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Safer Recruitment Guidelines

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on behalf of the CHS Alliance

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INTRODUCTION

During a rapid humanitarian surge response, particularly large scale, there is often significant pressure to recruit large numbers of staff as quickly as possible. However, the need to fill posts urgently should not compromise the requirement to ensure that only the right people are recruited – not only in terms of skills but also with regards to competencies, behaviours, attitudes and beliefs. In line with the Core Humanitarian Standard, we also have a moral and legal duty to protect the communities and people we work with, staff, partners and stakeholders, from those individuals who may misuse their position for their own benefit, be this financial, sexual, abuse or positioning of power.

The guideline below is in line with the Keeping Children Safe standards, but also considers other vulnerable groups (see end for resources). It outlines the key steps and issues to consider in recruitment in order to safeguard organisations and individuals.

SAFER PRACTICE IN RECRUITMENT

Safer practice in recruitment means that every stage of the process should be considered carefully, in order to deter unsuitable candidates from applying or being appointed into an organisation. It also requires a consistent and thorough process of obtaining, collating, analysing, and evaluating information from and about applicants.

In summary, the following should be considered when planning recruitment:

- **job descriptions** for all positions - make reference to responsibilities for safeguarding and/or the Code of Conduct and include the beliefs and values of the organisation or link to them
- **advertisement** - make clear the organisation's commitment to safeguarding
- **shortlisting** - obtain and scrutinise information in applications/CVs - resolve any gaps, discrepancies or anomalies in employment history
- **interviews** - include questions around safeguarding, the Code of Conduct or working with vulnerable people
- **checks** - verify the successful applicant's identity, their employment history and qualifications. **Offers** should not be confirmed until all checks are in place
- independent professional **references** should be obtained and any concerns followed up
- **external checks** - conducted according to organisational policy - in the UK these may include an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring (DBS) check, in other countries this could be a police clearance check or equivalent. Some donors require an anti-terrorism check
- **induction** - include a briefing on safeguarding and the Code of Conduct

STAGES OF RECRUITMENT:

> JOB DESCRIPTIONS

All information given to applicants should highlight the importance of a member of staff's duty and responsibility to safeguard, report and promote appropriate behaviours.

When producing the job description special consideration should be made to assess the level of risk in relation to working with children and vulnerable adults in the role concerned. It should also be made clear whether the role requires the successful applicant to complete a police check or equivalent (in some organisations and for some roles these checks will also continue throughout employment e.g. every 2 years).

> ADVERTISING

When a vacancy is advertised, the advertisement should include a statement about the employer's commitment to safeguarding and the values, beliefs and behaviours expected. Again this should act as a deterrent to unsuitable applicants. In addition, reference should be made (either in the advertisement, on the webpage or in the job description) to the organisation's rigorous selection process, which should deter unsuitable candidates from applying.

Examples include:

Save the Children

At Save the Children we are committed to the safeguarding and protection of children in our work. We will do everything possible to ensure that only those who are suitable to work with children are recruited to work for us. This post is subject to a range of vetting checks including a criminal records disclosure.

Tearfund

In the process of recruitment, selection and appointment Tearfund implement a range of procedures and actions including Police/Enhanced DBS Checks to ensure children and vulnerable people are safeguarded and abuse is prevented

> APPLICATIONS

Regardless of whether an organisation requests candidates to complete application forms or CVs, a recruiter should look for the following:

- A statement of any relevant education/training/qualifications and dates
- A statement of employment history including all positions held as employment and voluntary work. This should include start and end dates and reasons for leaving employment. Explanations should be given for periods either not in employment, education or training

- Details of referees – at least two employment referees should be submitted, one of which should be the applicant’s current or most recent employer, usually from a Country Director (or equivalent) or a member of the HR team.
- If application forms are used then they should include a safeguarding declaration for applicants to sign, or where no application form is used, the successful applicant should be asked to sign one before an offer is confirmed and before they join the organisation. The nature of legal convictions that an individual needs to declare can vary from country to country and an organisation is encouraged to take legal advice prior to developing a declaration form. It will vary as to which convictions are considered spent or unspent and which occupations are required to declare spent convictions.
- The self-declaration form might start off with questions such as:
 - > Have you ever been charged with a criminal offence (include some explanation of spent and unspent convictions) ? If yes, please provide details:
 - > Have you ever received a written warning or been dismissed or resigned following allegations of improper or unprofessional conduct or unsatisfactory work performance? If yes, please provide details:.....
 - > Our process includes asking referees whether there are any child protection or working with vulnerable groups concerns in your regard. Do you foresee any problem arising from this process? If yes, please provide details:
- The self-declaration should follow and as a general guideline it should include - a statement that the person:
 - > is not disqualified from work with vulnerable groups
 - > is not subject to sanctions imposed by a regulatory or professional body
 - > has no convictions or cautions
 - > has provided information that is true and accurate
 - > confirms, that by signing this form you also declare that, if you are successful in your application, you will notify the organisation should there be a significant change in your circumstances that relates to the screening process; for example, criminal offence charges and convictions, restraining orders, injunctions, intervention orders, disciplinary proceedings and investigations.

