

Community Development Officer interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for this role test whether a candidate can run genuine two-way community consultation, hold a program together through competing stakeholder interests, and back decisions with evidence rather than instinct. Expect a panel that often includes someone from the community or partner organisation side, not just HR and a manager.

- **Behavioural:** Past examples of running consultations, managing partnerships or contributing to grant applications, used to check for genuine hands-on experience.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations, such as a partner withdrawing or a consultation revealing conflict, used to test judgement under pressure and stakeholder handling.
- **Process:** Step-by-step questions about how you'd run a needs assessment or build an evaluation framework, checking for a structured method rather than improvisation.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about handling difficult or upset community members, since this role regularly involves public-facing conflict.

Panels typically open with one or two general fit questions, move into three or four behavioural or scenario questions covering consultation and partnership work, and often finish with a process or technical question about evaluation frameworks or reporting. Some councils and NGOs add a short written or presentation task on program design.

1. Tell me about a time you ran a community consultation that revealed conflicting needs between different groups.

Why they ask

Conflicting priorities come up constantly in this work, and the panel wants to see whether you can hold neutral ground and still move a program forward.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and the groups involved, the task you were responsible for, the specific actions you took to manage the conflict, and the result, including how the outcome was received by both sides.

Example answer

"I was running consultations on shared use of a local community hall between an established seniors' group and a newer youth program. Both wanted the same evening slots and neither trusted the other to compromise. I set up separate initial conversations to understand what each group actually needed, then brought them together for a facilitated session focused on the underlying goals rather than the time slots themselves. We landed on a rotating schedule with a trial period, and I built a short logic model to track attendance and any complaints over the following weeks. Both groups stayed in the program and the rotating model became the template for two other shared-space bookings."

2. A key partner organisation pulls out of a joint program two weeks before launch. What do you do?

Why they ask

Partnership coordination is central to this role, and partners withdrawing late is a realistic risk the panel wants to know you can absorb without the program collapsing.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your judgement under pressure: what you'd check first, how you'd triage options, who you'd escalate to, and how you'd protect the program's core outcomes.

Example answer

"First I'd get clear on exactly what the partner was delivering and what gap that leaves, rather than assuming the whole program is at risk. I'd then check whether any other partner or an internal team could absorb that piece short-term, and flag the situation to my manager early rather than trying to fix it quietly. If no replacement is realistic in the time left, I'd look at whether the launch can go ahead in a reduced form while we rebuild that partnership piece afterwards, and I'd be upfront with the community about any changes so trust in the program isn't damaged."

3. Walk me through how you'd conduct a community needs assessment from scratch.

Why they ask

This is core to the role, and the panel wants to see a structured method rather than a vague sense of 'talking to people'.

How to structure your answer

Give a step-by-step walkthrough covering scoping, data sources, consultation methods, analysis and how findings feed into program design.

Example answer

"I'd start by clarifying the scope with whoever commissioned the assessment, what decision it needs to inform and what data already exists, whether that's council demographic data, GIS mapping or past program reports. From there I'd design a consultation approach that mixes methods, short surveys for breadth and small group sessions or interviews for depth, making sure I'm reaching groups who don't usually respond to standard council channels. Once the data's in, I'd analyse it against the original question rather than just summarising everything collected, and turn the findings into a short set of recommendations with a clear line back to the evidence, so the program design that follows is defensible if it's questioned later."

4. How would you build a logic model to evaluate a new community program?

Why they ask

Evaluation frameworks come up in the role's tasks directly, and this checks whether you can think in terms of measurable outcomes rather than just activities.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a technical explanation: define inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and how you'd track each, then note how you'd report findings to senior stakeholders.

Example answer

"I'd map inputs, staff time, budget, partner contributions, against the activities the program actually runs, then separate outputs like sessions delivered or people reached from the outcomes we actually care about, such as changes in participation or connection within the community. I'd set indicators for each outcome early, before the program starts, so we're not retrofitting measures after the fact. For reporting, I'd keep the language plain for senior stakeholders, leading with whether outcomes were met and using the detailed data as backup rather than the headline."

5. How would you handle a community member who becomes angry at a public forum about a council decision you had no control over?

Why they ask

This role is public-facing and often absorbs frustration directed at government generally, so the panel is checking for composure and de-escalation skill.

How to structure your answer

Structure this as a de-escalation approach: how you'd acknowledge the person, separate the emotion from the issue, and redirect toward a constructive next step.

Example answer

"I'd let them finish without interrupting, because most of the heat comes from feeling unheard rather than the decision itself. I'd acknowledge what they've raised directly, even if I can't change the decision, and be honest about what is and isn't within my control. Then I'd offer a specific next step, whether that's passing their concern to the relevant team with a name attached, or setting up a follow-up conversation once I have more information, so they leave with something concrete rather than just a brush-off."

6. Describe a grant application or funding submission you contributed to and what made it successful.

Why they ask

Grant writing is a stated task for this role, and the panel wants evidence you can translate community need into a case that funders will back.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: outline the funding opportunity and community need, your specific contribution, the approach you took to make the case compelling, and the outcome.

Example answer

"I contributed to a submission for a small community grants round aimed at improving access to a local program for a group that had been under-represented in past intake. My part was pulling together the needs assessment data and turning it into a clear problem statement, rather than a general description of the program. I made sure the application tied every requested dollar to a specific activity and outcome the funder could track, instead of bundling costs together. The submission was successful, and the reporting structure we'd built in made the funder's mid-program check-in straightforward rather than a scramble."