

Good Practice Guides: Building Foundations

No. 2 - Creating a Volunteer Task Description

Key Points

It is important not to overlook this important aspect of volunteer management. Whether it is a staff member or member of the board, everyone should know what they are expected to do in their role and volunteers are no different.

A volunteer Task Description is also critical in recruiting and retaining your volunteers. In other words, to attract them to your organisation and to provide a role that continues to enthuse and motivate your volunteers to stay!

Key Components

It is important to remember that the task description for volunteers has to reflect a balance between how the organisation wants to involve the volunteer and creating an interesting and fulfilling opportunity for that volunteer.

What Tasks Need To Be Completed?

When looking at how you would like to involve volunteers, it is important to consult with staff and any existing volunteers to help identify roles and tasks that need doing. You could ask them following questions:

- What activities and projects have you wanted to do but have not had the time for?
- What would you like to see done that no one has the skills for?
- What could be done to enhance the service you are offering?
- Are there specific tasks or projects that volunteers could take on that would help support the staff or service users?

It is also worth looking at any future strategies of the organisations and seeing if there is scope for involving volunteers in this work. Finally, when identifying roles, remember not to make assumptions about the task. Stuffing envelopes may be terribly dull for some individuals, whilst others may find the role therapeutic and relaxing and something different from the stresses and pressures of life and previous jobs.

Getting the Task Description Right

When designing your task description, it should remain fairly flexible and not too formal but it should outline the tasks that are involved and crucially explain why doing that task will make a difference to the wider organisation and its service users. For example, it might be easy to see why working on the marketing strategy may make a difference but it might be less obvious (but just as impactful) why a role that involves organising the publicity material in the display racks makes a difference.

The Where, When and What-Not's

Once a task description has been given a purpose and goal, it is then important to look at how and when the role will take shape and what considerations and support can be given to the volunteer. Consider the following when making up your Task Description:

- How many hours per week do you expect the role to require?
- Is there a minimum commitment required from volunteers, e.g. four months?
- Does it take place during normal office hours or at weekends or evenings?
- What kinds of skills and attributes do you expect your volunteer to need?
- Are there development opportunities and/or training available to support the role?
- What can a volunteer hope to gain from their volunteering with you?
- Any unique details about the role for example, do the volunteers need their own transport or equipment?

Review

Once you have put in place the task description, look at the final draft or better yet, get someone else to look at it for you. Is the role realistic, is it too simplistic? Are the skills you are looking for meeting the needs of the task? It is also worth looking at areas where there is scope for flexibility and compromise, for example if a volunteer can only make a certain time of day, are you able to change it? If they don't have all the required skills can their development in that area be accommodated?

And finally, when your volunteer is in place, review the role with them at appropriate intervals for example every three months, this will provide you with the best feedback on the success of the volunteer role.

More help?

If you would like more help or advice in relation to this Guide please contact STRiVE on the following details:

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