



Volunteer Role Descriptions

1. Introduction

As part of the recruitment process, many volunteer organisations write and share volunteer role descriptions. This details the specific activities in which a particular volunteer is involved. It is a simple job description, although it's important not to use this terminology to avoid implying a contract of employment for volunteers. Role descriptions allow the organisation to be clear on what needs to be done and the volunteer to have a good idea of what they are getting involved with.

Before writing a role description decide what tasks volunteers will be expected to do and how these will support the organisation. Once this has been decided, think about how these tasks can be undertaken:

- Could they be grouped together into a specific role?
- Can they be undertaken flexibly or as a micro volunteering opportunity?
- Could they be carried out by a group or is it a regular task, can it be done from home?

Generally the more flexibility on what volunteering is done when and how, the better.

2. Writing volunteer role descriptions

You should provide written outlines, or descriptions, of volunteer roles. Well written role descriptions will help both staff and volunteers to understand their roles. Volunteers are more likely to be attracted to roles that will motivate, challenge and reward them.

Role descriptions should:

- give more detailed information to the volunteer about the role
- show where the volunteer fits in with the work of the organisation
- offer a list of tasks so the volunteer can compare these with their skills and expectations
- describe how the role will make a difference to your cause
- help others understand how the voluntary role applies to their own.

Elements of Volunteer Roles

In order to cater for a range of potential volunteers and promote diversity, try to design a variety of volunteer roles, which suit people with varying motivations, skills and interests. There are links below for a number of description for example roles. These may need to be adapted and amended to suit the skills, knowledge, interests and availability of potential volunteers e.g. allow for the different amounts of time people are able to offer. Be aware of the different motivations potential volunteers may have. Some may want work-related experience, others may be hoping to meet new people or find an activity that gives them a change from their daily routine.

What to include in a volunteer role description

A role description is not a full job description. Try to make it concise and easy to read. Building the description around different headings is useful. Some suggested headings could be:

- Title of role - be specific
- Purpose of role - the difference it will make to the work of your organisation
- Main activities / tasks
- Qualities / experience / skills needed (where relevant)
- The time commitment and when this will be needed
- Training available
- Location
- Who will be the main point of contact?

Be careful not to imply a volunteer is under contract to perform specific tasks. If it appears that a volunteer is being employed by your organisation, they may be eligible for full employment rights.

While volunteers should not feel over-committed or overloaded in their role, it is also important that they are engaged in productive tasks and get a sense of achievement from their voluntary work. When creating volunteer roles, it is useful to think about whether a particular role offers the volunteer a chance to expand and develop.

Think about the title of your volunteer role, first impressions count and it is often the first sense a potential volunteer will get of the role and your organisation. The word volunteer can put people off, especially if they have not volunteered before. Also remember it's not a job title. Don't be too formal, try to think of titles that are engaging and descriptive.

3. Using volunteer role descriptions

Volunteer role descriptions form an important part of an organisation's recruitment process because they:

- Help the organisation focus on what needs doing
- Give volunteers a good idea of what is expected
- Can be used to focus discussions in the ongoing management of the volunteer
- Help to evaluate the volunteer programme
- Are particularly useful if you are recruiting volunteers through an external organisation such as a Community Organisation, Volunteer Centre, or Community First Yorkshire.

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