

Writing volunteer role descriptions

By following the advice in this guide, you will understand what to include in a volunteer role description that makes it appealing to volunteers.

Purpose of a volunteer role description

A role description is there to give a potential volunteer all the essential information to help them decide whether they would like to volunteer with you. The information for the role and if they have the suitable skills to apply. It should include more information than can be given by a phone call or conversation. A role description also helps other people in the organisation understand how the volunteer role relates to what they are doing. In this way a volunteer role description can help you re-evaluate your organisational structure. You can use the role description to measure a volunteer's performance, although be careful not to have the same expectations as paid staff and include any targets that may put people off! Evaluation of a volunteer's role can be informal and formal, including client feedback and review of both positive experiences and concerns brought up in supervisions. No matter how small a volunteer role is, a role description should be created and well defined. If you have clear lines of accountability for the volunteer, transparency for the strengths needed for that role and specific time commitments, you are more likely to recruit and retain your volunteer.

What is a good volunteer role description

A volunteer role description is like a job description in that it explains the tasks and details of a role, but the language used should be different and should be about expectations for the unpaid role and not obligations.

Title

Organisations are in competition with each other, so the more eye catching your title the better – be careful though that the title still does still describe the role but use your imagination!

Motivations

You will need to explain why volunteering for your organisation and in this role would be a good experience. Why might people apply and what would make it a positive experience for them? Consider that there are many reasons why people volunteer and check your role against these, selecting what motivations apply to your role. Factors include being in an inclusive environment and feeling connected to other people and the organisations' purpose. Volunteers usually want to make an impact on the world they live in and do something that is meaningful to their lives and their interests. A volunteer wants to do something that is enjoyable and balanced, to fit in with their lifestyle. When you consider all these motivations, pick out the ones that you think would attract someone to your position and then include these in your role description as benefits and draw attention to why a volunteer would have a fantastic time at your organisation.

Aims and expectations.

Your description must explain the role's purpose and what the volunteer will be expected to do. Keep this brief but highlight how the role fits in with other roles in the organisation and how it fits in with your organisation's overall aims and purpose.

Skillset

Although you don't want to be too prescriptive like a job description. It is important to include what skills you are looking for and what personal qualities the role would suit from someone, so you can appeal to the right people. You can break down the skills into essential and desirable ones and highlight that the organisation can help you develop some of these. Some role descriptions talk in terms of competencies.

Practical details

You will want to include the location of the role and estimated time commitment, including expected training, needed from a volunteer, and the days and times you are looking for. When expectations are clear people are more likely to sign up. Please note that flexibility is becoming increasingly important, so if changes to the role can be made include these, i.e. can work from home, share role etc. Include what expenses will be covered and the name or job title of the person the volunteer will report to.

You can also include:

Some organisations include boundaries to set the limits of a role from the beginning. This may or may not be appropriate, but clarity is key to a good volunteer description. The volunteer needs to be clear as to what they are doing, why and the expectations of behaviour. You could also state how the viewer can find out about other opportunities, in case the role is not a good fit, but they may still be interested in volunteering for your organisation.

Remember:

Review your volunteer role descriptions regularly in line with your volunteer policy and other roles in your organisation.

For more information:

The National Council for Voluntary Organisation's have great downloadable resources for members, free to groups with a turnover of less than £30,000 per annum: [Writing volunteer role descriptions | NCVO](#)

Reach Volunteering is a /London based charity that finds volunteers suitable roles and partners with businesses to do the same for their employees: [How to recruit volunteers with skills | Reach Volunteering](#)

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