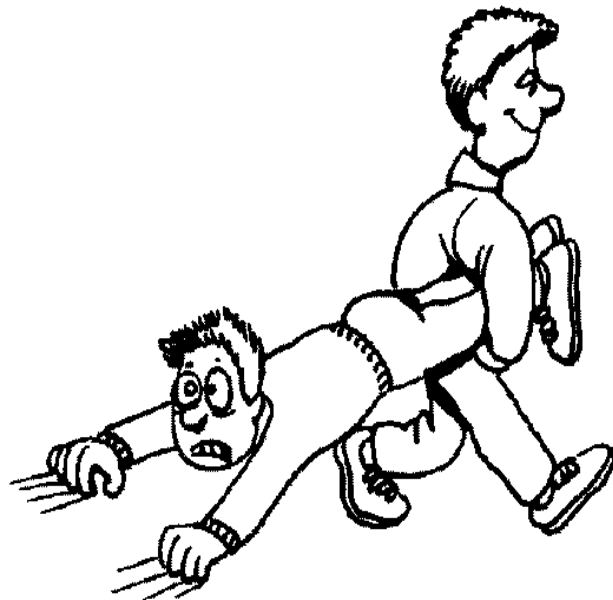


Recruiting staff for youth services



A HANDBOOK FOR YOUTH SERVICE MANAGERS

Produced by the Youth Action & Policy Association

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Introduction

This handbook has been designed for youth service managers to take you through the employment process step by step. The guide covers preparing job descriptions, advertising, convening employment panels, interviewing and confirming employment arrangements.

The handbook should be read in conjunction with

- Your funding agreement with your funding body
- Your organisation's policies and procedures

Preparing a job description

The first step in the employment process is to develop or review the job description for the position. This should be completed or at least formally approved by the Management Committee of your organisation.

A job description should include-

1. name of the position
2. salary range – check this at <http://www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au>
3. role of the position
4. major tasks to be undertaken
5. accountability and reporting mechanisms
6. skills and attributes that are required to do the job (this is referred to as the 'selection criteria').

Formal agreements with funding bodies should be referred to when developing job descriptions.

Selection criteria

What are selection criteria?

Selection criteria are a list of desired skills, experiences and attributes required to perform a certain job. The selection criteria are often divided into essential and desirable.

Why do community organisations have selection criteria?

It is very common for youth and community organisations to have a list of selection criteria for advertised positions. The list has been developed after discussion and a formal agreement between the management of the service and the funding body.

The employment subcommittee/panel can ONLY employ someone who has the listed skills, experience and attributes. The way they find out who has those skills is by seeking applications which outline how they meet the criteria, and then by interviewing based on the criteria. Applicants that do not address the criteria are not normally offered an interview, regardless of their application, experience or skills.

What does it mean to “address the selection criteria” ?

This means to write the heading of each criteria in a job application and then at least a paragraph underneath saying how the applicant has that experience or skills.

Typical selection criteria

This is a typical list of selection criteria for youth work jobs. It is important to talk to other staff, management committee members and young people about other criteria that may be important.

1. Relevant qualifications/experience
2. Teamwork skills
3. Communication skills
4. Ability to relate to young people
5. Knowledge of youth issues
6. Knowledge of youth services in local area
7. Ability to advocate and lobby on behalf of young people

Advertising

Most youth work positions are advertised in the Sydney Morning Herald on a Saturday under the “Community” section. You may also want to think about advertising through

- Local newspaper
- NCOSS website (<http://www.ncoss.org.au>)
- Koori Mail
- Ethnic newspapers
- Your peak organisation, such as YAPA
- Through egrouop lists such as youthgas.

Job ads can be really expensive. An ad in the Sydney Morning Herald normally costs around \$500-\$1500. So it is important to keep your ad to a bare minimum.

The job ad

Things to include in the ad

- Name of position
- Name of organisation
- Who the position is funded by (this might be a condition of your funding)
- Salary and SACS grade
- A very brief explanation of the job
- State that applicants must phone for an information package and give a contact phone number
- Closing date.

Do not include

- Selection criteria – include this information in the info package
- Mailing address – ask people to phone for an information package. If you state the address many people will apply without bothering to find out the background information.

