

Designing the Volunteer Position Description

A written volunteer position description is one of the single most important factors in overall volunteer program management. Written position descriptions should be prepared for every volunteer position, no matter how large or small. The advantage of a written position description is that the duties, expectations, and responsibilities of both the volunteer and the organization are outlined clearly. Knowing the requirements of individual volunteer roles in advance simplifies the selection/recruitment and utilization of volunteers.

Written position descriptions challenge an organization to provide volunteers with opportunities to contribute that are both challenging and rewarding. Many individual volunteers and entire volunteer programs either fail entirely or are not as successful as they could be because the relationship of the volunteer to the clientele and to salaried staff was never clearly defined.

This lack of definition often results in a less-than-positive experience for the clientele, confusion on the part of the volunteer, and resentment on the part of salaried staff.

Based on your own experiences and on these comments, let's review how position descriptions are used.

Position descriptions are a starting point for discussing volunteer involvement...not a predetermined, inflexible list of responsibilities! If the position description sparks an interest in a person considering a volunteer role (whether new or a change from a previous volunteer role), then the stage is set for discussion of options for carrying out this assignment, or part of it. It's often practical to develop position descriptions with people who might later be involved. This isn't a one-time task; it's an on-going review with continuous negotiation.

Some key considerations for a position description include:

1. Is the position needed?
2. Are the tasks reasonable?
3. Are the tasks clear enough to be understood?
4. Are duties and responsibilities clear?
5. What resources are available for this assignment?
6. Who will be the advisor or supervisor?
7. How long will the position last?
8. What qualifications are required for the position?
9. How will the position be evaluated?

Volunteer position descriptions may vary considerably in format and length, but should include certain basic information. The specific volunteer **ROLE TITLE** should be identified along with the estimated **TIME REQUIRED** (both in preparation time and actual involvement time). State the **BENEFITS** for volunteering in this role. The **GENERAL PURPOSE** of the volunteer position should be stated broadly, followed by **SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES** described in greater detail. The **QUALIFICATIONS** needed by the volunteer should be identified clearly along with any **RESOURCES AVAILABLE** (materials, resources available, training, etc.) as part of the volunteer position. List the **EXPECTED RESULTS** for the position. Finally, and yet perhaps most importantly, the **CONTACT PERSON**, the mentor or supervising volunteer or salaried staff who will evaluate the volunteer should be identified.

Include space for the volunteer's signature. The position description then becomes a contract of expectations or a volunteer agreement. It also builds greater risk management protection.

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Volunteerism for the Next Generation

