

## Writing Role Descriptions

### Why should you bother with a role description?

- It attracts the right volunteers
- Clearly states what is expected of the volunteer
- Staff know what the volunteers are there to do
- You are more likely to retain volunteers

It is important that all volunteers who come to your organisation are clear on what they will be doing in a particular role. The volunteer role description defines what the volunteer's purpose is and how they will fit into your organisation. It will clarify expectations and make the process of recruitment and selection easier because the description can be used to determine a person's suitability for the activity.

Well-written opportunities are far more likely to attract potential volunteers. You may have just a few moments to grab someone's attention, so opportunities that are concise and interesting are much more likely to be read and remembered.

### Sell your organisation and your vision

Sometimes, volunteers will come to you with previous knowledge of what you do or, will have been beneficiaries of your services and want to give something back. Maybe they have been a carer for someone with dementia and have benefitted from advice, information and peer support and now want to help someone else in the same situation.

But often, someone will make the decision to volunteer, as they want to give something back to the community. They could be retired and have more time on their hands, they want to get out more and meet new people or they want to improve their CV and have no idea who they want to volunteer for.

Either way, you need to either reassure any potential volunteer that they are making the right choice or you will need to persuade new volunteers that you are the organisation for them by offering interesting volunteering opportunities that will make a real difference to people's lives.

Often, organisations will be very formal and concise when describing what their organisation does, mentioning that it is a registered charity / member of this strategy group or partners with that organisation, forgetting that volunteers probably just want to know what change you are making and the actual impact of the work that you do. A brief description can be inspirational and engaging and really illustrate how what you do can change things for the better. Spend a minute thinking about the most impressive thing about your work. Is it that you enabled 100 young carers to attend

a peer support group and access friendship, support and information enabling them to feel less alone and carry on with their caring roles, avoiding crisis point. Did you help adults recently diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder find a safe, understanding place to meet? Use your description of your organisation to sell yourself, to outline the need for your service and what changes because of your work.

**Role Descriptions** – It is crucial that we attract the right volunteers to work with us and this starts with promoting your volunteering opportunities in a clear and engaging way – making a good first impression to inspire people to get on board and feel as passionate about your work as you do.

This first contact is crucial to how volunteers will see you and, if your voluntary opportunity looks like you can't be bothered, or you can't communicate properly, then chances are this is how they will see you and it may influence the type of people you attract.

Would you like to volunteer here .....?

*'We provide services to support older people and ensure that they can access the support and resources they need.'*

Or here .....?

*'Loneliness in later life is a killer.'*

*Around 1 million older people regularly go an entire month without speaking to anyone at all. Shockingly, half of all older people consider television their main form of company.*

*Our vision is to beat loneliness in later life through our befriending services. And, with your help, we will do it.'*

These are two examples of the same organisation. There is nothing wrong with the first one – it tells people what you do. However, it is very inward looking and formal. The second example gives potential volunteers an understanding of the problem you are trying to solve and involves them in the solution. Using the word 'you' has been proven to capture the reader's attention. This is the problem and you are part of the answer, what you do will make the difference.

You could also include a quote from either a volunteer or a service user who has benefitted from the support of volunteers. For example this quote from a volunteer supporting young carers to have a week's holiday;

*"I genuinely had the best week of my life. I have never smiled, laughed, been appreciated or cried so much before. I know that I made a significant positive impact on so many of the young people's lives even though I was only with them for one week. I discovered a wonderful sense of pride and passion I never thought possible."*

## An inspiring example – Coppafeel!



A great example of this is breast cancer awareness charity Coppafeel. Essentially what they are doing is raising awareness of breast cancer, how to check your boobs and sending out a message that cancer can affect people of any age.

As a sector we know that recruiting promotion volunteers and volunteer fundraisers is the hardest thing we do and yet this is really all they do, and they do it brilliantly. So what are they doing differently?

They are creating imaginative, fun, realistic and productive volunteering roles:

They ask you to join the Boob revolution, become a 'Uni Boob Ambassador' or a 'Boobette' to educate young people and spread the word. They have 'Boob Champions' and their social media ambassadors are the 'Digital Boob Team'.

They encourage people to drop some money in the 'Boob Bank' or take on a 'Boob Challenge' such as the Hilly Half Hundred. In short, they are making volunteering fun and easy. They have clear roles with a great purpose and sense of achievement.

Although it sounds flippant and fun, they are spreading a serious message – get to know your own body so that you can spot any problems early on. Avoiding the situation that Coppafeel founder Kris Hallenga found herself with stage 4 cancer at the age of 23. They are being taken seriously at a high level, engaging with politicians, getting considerable coverage in national press and TV and securing high worth corporate sponsors. So, don't think that, by mixing things up a bit, you won't get taken seriously.

Spending a bit of time on your volunteer role description will pay off. Here are a few guidelines:

- Keep sentences and paragraphs short. If it's possible to cut a word out –cut it out
- Keep it simple
- Always give the most important information first.
- Don't be too formal and don't use jargon
- Don't CAPITALISE – it makes words much harder to read.
- Separate out different roles. Grouping opportunities together isn't helpful –different people are attracted to different roles.
- Don't write reams of boring text – volunteers probably won't bother reading it. And definitely don't make your role sound like a formal job description with all the related person specification – all the details can be discussed, considered at a later date.
- Don't 'use acronyms, the general public won't know what you are talking about and potential candidates might be intimidated and think they are not the right person for the role
- Use clear, simple language with concise details about where the role will take place, what sort of activities it will involve, what sort of person it might appeal to and why it is a worthwhile role.

- Stress that volunteers are valued and volunteering for your organisation will be a welcoming, positive experience for all involved.
- And finally, try reading aloud what you've written. You may feel a bit daft, but you'll quickly spot what works and what doesn't.

### Other points to think about

**Role Title:** Give the opportunity a clear and interesting title. The title should be engaging immediately give some idea of what the role is about.

**Organisation Overview:** People are often attracted to volunteering as much for the aims and objectives of the organisation as the role itself. Provide a brief overview of your organisation and its purpose

**Location:** State the place where the volunteer will be working i.e. virtually, at your office or an off-site location. While your head office location may suit the volunteer, if the volunteer activity takes place elsewhere it may not suit the volunteer to travel to that location.

### Benefits to the Volunteer:

Volunteers give of their skills, experience and time for free but they are looking to satisfy some needs through their volunteering experience.

Do say what the volunteer will get out of it.

- What skills will they develop?
- Will they work with other volunteers, perhaps make new friends?
- What benefit will their volunteering bring to the organisation as a whole?
- How much fun will they have?
- Could they make a difference or "give something back" by sharing their skills and experience.
- Is it an opportunity to boost their confidence and self-esteem, whilst giving them structure to their week?