You should allow about 3 weeks between the job advertisement and the closing date. This will ensure that applicants have enough time to receive an information package by mail and have time to put together an application.

Information packages

It is a good idea to have an information package for applicants. By providing applicants with more information they will be better prepared for interviews. Things to include in the information package –

- Copy of the job description, including the selection criteria
- An explanation of how to apply for the job, how to address the selection criteria (you could use the YAPA factsheet on this), how to forward their application, closing date for applications, and when interviews will be held.
- A copy of the latest annual report
- A brochure about the organisation
- An explanation of any special or above award conditions that your organisation offers, ie parental leave, above award rates, access to professional supervision and training, flexible working hours etc.

Employment panel

The Management Committee of an organisation is legally responsible for the employment processes. It is common practice for the Management Committee to delegate the responsibility to an employment subcommittee/panel.

The employment panel should consist of 3-4 members.

This should include –

1. Yourself as the manager
2. A management committee representative

Other people who could be on the panel –

1. A young person from the service
2. An independent person who does not work at your service, such as the local Council Youth Development Officer, or other local youth worker
3. A funding body representative (some funding bodies require this as a condition of funding).

Young people on employment panels will need extra support. Take the time to fully explain the employment process and the skills you are looking for in an employee. Clearly outline the role of the young person in the employment process and how much of a say they can have, ie equal voting rights.

Employment principles

Important principles to remember when interviewing are -

Equality

This means that all applicants must receive the same information package, be offered the same amount of time to apply, answer the same selection criteria, and be asked the same interview questions. The selection criteria must be the basis for deciding the successful applicant.

Non-Discrimination

You cannot discriminate against anyone because of their age, disability, homosexuality, race, sex, marital status.

Confidentiality

Panel members must keep details of the employment process confidential. This means the information cannot be shared with anyone including other Management Committee members or with other applicants.

Talk to panel members about these principles before you start the employment process.

Selecting applicants for interview

The employment panel should meet to read through and score each application. This will probably take you a few hours to do. You should meet in a quiet room where you will not be disturbed.

To start the meeting outline the major tasks of the job and explain how to read applications, ie

- each person on the panel should read each application
- read the resume first
- read the section which addresses the selection criteria and score each (see following). If an application does not address the criteria, and you clearly stated that this must be done, then you do not need to consider their application.
- there is no need to read through any attachments such as certificates, references, reports etc

Scoring applicants

Each panel member will need to fill out a separate scoring sheet for each applicant.

Write the selection criteria down the left hand column and leave a space to write a score on the right hand side, such as the example below -

Applicants name here : <i>Joe Pickle</i>	Panel member : <i>Greta Gherkin</i>
Selection criteria	Score
• Relevant experience	7/10
• Communication skills	4/10

Each panel member can use their own scoring system as long as they are able to rank applicants at the end.

Allow young people on the panel extra time to read and score applications. It can be a daunting task for young people to go through a lot of applications. Make sure you spend time talking to young people explaining any jargon and outline what types of skills and experiences that would be relevant to the job. Do not proceed to selecting applicants for interview until the young person has finished reading all of the applications.

At the end of the meeting tally all of the rankings between panel members and decide on how many applicants you will interview.

Writing interview questions

Before the interviews

As a guide you should ask around 6-8 questions at the interview. If you allow about 5 minutes per question then interviews should take 40-45 minutes each.

The interview questions should be based on the selection criteria and the job description. Use simple language and no jargon so that the questions cannot be misunderstood. Do not ask personal questions – ie how old are you?

You must ask the same questions to each person being interviewed.

Don't ask questions which are already answered in the applications.

You may want to ask applicants to prepare for the interview by giving them a harder question beforehand (see page 11 for an example). This process can make it a lot easier on the panel to select the right person for the job. Notify applicants of the question and interview time a week before hand.

Scenario questions

You might want to ask applicants 1-2 scenario questions during the interview.

1. You are working by yourself at night running a drop-in program and a group of older boys come in - they are obviously drunk and are threatening other young people. A fight is about to break out. What do you do?
2. A young person tells you that they are being abused by their parent but they don't want you to tell anyone. What do you do?
3. A young person tells you that they have run away from home. They have nowhere to stay and they do not want you to tell their parents. What do you do?
4. Young people turn up to the youth centre in a stolen car. What do you do?
5. A young person makes a pass at you. What do you do?
6. A group of young people are at the centre and start making racist or sexist comments towards another young person. What do you do?
7. You become aware that a young person you know has been using drugs or alcohol on a regular basis. What do you do?

