Volunteer screening

How to screen volunteers for prison ministry



Edition 1

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# SCREEN

Here we screen applicants for suitability and placement into a relevant role

##

## Pre-screen

A few basic considerations to check upon receipt of application:

* Is the applicant a committed Christian?
* Are they able to commit to visiting a prison at least once a week?
* Is the volunteer available when Prison Fellowship has access to the prisons?
* Is the volunteer living within reasonable proximity to the prison?
* Does the volunteer have a means to reach the prison?

## Volunteer self-evaluation

*Many thanks to Gevangenenzorg Nederland for providing the core document content*

Dear volunteer,

Visiting prisoners or their family members will bring you into contact with people who often find themselves in a difficult situation. This can place you in an awkward dilemma. A volunteer must have certain skills in order to help and support them. It is important both for you and for Prison Fellowship to ascertain what your strong qualities are.

This self-evaluation is one way of determining these. Careful consideration and response to the corresponding questions can give you a greater insight into the particular character of this work. In addition, it will also give us a better understanding of who you are. When filling in this form, try not to indicate how one should have acted in a specific situation, but rather how you would personally react in that situation.

We do not expect a volunteer to be at the level of a professional. With some training and guidance of an experienced person, a motivated volunteer with certain skills will already be able to get to work. A volunteer will continue to improve his or her personal skills during other training sessions and through experience.

We kindly ask you to fill in this form and send it to Prison Fellowship. We will then invite you to come to our office for a personal visit so that you can acquaint yourself with us and our facilities. This form will be one of the items we will discuss during the visit. It is important to note that this information will be kept confidential.

With kind regards

## Competencies

* Awareness of one's own safety. The cultural and ethnic diversity of the prison population as well issues relating to prisoner physical and spiritual health is increasing. PF volunteers are also being confronted with this diversity. In one-on-one situations with a prisoner it is essential that the volunteer is aware of small changes in behaviour and in the prisoner's state of mind and is able, above all, to consistently react in a calm, and composed manner.

*Skills: Sensitivity, Self-confidence.*

* *Describe one or a number of different situations from your own life- experience, in which it was evident that you have this ability?*

To pay attention to rules and to one's own feelings and convictions. Volunteer organisations often characterize themselves as having a profound intrinsic motivation for their activities. Similarly, within the framework Prison Fellowship volunteers, out of “a desire to do good for their fellow man”, manifest and demonstrate the feeling of love for one's neighbour which has arisen from their faith.

Moreover the volunteer's work is characterized by a significant measure of independence leading to a bond of confidence and trust developing. Over involvement can lead to blurring of the important line between privacy and necessary distance. This can comprise the volunteer, the prisoner, as well as Prison Fellowship. The actions of every individual volunteer and the possible precedents these may set, can harm the image and the position of Prison Fellowship in the eyes of the Ministry of Justice.

It is essential that each volunteer adheres strictly to the code of conduct, even when they go against one's own feelings and convictions. Furthermore, it is important that volunteers are able to recognize this inner struggle and that they are able to discuss this and point out it out the very moment that the interest of the organisation becomes incompatible with one's personal convictions.

*Skills: Sensitivity, Self-confidence*

* *How do you react to people who react unpredictably and/or emotionally? Give an example.*
* *Describe an example from your own experiences where your personal feelings began to conflict with recognised codes of conduct? How did you handle this?*
* *What does it mean to you to hold yourself to codes of conduct and procedures, which limit your possibilities of giving concrete help to the person asking for it?*
* Building mutual trust. The relationship between the prisoner and the volunteer is one based on mutual trust:

On the one hand the prisoner's trust in the volunteer. That the volunteer will do what he/ she says. On the other hand the volunteer's trust in the prisoner that he/ she sincerely wishes to be honest during the conversations between them and is not merely trying to manipulate someone.

A detention situation increases the chance of manipulative behaviour. It needs to be recognized in time. It is of utmost importance in this process that the volunteer be able, above all, to focus his attention fully on the prisoner, on his wishes and needs, on his emotions, on his tensions and on his possibilities. He is able to listen' between the lines, and can, depending on the given situation make use of a wide repertoire of conversational methods, such as to re ect, to confront, to wait, to reward, to provide arguments, to think in alternatives, to instruct, etc. Furthermore, it is of great importance, that the volunteer does not create false expectations and that he makes clear where he will help and where he won't.

*Skills: Listening, focusing on the prisoner, flexibility*

* *In discussions people often react to what the other says by giving examples from their own experiences. To what extent do you think this is useful?*
* *What do people who know you well think of your ability to listen? What do you yourself feel are your strong and weak sides with regard to your ability to listen?*
* *Give an example of a situation in which you held a conversation with someone, who did not want to focus critically on himself and/or listened badly? How did you go about it?*
* Teamwork and authority
* *How will you keep the balance between maintaining your church commitment and supporting Prison Fellowship?*
* *You hear the Chaplain saying something with which you strongly disagree. What are the different ways of dealing with such an issue and what might be the (long-term) consequences in each situation?*
* Qualities: The following list are recommended qualities of a volunteer:
* Listening: Shows that he has the ability to pick up important information by word of mouth: he continues to ask; he acts upon reactions.
* Focusing on the client: He examines the client's wishes and needs and acts on these accordingly.
* Sensitivity: Shows himself to be aware of other people and their personal environment, as well as his own influence in it; he shows the ability to distinguish the feelings and needs of other people.
* Discipline: He complies with the policy and/or the procedures of the organisation; when changes occur, he confirms this with the proper authority.
* Flexibility: If problems or changes arise, he changes his own style of behaviour or his conceptual approach in order to reach the set goal.
* Self Confidence: He acts with certainty and calmness and he maintains this impression, even when he meets opposition or emotions of other people.
* Self Reflection: He evaluates his own behaviour and his points of view in a critical way; he is open minded with regard to the evaluation of other people; he learns from it and based on this evaluation changes his own behaviour as well as his own points of view.

### Reference

* Received satisfactory references from church leader