Volunteer Role Descriptions

It is important that all volunteers who come to your organisation are clear on what they would 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. On the web, you have just a few moments to grab someone’s attention. Most users scan pages, and move between pages to pick out the most useful segments, so opportunities that are concise and interesting are much more likely to be read and remembered.

Spending a bit of time on this will pay off in the long run. So here are a few guidelines:

* Keep sentences and paragraphs short. If it’s possible to cut a word out – cut it out
* 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. You wouldn’t necessarily expect the volunteer who’s great on office admin to help at a public event or give advice on a helpline. So target as accurately as possible. If you involve some volunteers in practical conservation work and others in producing your newsletter, present them as two separate roles.
* 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.

Volunteer role descriptions should be detailed but concise. Building the description around different headings is useful.

Role Title: Give the opportunity a clear and interesting title. The title should immediately give some idea of what the role is about. ‘Help a cancer charity’ doesn’t convey much. Is the opportunity in fundraising? helping in the office? supporting carers? ‘Admin support for a cancer charity’ would be much clearer.

Be honest: make the title sound enticing and encourage people to apply without making them think the role is more than it is.

**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

**Role Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the volunteer role.

**Main activities/tasks:** Clearly and specifically outline all the tasks the volunteer will undertake. This way, both you and the volunteer know exactly what is expected.. Give real examples of what a volunteer might actually do. You don’t need to include an exhaustive list, but concrete examples will help someone to imagine ‘that could be me’. ‘Tasks could include mowing, clearing leaves and weeding in our allotment garden’ paints a much clearer picture than ‘a variety of gardening tasks’.

**Time Commitment:** Outline the hours the volunteer is needed e.g. 2 hours a week on a Monday evening. In addition, outline the anticipated length of time the volunteer is required e.g. one weekend, 6 months or 2 years.

**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.

**Skills, Experience & Qualities:**

* Experience: previous paid or voluntary work experience, life experience
* Skills, knowledge and abilities: for example, languages, driving, knowledge of specialist fields, ability to use equipment; plus some indication of the level of competence required, and whether the person must have the skills or knowledge beforehand or can learn them on the job (for example "basic knowledge of Microsoft Word, or willingness to learn")
* Qualifications: exams, certificates, degrees, diplomas (some jobs require specific qualifications, but most do not and it can be fairer to ask for the skills or knowledge represented by the qualification rather than asking for the qualification itself)
* Personal attributes: such as strength, ability to lift, willingness to work in a hectic busy environment or on one's own
* Personal circumstances: such as being able to work weekends or evenings or to travel
* Would the role be suitable for younger people (ie 15, 16 or 17 year olds)?

**Training & Induction:** All volunteers should be offered an induction to your organisation regardless of the role they are undertaking. Further training may include role-specific training.

**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.

**For Further Information:** Give contact details of the person in the organisation who can speak with the prospective volunteer, answer any questions and arrange the next step if they want to take things forward.