

Writing a Volunteer Role Description



Volunteer *Centre*
Dorset

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This guide has been produced by Volunteer Centre Dorset to offer guidance and suggestions to assist with the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Should you have any questions about volunteering, please do not hesitate to contact Volunteer Centre Dorset on 01305 269214 or email info@volunteeringdorset.org.uk

“Act as if what you do makes a difference, it does.” - **William James**

Overview

A volunteer role description is the way to attract volunteers to your organisation. It describes what you need and enables volunteers to know exactly what the expectations are.

It is also important as it helps staff and volunteers to understand and be confident in their roles.

A volunteer role description needs to be:

- ✓ Clear
- ✓ Interesting
- ✓ Informative and
- ✓ Enticing

When writing your role description, try and avoid using long sentences and paragraphs. Using bullet points is a great way to keep your information focussed and easy for the volunteer to read through.

What to avoid in a role description:

- ✗ Corporate 'jargon'
- ✗ The use of acronyms
- ✗ Unrealistic skills and qualities
- ✗ Complicated onboarding process
- ✗ Implication the volunteer is under contract to perform specific tasks

A volunteer role description should not look like a job description, it should only describe expectations of a role.

Be able to offer your role description in alternative ways than just in writing, they could be on a video, for example.

Ensure your role descriptions are consistent and in line with your volunteer policy.

What to include

Role title

- Set out what the role is, e.g. 'Vaccination Clinic Marshal', 'Phone Befriender' etc
- Avoid just using the term 'volunteer', this is too generic

Purpose of the role (the aims)

- How/why is this role important?
- How the role fits within your organisation's work
- Include what a difference this role will make

What the role involves

List what the main tasks and responsibilities are, try and set these out as what the volunteer is responsible for achieving as this is empowering for the volunteer.

- Does the role involve driving, entering people's homes, physical work, customer service etc?
- Will the volunteer be working alone, with other volunteers, with members of staff?
- What are the main tasks? Is it delivering shopping, calling someone on a regular basis, supporting activities at a youth club, speaking to patients in hospital? List a few things to provide a true picture of the role and reflect the range of tasks
- If the role involves working with individuals, provide information on their needs
- Be sure to include any role boundaries, such as tasks the volunteer will not be undertaking

Skills, experience, and qualities needed

- What are the base skills you would need a volunteer to have? E.g. a clean driving licence if they are a community car scheme driver
- Think about 'hard' skills and 'soft' skills, an example of hard skills would be knowledge of finances, computer skills etc, whereas 'soft' skills could include being a good listener, empathetic etc.
- Avoid a long wish list, this will deter people from applying
- Be clear on who the role is suitable for
- What opportunities are there for volunteers to develop within the role?

When and where

- How often would a volunteer be needed?
- What days / times are you looking for assistance with?
- Is this a regular commitment or is it more flexible, ad-hoc, or could it be either?
- Where is the role based? Is it at your organisation's office, in the community etc?

Support offered

- Be clear on what expenses you can cover, reasonable travel costs, parking etc
- What is your volunteer induction process, will they be 'shadowing' staff, other volunteers?
- Is there training the volunteer would need to complete? How long would this take, how is it delivered etc.
- Who does the role 'report' into? Who would be available for the volunteer to talk to and check in with on a regular basis?

What is in it for the volunteer?

This part of the role description is very important and set out the motivations for the volunteer.

- Be clear on the benefits to the volunteer; new skills, chance to be part of a team, meet new people etc
- Making a difference to a cause or their local community
- You want the best from your volunteer, so you want to give them the best experience

Other relevant information

- Will a DBS check be required?
- Is there parking available (if appropriate)?
- Do you offer support for volunteers with additional needs, such as a quiet space if needed?
- Is your opportunity accessible, for example could a wheelchair fit under your reception desk if the role requires this
- Do volunteers have access to refreshments, a break room, a place to store their belongings, provided with a uniform etc?
- Expectations of behaviour and dress (if appropriate)

How to apply and the onboarding process

- What does the volunteer need to do next?
- How will the volunteer hear from you and when?
- Set out your selection process, how will you decide if the role is suitable for the volunteer?
- Will an application form need to be completed?
- How to find out about other opportunities within your organisation

If you were looking for a volunteer role, what would the description need to include to 'speak' to you?

The Time Well Spent report, published by NCVO in 2019, found eight things which make up a good experience for volunteers:

- ✓ Inclusive of everyone
- ✓ Flexible around people's lives
- ✓ Impactful and makes a difference
- ✓ Connected to others, the cause, and the organisation
- ✓ Balanced, doesn't overburden the volunteer
- ✓ Enjoyable and makes people feel good
- ✓ Voluntary, not an obligation
- ✓ Meaningful to volunteers' lives, interests and priorities

Template

Role title Opportunity name	
Purpose of the role (the aims) Opportunity description	
What the role involves Opportunity description	
Skills, experience, and qualities needed Skills required	
When and where Opportunity description	
Support offered Opportunity description	
What is in it for the volunteer? Benefits and Perks	
Other relevant information Opportunity description	
How to apply and the onboarding process Opportunity description	

The titles in grey relate to the headings where this information should be captured on our free online platform to promote volunteering opportunities.

Additional Support

Volunteer Centre Dorset are here to offer any additional support for your volunteer recruitment, retention, and responsibility needs.

This support can be tailored to meet your individual requirements, or you can join group events and online training as you feel appropriate.

The support offered includes:

- Joining an online forum alongside other volunteer coordinators to offer peer to peer support and receive information
- Join our Volunteer Coordinators Network to meet other volunteer coordinators in your area
- Arrange specific training for staff and volunteers
- Participate in training offered either online or face-to-face
- Watch online training videos at a time which suits you
- Drop in events at locations across the Dorset Council area where you can speak to a member of staff
- Volunteer Fairs where organisations can present their volunteering opportunities and meet potential volunteers
- An online platform to advertise volunteering opportunities, create sessions, manage volunteers

Volunteer Coordinator Network

The Volunteer Coordinator Network is running monthly events at different locations across the Dorset Council area to enable coordinators to attend a meeting near to them. There is also a virtual event every other month for convenience.

The network includes an element of peer-to-peer support as well as discussing current issues, changes in regulations etc. The network takes its lead from the coordinators, covering items and issues they would like addressed.

Information from this guide has been taken from:

- <https://www.nandscvs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/template-volunteer-role.doc>
- <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/planning-for-volunteers/writing-volunteer-role-descriptions/#/>
- https://www.volunteer.ie/resource_library/designing-volunteer-role-descriptions/