

Writing volunteer opportunities for volunteernow.co.uk



On volunteernow.co.uk, well-written, appealing and clearly expressed opportunities are far more likely to attract potential volunteers.

Title of opportunity

An opportunity on volunteernow.co.uk has to attract people's attention in just a few seconds. As a potential volunteer scans the listing of opportunities following a search, they will click through for more information only if it looks interesting.

Use a descriptive, eye-catching title for the opportunity. Try to avoid generic opportunity titles such as 'Volunteer' or 'Admin assistant'.

Don't use all CAPITAL LETTERS - they make words more difficult to read and make it appear that you're shouting at people.

Name of organisation

How the organisation wishes to be known. If you are advertising for the opportunity county-wide, it is advisable to indicate the town/city in brackets, after the name, where the opportunity is based.

If the opportunity is being advertised by a Volunteer Now office, the organisation name should be the name of the organisation the office is posting on behalf of, not the name of the Volunteer Now office itself.

It should never be left blank as it's important for the volunteer to know who is providing the opportunity.

Distance & Location

Provide a clear address and postcode as this will link to the Googlemap search. Ensure that these are the details for the location at which the opportunity is based if it is different from the address of the contact person or organisation.

About the Opportunity

Reading from a screen is harder than reading on paper. Research shows that most internet users scan a webpage for no more than 3 seconds, so opportunities that are concise and logical are much more likely to be read in detail.

Keep the opportunity summary description short, snappy and straight to the point. This will appear on the search listing and is your opportunity to catch their eye and 'sell' the opportunity. Make it clear what is required of the volunteer and how they will benefit from volunteering for this opportunity.

Try to incorporate something new, innovative, exciting, challenging – people are attracted to new things – either in the organisation or the role.

When writing an opportunity description, try to answer the following questions:

- What does the role involve?
- Who will the volunteer be working with?
- What skills will they develop?
- What benefit will their volunteering bring to the organisation, and to them personally?

Get the reader involved. Refer to the reader as 'you' and use the second person ('you, 'your' and 'yours' etc) in the description. This helps people to visualise themselves in the role. Talk about your organisation in terms of 'we' and 'our'. For example, 'we are looking for' or 'our organisation can offer you'.

Keep sentences and paragraphs short, bite-sized and aim to keep the word count down. More than fifteen words in a sentence reduces the clarity of the meaning. Always check spelling and punctuation, and if possible ask someone to proof read it. It can help to think in terms of a paid job advert – i.e. really try to 'sell' the opportunity.

Use simple language and avoid complicated or technical words unless absolutely necessary. Less is more. Efficient writing enables efficient reading. Make sure that you use language that your reader uses. It can be useful to imagine that you are reading a newspaper and limit your vocabulary to that found in the newspaper.

If possible, include a website link to your organisation so that the potential volunteer can find out more about you and what you do.

Remember to say when the opportunity is available – what day/s and how many hours per week.

Examples:

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

Might be better expressed 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.

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 expressed as:

Retail Assistant - Are you keen to get some experience in retail? Our busy shop needs an enthusiastic assistant to help sort, select and sell. Profits go towards our work helping homeless people to help themselves.

Minimum Hours per week

Do include minimum hours. Do not include 'Not Specified' as this can be misleading. You can include more descriptive information in the 'About the Opportunity' section.

Skills/Qualifications

This field should be used to specify any skills or qualifications the volunteer should have in order to undertake this role. If there are no specific skills necessary there will always be qualities required for any given opportunity, such as 'friendly' or 'confident and outgoing'. This section should not be left as 'Not Specified'.

Expense Detail

Do not include 'Not Specified' as this could imply that there are no expenses available. Ensure that you make statements about the organisation's expenses policy – what is provided and if possible how and when they are reimbursed.

Example: Volunteers are reimbursed agreed expenses in relation their role. Mileage is paid at 40p per mile. Public transport costs are paid on receipts being produced. Expenses are reimbursed monthly on completion of an expenses form.

Volunteer Activity

Ensure that only ONE volunteer activity is ticked and that it accurately describes the opportunity as this will link to the search engine.

Formatting

Be aware that if you copy and paste from Microsoft Word, all the formatting such as bullet points and fonts will be stripped out. Ensure that you 'Paste as plain text'. This is to maintain consistency so that all the opportunities advertised on volunteernow.co.uk are in a similar format.

Checklist

Remember, well-written opportunities are far more likely to attract potential volunteers.

Do:

- Make it sound interesting and appealing
- Use a concise and descriptive opportunity title
- Place important information at the start of the opportunity description
- Use short paragraphs and short sentences
- Keep the word count down
- Avoid jargon and acronyms
- Check spelling and punctuation and get someone if possible to proof read it
- Include clear postcode and address
- Include minimum hours and availability
- Include details about expenses.

Don't:

- Use generic opportunity titles, e.g. 'Admin volunteer', 'Volunteer'
- Use too many words – they can be a real turn-off for the reader – keep it simple
- Use uninspiring, boring descriptions of roles and ideal candidates
- Put too much emphasis on the role and not enough on the person
- Use graphics or logos in the text of the opportunity
- Add too much technical detail about the role or organisation.

Volunteernow.co.uk: Code of Practice

These are the obligations between Volunteer Now and volunteer involving organisations using www.volunteernow.co.uk.

Volunteer Now will:

- Provide support to organisations wishing to use volunteernow.co.uk.
- Help organisations to provide high quality opportunity information to volunteers searching volunteernow.co.uk.
- Keep organisations informed about volunteernow.co.uk with regular updates.
- Ensure that the website is online and available as consistently as possible, and inform relevant organisations when unavoidable downtime is scheduled.

Organisations who advertise volunteering opportunities will:

- Ensure their advertised opportunities provide high quality, current information – and that this information (including contact details) is checked and updated on a regular basis. We recommend that organisations review their opportunities and information monthly and advise Volunteer Now of any changes to be made.
- Inform Volunteer Now of any changes to their organisation or contact details, including office closures and interruptions to internet service
- Contact prospective volunteers who have enquired or applied for one of their opportunities as soon as Volunteer Now forwards the volunteer's details to the organisation contact person. In line with good volunteer practice, we recommend that organisations follow up with applications within 10 working days.
- Act promptly on requests from Volunteer Now to modify or update their opportunities.

Organisations who are not advertising their opportunities via volunteernow.co.uk will:

- Inform Volunteer Now of any changes to volunteer opportunities or organisational circumstances. This includes change of contact details and office closures.