RICE UNIVERSITY

Office of Ethics, Compliance and Enterprise Risk

Screening Process and Interview Tips for Hiring Staff that work with Youth

Adopting a solid screening process is the first line of defense in creating a safe environment and is the minimum expectation for any organization that serves vulnerable populations. A thorough, consistent screening process may discourage would-be offenders from targeting an organization or program. Failure to uncover a known offender can endanger those in your care and permanently damage the organization's reputation, financial stability and trust within the community.

The Office of Ethics, Compliance and Enterprise Risk encourages programs to utilize the below screening process for hiring new department staff as well as volunteers or seasonal employees for multi-week programs.

Background Checks

Background checks are a requirement for any Rice-sponsored program on campus, off-campus or virtually where children are in the care of faculty, staff, undergrads or volunteers. This is also a requirement of third-party programs hosted on Rice campus. These background checks should include at a minimum Criminal Felony & Misdemeanor, Federal Criminal, Statewide Criminal, and a National Sex Offender Registry search. The Office of Ethics, Compliance and Enterprise Risk will conduct background checks through a secured third-party vendor for Rice-sponsored programs. Third-party programs are responsible for completing their own background checks.

Background checks complement other elements of the hiring process, such as interviews, reference checks, and skill assessments. Conducting background checks is an obvious jumping-off point, but we must also use that background check, and the rest of the screening process, to evaluate candidates on a case-by-case basis.

Interview Techniques

Interviews, when done well, are your primary and best opportunity to asses how an applicant will perform in their potential new role at your organization. They are a chance to understand the applicant's background, motivation and interests. Interviews provide an opportunity to understand whether the applicant is appropriate for the role and whether they will execute it safely while protecting the organization and the children/youth in their care. That's why it's important that the interview process reflects the actual realities of the job you are hiring for. Fortunately, there are tools we can use to make sure that the hiring process results in a clearer, more accurate picture of a candidate's suitability for a job.

<u>Behavioral Interviewing</u>

Behavioral based interview questions will give you a sense of how an individual will perform or behave in specific circumstances. Questions related to stress, time management, and pressure situations are perfect for assessing your youth program candidates.

Sample questions

- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with a supervisor.
- Describe a time when you had to step up and demonstrate leadership skills.
- Often in school or work, we're expected to adhere to policies that don't really make sense to us. Tell me about a time you had to stick to a rule even though it didn't seem reasonable.
- Give me an example of a time when a child/youth tried your patience. How did you respond to the situation?
- Tell me about a time when you made sure a child/youth was happy in your care.

Situational Interviewing

In addition to behavioral interviewing, it's important to also ask questions that do relate to specific situations that can or will arise at your organization. This allows you to get a better sense of how willing and able a candidate is to adjust their behavior based on your protocols and programming.

Sample questions

- What would you do if a child/youth refused to do an activity?
- How would you handle a child/youth who misbehaves or does not listen to instructions?
- How would you handle a fight between two campers?
- What would you do if you found children/youth vaping on-campus?

Active Interviewing

This method involves taking part of the interview outside of the office, walking the environment in which the job will actually be performed. This allows you to gauge how a candidate actually interacts with others.

Red Flags in Interviews

- Defensive or angry responses
- Patterns of gaining access to children/youth
- Themes of preferences for particular children/youth
- Perception that children/youth are 'helpless' or 'vulnerable'
- Evasive responses

Reference Checks

Employment and personal references should be checked for all program volunteers and employees, especially for programs multiple weeks in length. It's important to reach out to every reference, and to document the interaction in a personnel file. Additionally, requiring a family member or close personal contact as a reference opens up the opportunity to learn more about an applicant—as family members or close personal contacts will usually have a broader picture of an applicant's personality and behavior over the span of their entire life, not just within a specific job or position.

Sample Reference Questions

- How long have you known the applicant?
- What is your relationship to the applicant?
- How would you rate the applicant's ability to work with and relate to children/youth?
- Can you give an example of how the applicant relates to children/youth?
- How would you rate the applicant's ability to be patient and stay calm?
- Have you ever known the applicant to use harsh or abusive discipline with a child/youth?
- How would you rate the applicant's ability to follow policies and procedures?
- How would you rate the applicant's ability to maintain appropriate boundaries with children/youth?
- Are you aware of any reason why we should not allow the applicant to work with children/youth?
- Would you be comfortable placing one of your own loved ones in the care of the applicant? Why or why not?

Red Flags with References

- Reluctant references
- References did not know the applicant well
- No references from recent position
- Deceptive responses or refusal to answer
- Different responses from the applicant
- Characteristics associated with adults who abuse
- Would not rehire the applicant
- Not informed they would be used as a reference
- References cannot be contacted

Information for this resource was collected from Praesidium and The Redwoods Group.