

### Writing a Volunteer Role Description

When writing a volunteer role description, you should try to make it detailed but concise, it can be useful to use different headings. Some suggested headings:

**Title/Role:** Name of the role.

**Role Description:** An outline of the role and its contribution to the work of the organisation.

**Tasks:** List of the main tasks involved in the role.

**Experience/Skills:** Be careful of putting up barriers here. Willingness to learn, general attitude, skills and experience are more important than qualifications. Link these to your equal opportunities policy and the risk assessment you carried out for the role.

**Recruitment Process:** Make it clear if the volunteer needs any of the following: references, an interview, completed information form, Criminal Records Bureau check.

**Time Commitment:** You cannot demand that volunteers work a set number of hours a week but you can suggest an amount of time that you hope they can commit to and/or an end date by which work should be completed. Indicate whether there are fixed days and times you need the volunteer or if the role is flexible.

**Support:** State the name of the role of the person who will give support to the volunteer and what form this support will take. Give details of any training that is needed for this role.

**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. What can you offer them?

**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. This stage in the recruitment of the volunteer is crucial so make sure the contact person is readily available, has the information to hand and is friendly.



### Voluntary and Community Action

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### How can the Volunteer Centre help?

If you are a voluntary organisation or community group operating in southern Bedfordshire, we can help by:

- promoting your volunteering opportunities and signposting volunteers to your organisation
- providing information, guidance and training in all aspects of good practice and volunteer management.

Please give us a call on 01525 850559 or email [volunteer@action-centralbeds.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@action-centralbeds.org.uk) to arrange a meeting.

# Voluntary and Community Action

## Creating Volunteer Roles

Volunteering Information Sheet No.1

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A volunteer role description (sometimes known as a volunteer task description) 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.

### Volunteering Information Sheets

The Volunteer Centre has produced a series of Information Sheets on:

- setting up and managing a volunteer programme
- recruitment and development of volunteers and trustees.



They are available to download from our website or by contacting the Volunteer Centre (details on back page).

### Thinking about Volunteer Roles

Writing a role description allows you to sit down and work out exactly what role volunteers will play in the organisation and what tasks you need them to do. You should involve the Volunteer Co-ordinator and staff who will be working with and/or managing the volunteers by thinking:

- practically about tasks that staff members currently don't have time to do
- about dream projects that your organisation doesn't have the resources to tackle
- realistically about what an individual volunteer (or group of volunteers) could achieve.

Alternatively, sometimes organisations prefer to design a role specifically for a volunteer. This might be a good approach to adopt if a willing volunteer or group of volunteers offer both their time and a specific set of skills. Volunteer Managers could prepare for this by jotting down a wish list of tasks as they come up so that volunteer roles can be prepared quickly in response to certain skills a potential volunteer has.

### Elements of Volunteer Roles

In order to cater for a range of potential volunteers and promote diversity, organisations should try to design a variety of volunteer roles which suit people with varying motivations, skills and interests. You also need to plan for the different amounts of time people are able to offer. Mixing and matching these volunteer role characteristics will help to create a range of different roles suitable for:

- one-off, short or longer-term projects
- individual, group/family or even job share
- daytime, evening or weekend
- variable patterns of commitment, e.g. weekly, fortnightly or monthly
- onsite, off-site or e-volunteering
- specific skills or experience needed
- public or client-facing
- manual work
- higher or lower level of supervision
- higher or lower level of training required/available.





Volunteers also have different motivations, a volunteer wanting work-related experience will look for a different experience from a volunteer hoping to meet new people or find an activity that gives them a change from their daily routine.

While volunteers shouldn't feel over-committed or over-loaded in their work, it is also important that they are engaged in productive tasks and get a sense of achievement from their voluntary work.

Roles that use volunteers should complement the work of paid staff, rather than substitute work that staff currently do or recently did.

### Using Volunteer Role Descriptions

Volunteer role descriptions form an important part of an organisation's recruitment process. They help to give the volunteer an accurate idea of the work they will be doing. An organisation is more likely to keep someone on if they are fully aware of the types of work that they will be doing before they start.

They also help a Volunteer Manager to focus on what kind of volunteer they actually need and avoid mis-matching people and tasks. It is important for volunteer managers to offer ongoing support to volunteers and a volunteer role description can help you to structure supervision sessions.

Having defined a volunteer role, be prepared to adapt and amend it to suit the skills, knowledge, interests and availability of potential volunteers.

### Writing a Role Description

Writing a volunteer role description will also help you to focus on your organisation's volunteering programme. It is important to make sure that all the necessary resources and procedures are in place before the volunteer arrives; for example, if they need any particular equipment or supervision for their work, make sure you know when these will be available (see back page).

### Developing a Volunteer Person Specification

Person Specifications exist to make it easier for both volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations to realise what skills and abilities volunteers have or need.

The person specification should come about as a result of the volunteer role description.

When preparing a volunteer person specification it can be helpful to think through the following points:

- remember, you are thinking about recruiting a volunteer not an employee
- what do you want them to do and what attributes are necessary for this to be done?
- when filling in the essential column, ask yourself if it is really essential. Could you open the opportunity to a wider audience by being more creative and flexible about your needs?
- is it necessary that the person has certain skills or is it more important that they can gain new skills and experience?
- can you be flexible on the time commitment, could you have more than one volunteer?

TRY TO DESIGN A VARIETY OF VOLUNTEER ROLES WHICH SUIT PEOPLE WITH VARYING MOTIVATIONS, SKILLS AND INTERESTS, AND TIME AVAILABLE.

ROLES THAT USE VOLUNTEERS SHOULD COMPLEMENT THE WORK OF PAID STAFF, RATHER THAN SUBSTITUTE WORK THAT STAFF CURRENTLY DO OR RECENTLY DID.



From the role description, pick out the duties, grouping together those that are similar.

- translate duties into the abilities and skills needed to do the voluntary role. Specify necessary skills as far as possible in precise role-related terms
- identify any specific knowledge requirements for the role or requirement of some evidence of ability to learn
- where relevant, indicate qualifications and level of education required to the role, be as precise as possible
- identify experience required to carry out the role and define the extent

Once you have thought through these points it is time to start preparing a person specification. This can be done fairly easily by working to the headings as shown in the box below.

Volunteers will not always be able to show that they have the necessary attributes at a first interview. The volunteer may lack

Attributes	Essential	Desirable
Knowledge		
Skills		
Relevant Experience		
Personal Qualities		
Availability		
Education/ Training		

confidence and/or be very nervous, so this alone should not be used to show if a volunteer is suitable for your organisation.

Induction training over a longer period of time is a better measure of volunteers qualities as the training in itself will make volunteers confident of their own abilities.

### Further Information and Resources

For further information on writing volunteer roles, writing role descriptions and person specification contact the Volunteer Officer at Voluntary and Community Action or review the following resources:

- The Good Practice Guide for Everyone who Works with Volunteers, K Bowgett, K Dickie and M Restall, Volunteering England, 2nd Edition, 2002.
- Volunteer England website, [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)



WHEN COMPLETING A PERSON SPECIFICATION MAKE SURE THAT THE SKILLS/ATTRIBUTES REQUIRED BY A VOLUNTEER ARE REALLY ESSENTIAL TO THE ROLE.

VOLUNTEERS WILL NOT ALWAYS BE ABLE TO SHOW THAT THEY HAVE THE NECESSARY ATTRIBUTES AT A FIRST INTERVIEW.

INDUCTION TRAINING OVER A LONGER PERIOD OF TIME IS A BETTER MEASURE OF A VOLUNTEER'S QUALITIES.