Liaison Officer interview questions

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What to expect

Liaison Officer interviews test whether you can hold a conversation with a frustrated community member, keep accurate records while doing it, and represent the organisation without hiding behind policy. Panels usually want evidence you have done this with real people, not just studied it.

- **Process and systems:** How you handle a referral, a case note, a privacy question or a shared inbox. They want to know your working method is repeatable, not improvised.
- **Client-facing communication:** Explaining policy, eligibility or a decision in plain language, including when the answer is no.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of stakeholder management, cross cultural communication and difficult conversations, usually asked as tell me about a time.
- **Scenario and judgement:** A community group is upset, an agency contradicts you, or something sensitive surfaces in a meeting. These probe how you think under pressure.
- **Motivation and values:** Why this organisation, why this community, and whether you will stay once the novelty wears off.

Expect a short phone screen covering availability and background, then a panel of two or three people, typically a program manager and a community engagement lead with someone from HR. The panel usually opens with your experience, moves into behavioural and scenario questions, and leaves time for your questions. Some employers add a short written exercise, such as drafting a plain language response to a community enquiry or summarising a set of case notes.

1. Walk us through how you would handle an enquiry from a community member who is not eligible for the program.

Why they ask

This is the core of the job. They are checking you can deliver a clear no without losing the person or leaving them with nothing.

How to structure your answer

A walk-through of your steps, in order: greet and establish what they actually need, check eligibility against the criteria, explain the decision in plain language, name the reason without hiding behind jargon, refer to a service that can help, record the contact, then follow up. Finish by saying how you keep your own records and what you escalate.

Example answer

“First I would let them finish. People usually arrive with a problem and a bit of frustration, and I get further by understanding what they are actually asking for before I start talking about eligibility. Then I check the criteria properly rather than guessing, because being wrong in either direction wastes their time. If they are not eligible, I say so early and plainly: this program is for people who meet these conditions, and here is why your situation sits outside it. I do not soften it into something vague, because that just brings them back next week. Then I move straight to what I can do. I would name two or three services that fit their circumstances, give them the contact details, and offer to make the call with them if they want. I record the contact and the referral in Objective ECM, note the reason for the outcome, and follow up in a week to check the referral was usable. If the same gap keeps coming up, I flag it in my monthly report, because one person being ineligible is a case and ten people being ineligible is a program design issue.”

2. Tell me about a time you had to explain a complex policy or an unwelcome decision to someone who was upset about it.

Why they ask

Liaison Officers regularly carry decisions they did not make. The panel wants to see you take the heat without becoming defensive or overpromising.

How to structure your answer

STAR: set the situation briefly, describe the specific action you took to prepare and to deliver the message, then the outcome for the person and the relationship.

Example answer

"We changed the intake window for a community grants program and a local men's shed had built their shed extension around the old dates. The coordinator rang me and was, fairly, furious. Before I called back I read the decision properly so I could explain the actual reasoning rather than just quoting the rule, and I found out what discretion did exist, which was not much on timing but was real on payment scheduling. On the call I let him get it out, acknowledged the position they were in, and said clearly that the window would not move. Then I offered what I could: staged payment, help with the paperwork and a direct line to me through the process. The extension went ahead, delayed but not cancelled, and that coordinator now calls me first when something looks like it is going wrong rather than going over my head. I would rather be the person who tells someone the hard news honestly and then stays on the phone."

3. A community group tells you they were promised a consultation that never happened, and they are angry about it. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a scenario test of judgement under pressure and whether you will dig for facts or defend the organisation reflexively.

How to structure your answer

Take the complaint seriously, establish the facts before committing to anything, respond honestly including if the organisation got it wrong, then close the loop in writing. Say what you would escalate and to whom.

Example answer

"I would not argue about whether they were promised it. Even if no one in my team said it, they heard it from somewhere and telling them they are mistaken is not going to help. First I would hear the full story and take notes on who they spoke to, when, and what they understood was agreed. Then I would check the record, our correspondence, our consultation schedule and any case notes, before I said anything about what happened. If we dropped the ball, I would say so plainly and apologise on behalf of the organisation, because they deserve a straight answer. If it was a misunderstanding, I would explain how the process works without sounding like I am correcting them. Either way I would give them a specific next step with a date, put it in writing so they have something to hold, and escalate to my manager if this group has been missed more than once. Then I would follow through, because the follow through is what actually repairs the relationship."

4. How do you keep case notes and client records accurate and confidential across a busy caseload?

Why they ask

This role lives in Objective ECM, CRM systems and shared inboxes. They want to know you will not create privacy problems or leave a colleague stranded with a half written file.

How to structure your answer

Describe your method as a set of habits: when you write, what you write, what you leave out, how you store it and how you handle a privacy question.

Example answer

“I write notes the same day, while the conversation is still fresh, and I write them for a colleague who has never met this person. That means the facts, what was agreed, what I referred them to and what the next step is, in plain language, without my opinions about the person. I keep personal and sensitive detail only where it is relevant to the service, and I do not copy it into emails or notes that do not need it. Everything goes into the correct record in Objective ECM or the CRM rather than onto my own desktop, because a file only works if someone else can find it. If someone asks me for information about a client, I check who they are and whether they are entitled to it before I say anything, and if I am unsure I say I will confirm and come back to them. In a shared inbox I use the Teams channel for the quick coordination and keep the formal record in the system, so there is one version of the truth. I also check the privacy and records policy when something new comes up, rather than assuming last year's answer still applies.”

5. Describe a time you worked with a community or client group whose background or expectations were very different from your own.

Why they ask

Cross cultural communication and empathy are central to this role, and the panel wants a real example of adapting, not a statement about valuing diversity.

How to structure your answer

STAR, with emphasis on what you changed about your own approach after listening, and what the community got out of it.

Example answer

“I was supporting consultations with a newly arrived community where the expectation was that decisions would be discussed with elders before anything was presented to the wider group, and I had been booking open sessions. Attendance was poor and the feedback was flat. I asked a community liaison worker I trusted what I was doing wrong, and she told me plainly that I was going around the people whose word mattered. I changed the process: met with the elders first, explained what the program could and could not offer, and asked them how the wider session should run. We held the next consultation in a familiar venue, with interpreters, and with a shared meal at the start instead of a presentation. The turn out was better, the questions were sharper, and the feedback we collected actually changed how the program was promoted. The lesson I have kept is to ask about the process, not just the content, before I set anything up.”

6. Why do you want this liaison role, and what would you do in your first few weeks?

Why they ask

Employers in this field want someone who will stay and who understands the job is mostly relationships, not paperwork. It is also a chance to show you have thought about their context.

How to structure your answer

A short, honest motivation, then a concrete first period plan built around listening before acting: meet the stakeholders, learn the programs, learn the systems, find out where the friction is.

Example answer

“I want this role because the work I enjoy most is the bit other people find awkward, sitting with someone who is confused or annoyed and getting them to a place where they know what happens next. I like being the bridge rather than the gate. In the first few weeks I would focus on learning before changing anything. I would read the programs properly and sit in on a few of my colleagues' client interactions so I hear how eligibility is explained in practice. I would go out and introduce myself to the main community groups and partner agencies, in person where I can, and ask them what is working and what is not, rather than telling them what we offer. I would get comfortable in Objective ECM and the CRM quickly so my case notes are useful from day one, and find out who to escalate to when something sensitive comes up. Then at around the one month mark I would bring my manager

a short summary of the recurring issues I had heard and what I think we could do about them. I would rather earn the relationships first and suggest changes second."