

ROLE DESCRIPTIONS FOR VOLUNTEERS



Before Writing a Role Description

Before writing a role description it is a good idea to think about the role as a whole and the requirements being asked of that person and the commitment required.

A few things to think about:

- One-off, short or longer-term project?
- Individual, group/family or even job share?
- Daytime, evening or weekend?
- Variable patterns of commitment, e.g. weekly, fortnightly or monthly?
- Onsite or off-site?
- Specific skill or experience needed?
- Public or client-facing?
- Manual work or office based?
- Higher or lower level of supervision?
- Higher or lower level of training required/available?

What Are Volunteer Role Descriptions?

A volunteer role or task description is a document that details the specific activities a particular volunteer is involved in. It is rather like a job description, although using separate terminology is recommended to avoid implying a contract of employment for volunteers.

Useful things to think about when developing a role description might be:

- What tasks do you have that you need volunteers to do?
- How might these tasks be combined to create a role?
- How much training could you give?
- How much support and supervision can you give?
- Are there any areas of role development?
- What skills would the volunteer need to have already?

Writing a Volunteer Role Description

When writing a volunteer role description, you should try to make it detailed but concise. Building the description around different headings is useful. Some suggested headings are:

- Title of role (be specific, don't just call it a volunteer position)
- Purpose of role
- Main activities/tasks

- Qualities/experience/skills sought (where relevant)
- Training provision
- Availability
- Location
- Main point of contact/supervisor
- Writing a volunteer role description will also help you to focus on the practical elements of the Group's work.
- Be clear about what your volunteers will be expected to do.
- Draw up a list of the qualities, skills and experience you are looking for.
- Describe the activity realistically – make it sound attractive certainly, but be honest about its limitations and any special difficulties the volunteer can expect to meet. Roles inaccurately portrayed have a good chance of failure.
- In a role description, specify the amount of time required, the benefits to the volunteer, the duration of the opportunity and how the Group will benefit from the time given.

Using Volunteer Role Descriptions

Volunteer role descriptions should form an important part of your Group's volunteer management and recruitment process. They help to give the volunteer an accurate idea of the work they will be doing and ensure that the volunteer is attracted by the tasks as well as the Group's wider aims. They also help the Group organiser (or volunteer manager) to focus on what kind of volunteers they actually need and avoid mismatching people and tasks.

A volunteer role description is particularly useful if you are recruiting volunteers through a volunteer agency or bureau. It saves time and disappointment on both sides if a potential volunteer knows as much as possible about the role before contacting your Group. Advertising online through a service like www.do-it.org.uk or your Group's own website means that one-to-one contact with the volunteer begins later, but offering a full role description can help to make up for that.

It is important for volunteer managers to offer on-going support to volunteers and a volunteer role description can help you to structure supervision sessions. Referring to role descriptions is also a good way of demonstrating the breadth of what your volunteers do.