

Servas Interviewing Guide

Introduction

Interviewing procedures around the world vary. While this is only a guide, we hope that interviewers will read, consider and adopt, if possible, these suggestions. It was decided at the 1986 SI conference that travellers must be interviewed. Some countries require written references for travellers & at least a verbal reference for hosts.

Stage 1: Assessing travel applicant

To ensure suitable, Servas-spirited members and excellent exchanges, please remember that joining Servas is a privilege, not a right. Servas is not suitable for every person and every travel plan. You are right to refuse applicants who might abuse the system and lead to members quitting.

Note 1: It is not a proper interview if an interviewer only asks "Have you read & will you obey the Servas rules?"; the applicant says "Yes" and is then approved.

Note 2: Two persons travelling together from different addresses need separate Letters of Introduction and should be interviewed as individuals.

Where to Interview

Most are done in the interviewer's home. It is suggested that the interviewer not be alone if unsure of an applicant. A public place or cafe may be used if needed. Sometimes, personal interview is impossible. Use great care interviewing by phone. References should be carefully checked.

Atmosphere

Hold interview in a welcoming environment. Make applicant feel relaxed. Offer a refreshment perhaps. Allow 2 to 3 hours in order to do a thorough job of determining motives of the applicant and have time to answer questions. It is a big responsibility to approve or refuse applicants. Preparation

- Be sure to tell the applicant what forms, references, photos, money (preferably cash, not cheque), photocopies, etc. are needed for the interview.
- Be clear about the time, date and length of the interview. %Get applicant's phone number in case you must change the appointment.
- Read the applicant's letter or application form and reference letters to determine what areas you need to concentrate on during the interview.
- One reference should be from a "responsible person in the community".

Conversation

- Do not begin with a lot of complex questions. Respect and allow silences.
- Give the applicant time to talk—suppress your desire to talk and explain everything.
- Don't say too much, especially don't explain the Servas "spirit" and rules or applicant will know what answers you want

to hear and repeat them meaninglessly.

- Let the applicant talk about him/herself and travels to determine their “spirit”—don't give them the answers or ask obvious questions like “Do you believe in peace?”.

Observations

- Did the applicant follow instructions you gave, arrive promptly, show awareness of your “house rules,” was polite, and appreciative of you giving your time?
- Does the applicant listen well? Would he/she be welcome in most homes?
- Were any prejudices displayed? Was interest in people and culture shown?

Possible questions:

- Remember there is no “right” answer. Assess applicant's sensitivity, tact, listening skill, flexibility, tolerance, acceptance.

On any prior trips without Servas

- What did you learn from your trip? (Does the applicant display Servas-like spirit?)
- Have you had any unexpected difficulty. How did you deal with it?
- Have you stayed with local people? How was the experience? How did you meet?

Previous “Servas -like” experiences

- What interests you in travelling?
- What are your travel plans, transportation, your pace of travel?
- Have you invited in, or been invited in by, friends and/or strangers?
- Describe your time with: leisure, study, work, clubs, friends, people.

General questions

- What questions do you have about Servas? Do you understand its aims?
- How will Servas meet your needs? What do you expect of hosts?
- How many nights of your trip will you hope to be with hosts?
- Have you time to give advance notice to your hosts?
- If your time is limited, how much time will you spend with your host?
- What will you bring to the host family? (help, food, photos of your culture)
- What would you hope to discuss with hosts?
- What do you expect to get out of your stay?
- Why do you think people join Servas as hosts?
- Considering stamps, phone calls, extra travel distance, gifts, will you save money with Servas?

How does the traveller deal with various situations?

What would you do as a traveller do if:

- offered a dusty floor to sleep on
- offered unappetizing or offensive food
- host has emergency and can't accept traveller. Isn't home when traveller comes
- one member of the household is not a Servas member and resents your visit

- host invites you to come at 8 pm, but doesn't say it is for dinner
- host doesn't offer any food or meals
- host expects you to do 5 hours of washing & ironing their clothes
- host expects you to do something you feel incapable of doing, i.e. babysitting infant
- host wants traveller out of house when host goes to work at 7 a.m.
- host invites you to stay longer but you're expected at another host home
- you're expected at 6 pm but unable to find transportation in time to get there

Approve or reject applicant

Note: In some countries the National Secretary or Travel Officer is responsible for final approval, and may question applicants after their interview, before giving them host lists. This extra precaution can be a good safeguard, and will hopefully not be seen as a lack of confidence in the interviewer.