The self-declaration demonstrates that the organisation takes safe recruitment seriously. Having a written declaration means that if the successful candidate has deliberately withheld information about their criminal background, it may be easier for the police (if appropriate), regulatory agency or organisation to take action against the person. Evidence of a criminal history, that may be unrelated to any risk of harm to children, will not automatically preclude a person from being or remaining employed.

> SHORTLISTING APPLICATIONS

In order that key information or gaps in employment are not missed it is recommended that at least two people are involved in the process of short listing candidates.

Information provided should be consistent, not contain any discrepancies and any gaps in employment should be identified. Any anomalies should be noted and considered when shortlisting.

> ASSESSMENT & SELECTION

The assessment process should be designed to measure the merits of each candidate against the job requirements, but to also explore their suitability to work with vulnerable groups.

Invitation to Interview

The interview invitation should stress that the identity of the successful candidate will be checked, and that any offer will be subject to receipt of references and a police check or equivalent if the post requires it. Save the Children also sends out their Code of Conduct and Policy on Child Safeguarding so that the candidate is aware of these policies before attending an interview.

Interview Panel

All interview panels should have at least two people and will allow one member to observe, assess and make notes, while the other panel member is talking to the candidate. It also reduces the possibility of any dispute about what was said or asked during the interview.

Scope of the Interview

In addition to assessing and evaluating the applicant's suitability for the particular post, the interview panel should also explore with the candidate:

- gaps in the candidate's employment history - concerns or discrepancies arising from the information provided
- attitude towards issues relating to the Code of Conduct such as working with vulnerable groups, using organisational resources and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour
- motivation and reason for working for the organisation

Example questions are given below in Appendix 1

> CHECKS AND REFERENCES

Candidates should either be asked to bring documents with them to an interview or provide, on offer of employment (to be decided by each organisation), the following:

- documentary evidence of identity including current and former names, date of birth and current address. Ideally this would also include national/social insurance number or national identity number e.g. current driving licence, ID card, passport, including a photograph. In cases, where these documents are not available – a birth certificate should be provided. In most countries, evidence of right to work may be required if national position
- additional documents will also be required for police checks or equivalent (and when the role requires it), such as proof address, - utility bill, rental contract or financial statement and change of name documentation
- educational and professional qualifications that are necessary or relevant for the post, will require an original or a certified copy of a certificate, diploma, or a letter of confirmation from the awarding body

All copies of documents must be signed and dated by the person carrying out the checks and kept on the personnel file.

A person's past behaviour is the most reliable way of predicting future behaviour. Consequently the information obtained from referees is important. Any offer of employment should always be conditional on the receipt of satisfactory references and their purpose is to obtain objective and factual information to support appointment decisions. They should always be sought and obtained directly from the referee and should include the individual's current employer. References should always be obtained in writing (and if organisational policy, telephone contact can also be made).

Reference requests should include a brief description of the organisation and the role; asking about the applicant's suitability for the role, for the organisation and any details of previous disciplinary action.

Example reference request questions are given in Appendix 2.

Employers should not accept open references and testimonials, i.e. "To Whom It May Concern". There are cases of candidates forging references and open references/testimonials. Consideration should be given to whether the referee has been very cautious in the information they have given and whether it might be necessary to follow up. If an employer says it is not their policy to provide references, then a request for a confirmation of employment should be made. Consider asking the candidate to supply another professional reference which may include ex peers, professionals in another organisation who the candidate worked with during their employment (e.g. a partner organisation, a government official, a legal adviser, religious leader etc.). Verbal

references may be taken when there is no alternative – notes should be taken and recorded and if possible the referee should be asked to confirm by email or in writing that they are an accurate reflection of what they have said.

References must be thoroughly screened to ensure the referee has answered all the questions. Information provided by the referee should be compared with the information provided by the applicant in his or her application and any discrepancies checked.

Where references reveal any inconsistencies or doubts about the person’s suitability, the issues should be followed up and explored with the referee or the candidate. It is important to keep written records of any telephone conversations and where the issues are significant, more detailed information sought in writing from the referee if possible. This is particularly important where a decision is made not to consider the person further, or where issues need to be explored further with the applicant. Any information about past disciplinary action should be considered in the circumstances of the individual case.