General interview questions

Here are some suggested questions you could ask in interviews -

1. Why have you applied for this job or why should we employ you for this job?
2. Please tell us about your previous experience
3. What are your strengths?
4. What are your weaknesses?
5. What are important components of teamwork?
6. What are important components of communication?
7. How would you consult young people?
8. How would you involve young people in the running of the service?
9. What is your knowledge of other services in the area?
10. What ideas do you have for activities for young people?
11. What is your understanding of how community based management committees work?
12. What do you see as the main issues for young people living in the local area?
13. What would you do in this position to address these issues?
14. How would you advocate and lobby for young people in the local area?
15. What are your admin skills?
16. How would you advertise programs to young people and involve more young people from the broader community?
17. What hours would you be willing to work?
18. How would you go about building a positive profile for young people in the local community?

Question to send pre-interview

Here is a question you could send to applicants before the interview –

At the interview you will be asked to present on the following question. You will be allowed 5 minutes. Please also prepare a 1 page summary to be given to the interview panel on the day.

Question - What are 2 priority issues facing young people in the local area that the youth service can work to address?

Please outline -

- What is the issue, how does this impact on young people?
- Specifically, what change is required to address this issue? (this could address part or all of the issue)
- In this position, how would you go about bringing about this required change?
- What steps would you take to engage young people in this process?
- Who else would you work with to achieve this change?

Confirming interviews

When phoning applicants you should let them know –

- Date and time of interviews
- Interview venue and parking arrangements
- Who to ask for at reception
- How many people will be on the panel
- How many questions they will be asked
- How long the interview will take
- Whether they will have time to read the questions before interview
- If there is any question they should receive before hand
- That the questions relate to the selection criteria
- Who to call if they have any questions

conducting interviews

The selection panel should meet one hour before interviews start so that you can talk about the process of interviews.

Interviews should be organised about one hour apart so that you have 10-15 minutes to review each interview and take a quick break. Don't forget to include a lunch break in your interview schedule.

Allow people being interviewed about 15 minutes to read the questions in a quiet, private space before being interviewed. This helps reduce anxiety and helps the applicant give better quality responses.

Show the applicant into the room and show them where to sit. It helps to have a glass of water ready for each applicant and tell them to take their time and help themselves to a drink when they need it.

Take a few minutes for each panel member to introduce themselves, explain how the interview process will work, and briefly discuss the aims of the position.

Panel members should take turns to ask questions (decide a roster before the interviews). Panel members should also take brief notes during the interviews. This will help you remember each applicant and their answers.

Other things you may wish to add at the end of the interview

- Ask "Is there anything else you want to add to support your application?"
- Ask "Do you have any questions?" (the Convenor should answer any questions)
- Tell them when a decision will be made (this may take up to a week if referees are hard to contact)
- Check that contact phone numbers for referees haven't changed. Check that their referees include at least one past supervisor.
- Thank them for attending the interview.

Carrying out referee checks

Referee checks are carried out between the 1-3 people that you are considering for a position. **ALWAYS** do referee checks, even if you just have one outstanding candidate. Take time to do a full referee check – this is no time to rush.

If your decision is based on a claimed qualification you should also ask for a copy of the qualification (yes – some people claim qualifications that they don't have).

1. What is your relationship with the candidate?
(checking that the job title, duties and timeframes claimed by applicants are true and that the referee was a supervisor rather than a co-worker)
1. What do you see as their main strengths?
2. What do you see as their main areas for improvement, where they may need extra support? *(Explaining that this will help the organisation better support the applicant if they get the job)*
3. How are their time management skills? Can you give some examples?
4. How do they define boundaries between themselves and young people? Can you give some examples?
5. What was the single greatest contribution they made in their previous role?
6. What skill or attribute would you most miss about them?
7. If you had the opportunity to employ them (again), would you?
8. What are their teamwork skills like? Give an example.
9. Is there any reason at all why we shouldn't employ them?
10. Ask additional information about any criteria that is particularly important
11. Any other comments?

