

Writing an Inspiring Role Description

A well written and clear role description is more likely to attract volunteers. The time spent creating an engaging and informative description will pay off in the long-run, particularly so where the role has been thought through and shaped to be rewarding for both the volunteers and the organisation.

Role title

This should:

- Be as short as possible
- Encapsulate accurately what the role is all about
- Act as a mini role description (if possible)
- Attract people's attention quickly - if it looks interesting, they will click to find out more.

Things to avoid:

- generic titles, e.g. 'Volunteer' or 'General Assistant'.
- CAPITAL LETTERS – looks like shouting & is more difficult to read
- Organisation name in the title – not necessary as the role title never appears independently of the organisation name.

Role descriptions

Reading on a screen is harder than reading on paper. Research shows that most users scan-read online material, so roles that are clear and concise are much more likely to be read.

To make the description engaging, use active voice, first & second person and plain English.

- Short role description:
 - Keep this short and to the point – max 255 characters (including spaces)
 - include the tasks involved & avoid talking about the organisation
 - Include minimum qualities & skills needed for the role, and how the volunteer will benefit from volunteering in the role
 - include something about impact.
 - This should act as an accurate and engaging taster.

The prospective volunteer will see this in the search results online.

If they like this summary, they can click on 'details' to read the full description.

- Main role description
 - This can be much longer with more detailed information, to begin with, on:
 - Tasks involved in the role
 - Who the volunteer will work with
 - Who the service users are
 - Time commitment
 - Benefits to the volunteer including specific skills and experience, training and development opportunities
 - The impact the volunteers make on service users, the community and organisation
 - Later in the role description, include information on the organisation or project

Example short descriptions:

1- Lunchtime Assistant

Volunteers are needed to help lay the table, serve lunch and wash-up.

This might be better as:

Lunch-club Helper

Make friends over lunch. Our friendly stroke club needs volunteers to help with lunch-time duties and to socialise with members.

2- Shop Assistant

Homelessness charity works to give people a chance to help themselves. We run outreach, hostel and support services. We need volunteers to help in our charity shop.

Might be better as:

If you enjoy helping people or like to start a career in retail, this could be for you.

Our busy shop needs an enthusiastic assistant to help sort, select and sell. Profits go towards our work helping homeless people to help themselves.

Skills required

You can specify your minimum requirements for a role using the skills tick list and/or the skills narrative box.

In the tick list, only select items that are absolute minimum requirements, without which you would not consider an applicant. The items in the skills tick list are very specific and not appropriate for all roles (e.g. roles requiring particular qualities or soft skills, such as customer service roles).

The narrative box is often much more useful – you can specify your requirements more flexibly – e.g. welcoming and reliable.

These should not be used as a wish list – the more we ask for the smaller the pool and the more barriers we place in front of prospective volunteers.

Directions

- Give bus / tram details, names of stops, land marks etc.
- Include a post code if the role is based at a fixed location.
- If the role has a flexible location, such as a mentor / befriender role, the location of the volunteer role can't be supplied.

When is the role available

Advertising start and end dates are important and help you to be in control of when your role is advertised.

Maximum period of advertising on our website is 12 months. This should ideally be the default advertising period, unless the role is short-term.

It is good to be realistic – having a deadline doesn't necessarily result in more applications. It is worth allowing more time to allow more people to see the role. If it gets filled, the role can always be deactivated.

Checklist

- ✓ Well-written roles are more likely to attract volunteers: keep the word count down for short description
- ✓ Make the role sound as interesting and appealing, and maintain accuracy
- ✓ Make the role title appealing and descriptive
- ✓ Avoid generic role titles, e.g. 'Helper volunteer', 'Volunteer with us'
- ✓ Place info most important to volunteer at the start of the role description
- ✓ Use short paragraphs and short sentences
- ✓ Use an active voice & Plain English
- ✓ Avoid jargon and acronyms
- ✓ Check spelling
- ✓ Enter a realistic *advertising end date*
advertise for 12 months, unless it's a one-off / short term role
- ✓ Include directions