> CONDITIONAL OFFER OF APPOINTMENT

Any offer of appointment to the successful candidate will be conditional upon receipt of the following (this should be stated at interview and in the offer letter):

- Two (or more) satisfactory references
- Relevant police clearance check or equivalent
- Clear anti-terrorism check (where required)

Depending on policy – some organisations may not allow an individual to start their new role until all checks have been completed. Others will allow an individual to start, but make the offer to receipt of satisfactory checks.

If any of the above raises issues of concern then it should either be referred to director level (or as specified in the organisation) or then in some organisations a committee is formed to discuss this further and make a decision based on what could be the risk to the organisation. This may include asking for further information from the individual or maybe relevant authorities. In these cases it is recommended that an offer is not confirmed if there is any doubt and any conclusions are signed off at director level.

> INDUCTION

All successful candidates should be sent information about the organisation prior to starting, and with their contract. This should include an organisation’s Policy on Child Safeguarding, Child Protection, working with vulnerable adults and the Code of Conduct (as mentioned above, Save the Children do this at interview stage). There should also be a briefing as part of the induction programme for newly appointed staff regardless of previous experience. This should include knowing where to find information on the following:

- Policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding e.g. child-safeguarding, child protection, protection of vulnerable adults, anti-bullying, anti-racism, internet safety, whistle blowing, disciplinary and grievance etc.
- Requirements of the organisation's Code of Conduct
- Reporting procedures and when/how to raise a concern or observation
- Face to face training on Child Safeguarding, Child Protection or Code of Conduct as per organisational requirements

On appointment the successful candidate will also be required to sign an organisational code of conduct, which complements the self-declaration form, by outlining the behaviours required of the individual and asking them to sign their agreement to these.

APPENDIX 1

Example interview questions:

Generic – questions focused on understanding of the policy:

- What is your understanding of what a Code of Conduct, Child Safeguarding Policy or Protection of Vulnerable Adults Policy should contain?
- What issues could arise in these areas? And why is it important to have a policy in place? Do you think this should apply to everyone and why?
- What do you see as your responsibility in this area?
- What would you do if you are not comfortable about something you have witnessed or overheard?

Scenario based – could be adapted to context:

- Imagine a scenario where, you are meeting with a member of the local community and as you leave, the community elder asks you to give a lift to a teenager to an event they are attending. This is on the route where you drive home. How would you respond to such a situation?
- If you are recruiting a new staff member who will be required to work with beneficiaries, communities or vulnerable groups, how would you ensure that you have done everything you can to minimise appointing the wrong person? What would you tell them at induction?

Role specific:

- In the context in which you will be working, who do you think the different types of groups will be that you may have to interact with? What could make them vulnerable?
- What are some of the approaches you will need to adopt in order to work effectively with such groups?
- What minimum standards would you expect to be in place to ensure the protection of individuals/groups by our organisation? What do you see as your responsibility?
- Have you had experience of having to respond to concerns about how another individual has been interacting with the vulnerability of groups/individuals? If so, what did you do?

APPENDIX 2

Example reference request questions:

- Do you have any concerns to raise about whether the individual can follow an organisational Code of Conduct, Policy on Child Safeguarding or Policy on Protection of Vulnerable Adults?
- Was disciplinary action ever taken against the individual regarding their professional conduct when working with communities, staff, partners, and stakeholders?
- Do you have any concerns about the individual's ability to work with beneficiary groups in an appropriate and professional manner?
- In this post, the individual may have to work directly with children and/or vulnerable adults. How well do you think the individual will be able to do this given the vulnerability of those concerned?



As part of putting this document together we asked Save the Children for advice both on the main document and for any additional insights they might have:

They have now introduced:

- Job descriptions and adverts – include the statement around commitments to safeguarding to ensure candidates see them
- Interviews – Save the Children doesn't ask about working with vulnerable children, just what is the motivation behind wanting to work with children.
- Interview invitations include a broader statement on commitments to child safeguarding and the importance of following a safer recruitment process. Save the Children also attaches a copy of the Code of Conduct and Child Safeguarding Policies to the email.
- Interview questions – a pack of child safeguarding questions have been put together for use across Save the Children
- Candidates sign a copy of both the Code of Conduct and Child Safeguarding Policies when they join the organisation
- Module on safer recruitment for hiring managers has been produced as part of the Hiring Manager's Recruitment Training. This is available in both the Regional Offices as well as in the Centre.
- A ½ day safer recruitment workshop for HR/recruiters will be introduced in 2018 both regionally and at the Centre.

RESOURCES

Keeping Children Safe has a number of resources available to support organisations including a self-audit tool which can be found at <https://www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk/how-we-keep-children-safe/accountability/self-audit/self-audit-process>

[HR and Child Protection guidelines – People In Aid](#)