- If interviewer feels the applicants and travel plans are suitable, go to stage 2. %If unsure, take a day before deciding. Perhaps consult another interviewer. Remember that the applicants are trying to make a good impression in their native language at home: consider how they might respond in less comfortable travel situations. %If unsuitable, suggest the applicants might consider another organization more suited to their plans or personalities. (The booklet "Alternatives to Servas" is available from Servas Canada). Often an explanation of the extra time, expense and inconveniences of Servas makes applicants reconsider joining.

Stage 2: Inform the applicant about Servas

Explain Servas: history, Esperanto meaning, aims, how Servas works, SI function, conferences, organization, newsletters, costs, distribution of lists.

Responsibilities

- Explain responsibilities of the traveller. These should be printed on paper (for example Information for travellers, page 3.3), covered verbally one-on-one, and the paper given to the approved traveller to review. Discuss each point and answer questions: there should be some.
- Stress showing Letter of Introduction to hosts and when requesting host lists.

Contacting hosts

- Cover items special to the countries visited. For example, European capitals (especially London, Paris and Vienna) are very busy, so write ahead, stay in suburbs, write to 2 or 3 hosts telling each if they are writing to more hosts than they have time to see.
- Some countries require special precautions because for example government is suspicious
- Travellers who receive no reply from letters must not assume they are not welcome, and should try to phone hosts to clarify the situation.

Host Lists

- Traveller should read the notes in each host list and notice and respect each country's rules and suggestions.

- Explain how to get lists in your country or from a “key person” in another land.
- Give only a reasonable number of lists. Copy a few pages if that is all they need.

Travel Report

- Explain the importance of, and give traveller a Travel Report form
- To improve interviewing, a Travel Report form could contain: interviewer's name; did your interview adequately prepare you for Servas?; suggested improvements?; you must return this report to receive a host list deposit refund.
- (Also: Can we give your phone number to travellers going to similar areas?)

Stage 3: Paperwork

Host Lists

To get best use of host lists interviewers should suggest

- travellers not request an entire list if only one area/city is needed.
- travellers might copy addresses required and return the lists before their trip
- large deposits on lists (a minimum of the cost to photocopy list)
- travellers must return lists promptly to receive their deposits
- to request host lists: phone if time is short, or ask traveller to write to appropriate person, enclosing a copy of their Letter

of Introduction.

Record

In some countries, some or all of these responsibilities may be taken by the Secretary or a Travel Officer

- Keep a copy of Letter of Introduction (LoI) in case of problem, loss, etc.
- If LoI is hard to read or in difficult English, have traveller rewrite/type it.
- Add SI stamp, note fee and host list deposit paid, add interviewer's name and sign.
- Note: each adult requires their own SI stamp, even if at same address.
- Never add a SI stamp or sign an application which is incomplete.
- Collect cash for fee and adequate host list deposit. Collect for all lists expected to be received even if all are not available

at the time. To avoid bad cheques (because traveller closes his/her account) ask for cash. %If current lists are unavailable, lists may be obtained in other countries by showing LoI: further deposit may be needed. %Send to treasurer (or the appropriate officer) your cheque for fee and deposit collected and all the paperwork.

Finances and Host List System

- This will vary depending on size, and the number of volunteers in each country. However it is suggested for efficiency:
- Very few interviewers (one person only if possible) should have a full set of host lists.
- All lists be returned to the host list coordinator (1 per country) for reuse.

- A treasurer be found who receives all fees and deposits from interviewers and keeps detailed financial records.
- The treasurer or host list coordinator return all host list deposits to travellers.
- (Interviewers do not retain fees or the list deposits.)

Suggested Form for Interviews

- Adopt a form which relieves Servas of legal & monetary responsibility “I have understood the instructions, meaning and requirements of the Servas organization. I will act in accordance with the Servas rules and in a respectable manner. It is my own responsibility to contact hosts independently. My contribution does not entitle me to any services over and above acceptance as a member, except for return of my host list deposit. For various reasons I may not be able to contact or arrange stays with hosts. I will take no legal action against Servas, its branches, groups, volunteers, hosts or any members.”