You should document the referee's answers to each of these questions.

Applicants should list at least one supervisor from their past employment as a referee, not just past co-workers or mates. If you become aware that no past supervisors have been listed as referees then this is a problem. Phone the applicant and ask them to provide you with contact details or a reasonable explanation as to why this can't be done.

Offering employment

Once the employment panel have made a decision to offer someone the job and you have followed any other organisational policies (such as letting your management committee know) you need to document your offer of employment in writing.

You MUST document your offer of employment.

An example is shown below -

Date

Dear Bill,

I am pleased to write to you on behalf of the Sydney Youth Centre to formally offer you the position of Youth Worker for 35 hours per week.

This position is offered on a standard 3 month probationary basis. There will be a performance review at the end of this period. If your performance is satisfactory your employment will be confirmed as permanent, subject to continued funding of SYC by the Department of Community Services.

This offer is also conditional upon you returning the enclosed Prohibited Employment declaration and passing the Working With Children Screening process.

Normal hours of work are 9am to 5pm. These hours may be varied by mutual agreement to be worked between 7am – 7pm (Monday – Friday). The conditions of your employment will be in accordance with the NSW Social and Community Services Award.

All staff employed by Sydney Youth Centre are expected to follow the policies and procedures of the organisation. By accepting this position you will be indicating your agreement to follow these policies and procedures.

We would like to offer you an annual salary of \$XX,XXX

To accept this position, please:

- Sign the acceptance section on the back of the letter*
- Sign the Prohibited Employment Declaration and Consent Form*

These document should be marked confidential and returned to the Manger, Sydney Youth Centre, PO Box 30, Sydney 2001.

Yours sincerely

Greta Gherkin

Management Committee

Sydney Youth Centre

I, Bill Buffalo, accept the position of Youth Worker with Sydney Youth Centre, on the agreed terms and conditions. Signature _____

Informing unsuccessful applicants

You should contact anyone who you interviewed by phone and let them know that they didn't get the job. It can be upsetting for applicants to hear this news so try and give some positive feedback to each applicant about what they did well.

If applicants ask for feedback about their weaknesses be prepared to give some constructive feedback. Generally only give this feedback if they ask for it. When providing feedback be careful to explain how they did not meet the selection criteria or that the preferred applicant better met the selection criteria. This should have been the basis for your decision. If you give any other reason the applicant has a right to question whether the employment process was really fair.

Write to all other applicants. You might want to adapt the example below .

Date

Dear Joe Pickle,

Thank you for your application for the position of Youth Worker at the Sydney Youth Centre.

The Selection Committee, consisting of a representative of the Management Committee, the Service Co-ordinator, a client representative and an independent representative have met to consider the applications.

Unfortunately, we were unable to offer you an interview.

Applicants missed out on being interviewed because either

- They did not address the selection criteria, or*
- They did not have all the essential criteria, or*
- A number of other applicants better met the essential and desirable criteria.*

On behalf of the Selection Committee we would like to thank you for your interest in the position, and wish you well in your future endeavors.

Greta Gherkin.

Keeping employment files

You need to keep a copy of the following documents in a locked filing cabinet for six months.

- All of the job applications
- Score sheets for each applicant
- Interview notes for everyone that was interviewed

You should permanently keep a copy of the following documents in a locked filing cabinet.

- Preferred applicant's application
- Referee checks for the preferred applicant
- Letter of offer that has been signed

What happens next?

Don't forget to ...

- Conduct a Working With Children's Check before the employee starts. You are legally required to do this. More information is available at www.kids.nsw.gov.au/check
- Carry out a really good orientation for your new worker, outlining clearly your expectations of the position, workplan tasks, supervision arrangements, reporting requirements
- Provide your new worker with a copy of the SACS Award, Union information, organisational policies and procedures, funding agreement, workplan.
- Let your funding body know that you have employed a new staff member
- Set a time for your new staff member to meet individually with other staff at your organisation
- Book in any training for your new worker. For example YAPA runs a 2 day course for new youth workers called *A Survival Guide for Youth Workers*. This course is run several times each year in Sydney, Western Sydney and in rural areas. Details available from <http://www.yapa.org.au>