**Fact sheet 5: Creating volunteer role descriptions**

**Introduction**

This fact sheet contains information on how to write an effective role description and what to include. Creating volunteering role descriptions is good practice because:

* You and the volunteer are clear about the scope and boundaries of the role;
* Individuals will know from reading the description whether it is something they want to do and feel able to do. This means that you are less likely to get inappropriate applicants;
* By starting the role knowing what it is going to entail, a volunteer will be better prepared and less likely to leave on the basis that the role wasn’t what they were expecting.

This fact sheet is best used alongside the following resource documents in the ‘Recruiting Volunteers’ section of the resource library:

* [Sample role description](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1SWPOB2Wu2rFLvAv6X1naRJj-PPIgppIk)
* [Sample role promotion text](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1uSA02_cxfi9JZ7-FWXQkGvQgDT5TJm75)
* [Role description checklist](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1mDciREvm3DL_KS2UOFHQz8AR-LyKxJf9)

# Summary – how to write a role description

1. List all the tasks that volunteers could help with, and then group them into defined roles. This doesn’t have to be set in stone however; you might prefer to work in a way that responds to what volunteers can offer and create a role for them.
2. Create a task list – this is the core of the role description, and enables you and the volunteer to be clear from the start about what is expected of them. If roles develop and change over time, you can then easily move a task out of one role description and add it to another.
3. Read the information overleaf and look at the ‘sample role description’ resource sheet.
4. Write the full role description using the ‘Role description checklist’ resource sheet..
5. Write a briefer version to use on [Volunteer Connect](http://www.wcava.org.uk/volunteering/recruit-volunteers) (CAVA’s free online brokerage service)to ensure your role stands out – use the ‘Sample role promotion text’ as a guide.

So what goes into a role description?

1. **Organisation name and key information about the organisation** This should include the organisation’s aims and objectives/mission statement (if you have one), a brief description of the activities or services provided, and details of who benefits.
2. **Role title**   
   Give the role a title which sums up what the volunteer will be doing. Think about whether the title sounds attractive to a potential volunteer. For example:

* ‘Storyteller’ rather than ‘Children’s Club Volunteer’
* ‘Building Co-ordinator’ rather than ‘Volunteer Caretaker’
* ‘Library IT Mentor’ rather than ‘Library Volunteer’.

1. **Tasks and responsibilities**List all the tasks and responsibilities that the volunteer will be asked to undertake. If the volunteer will have a choice of which tasks they do, or if it will depend on their skills/experience, then make this clear, or consider dividing them up into more than one role description.
2. O**rganisation name and key information about the organisation**This should include the organisation’s aims and objectives/mission statement (if you have one), a brief description of the activities or services provided, and details of who benefits.
3. **Skills and experience**   
   Recruiting volunteers is usually inclusive rather than competitively selective, so only include skills and experience that are necessary for the role. Separate the skills that a volunteer must have from the skills which would be useful, but which are not necessary. For example, if you were offering a data entry volunteer opportunity you could reasonably ask for them to have previous experience of computer work, but not necessarily experience of your particular database, as this is something you could easily train them to use. Depending on the role, you might choose to create a person specification, listing necessary and desirable skills. Good practice involves avoiding or limiting descriptions of personal qualities. If there are restrictions on the kinds of volunteers you will accept, make this clear but give a rationale to ensure that you don’t appear discriminatory. This could apply to projects that require volunteers with personal experience of the issue they will be dealing with, with women or men-only projects, or roles with age restrictions.
4. **Time commitment**Give an indication of how much time the role will take up, e.g. ‘volunteers are asked to commit for a regular shift of 2 hours per week during our normal opening times of 10-4, Monday to Thursday’. In order to maximise the appeal of your role, consider the following points:

- Do you need volunteers to be available at specific days and times for a certain number of hours? Decide if you can be flexible – for example, could you accommodate a volunteer who does one hour instead of two, or volunteers every other week? If you are, say so.   
- Decide if you are able to accept short-term volunteers. Be aware that you will need to factor in the administrative time it takes to recruit and manage each volunteer.

-Decide if the role justifies asking for a long-term commitment (e.g. six months or more). Good examples of such roles include roles which require a significant level of training and input, or that involve developing a committed relationship with someone needing support. If it does, be specific about this and state the minimum time commitment you would accept. (Be aware, though, that you can’t legally bind volunteers to this).

1. **Benefits to the volunteer**

Whilst volunteers are not paid in money, they do look for other kinds of reward, whether that is something tangible, such as a character reference, or a quality, such as fulfilment. Make sure that you include these benefits in the role description, as it is easy to overlook or undervalue them. Check the list of common motivations below to see which might apply to your role:

* Doing something enjoyable
* Having new experiences
* Building confidence
* Developing new interests
* Work experience
* Boosting career options
* Getting a reference
* Enhancing employability
* Working with the public
* Learning a new skill
* Making new friends
* Meeting like-minded people
* Helping the local community
* Occupying time
* Having fun
* Feeling a sense of achievement
* Contributing something of wider benefit.

10) **Expenses**It’s good practice to make sure that volunteers aren’t out of pocket, and some people (particularly those on a limited income) can be put off volunteering if they end up out of pocket. Include information about expenses reimbursed to volunteers (e.g. travel costs, lunch). This information should also be in your volunteer policy.

11) **Training**Summarise the training that a volunteer will receive, tailoring it to the role; for example, a trustee will receive much more training than a shop assistant. You will need to consider what volunteers will need to know in order to perform the role adequately. An induction is usually given to introduce the volunteer to the organisation, as well as training in the practical skills they will need to learn. You will also need to consider if volunteers who want to increase their knowledge or develop their role can access additional training. Conversely, bear in mind that some individuals will be intimidated by too much information about training.

**12) Support and supervision**

You need to decide on the level of support and supervision you offer to volunteers. It is good practice to provide supervision at least every six months. You might describe opportunities for peer support such as volunteer social events or support sessions.

13) **Responsible to**

This should give the name and role of the person who will manage and support them, along with contact details.

14) **Recruitment end date**

You might have some roles that you will want to promote on an ongoing basis as you need a bank of volunteers (e.g., shop assistant). You might only need one social media assistant however, and such roles can be quite popular. Rather than recruit the first interested individual who makes contact with you, you might want to consider an end date for promoting the role, so you can consider multiple applications and select the most suitable person for the role.

If you decide to recruit in this way, it is good practice to email interested candidates with a fuller role description including the person specification. This ensures that the individuals you interview have understood what the role entails and the skills they need to have to carry out the role. Benefits to the volunteer also include paid expenses, free drinks and/or lunch being given training and having regular support and supervision (see below).

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