with?
- Children benefit most when they can work with the same person over time. Are there any circumstances that would prevent you from volunteering consistently throughout the school year?
- Are there placement situations that you would be uncomfortable working in?

Experience and Knowledge of Local Community

Often, RSVP volunteers have lived in their communities for many years. Capitalize on volunteers' knowledge of the community and perhaps even the schools/sites in which they will be placed.

- How long have you lived/worked in the community?
- Please describe any personal or professional connection(s) you have to any of the schools/sites under consideration for placement.
- Do you participate in any community- or faith-based education activities or partnerships that support schools and/or education? Tell me about them.

Personal Goals and Motivation

Seniors become involved in RSVP for an array of reasons. Find out as much as you can about potential volunteers' motivation to serve, personal goals, special needs, hobbies, and interests in order to make the best placement possible.

- How does the volunteer placement fit with your personal goals?
- How would you characterize the qualities and skills you bring to this position?
- Describe the ideal working environment for you.

- What are the most difficult aspects of jobs or previous volunteer positions you have held?
- Describe a situation in which you worked as part of a team. What were your contributions to the team effort?

Attitudes Toward Education and Schools

For many RSVP volunteers, much time has passed since their own experience with schools. Rely on tough interview questions to uncover attitudes or experiences that could make tutoring or mentoring difficult or inappropriate for some individuals. Often volunteers come from cultures very different from the children with whom they will be working. Probe for indications that volunteers will be sensitive and responsive to a variety of learning styles and backgrounds.



- Think back to your own school situation. What memories come to mind?
- People often talk about how different schools are today than when “they were kids.” How do you experience this?
- What are your thoughts about discipline in schools?
- What would you say if a student cursed during a session?
- What strategies would you use if a child didn’t want to work with you?
- When children work together, disagreements often occur. What are some strategies you might use to help resolve such disagreements?
- Imagine that you are working with a small group of children, and one or two become disruptive. How would you respond to the situation?