

Developing Volunteer Roles

What does the organisation want volunteers to do?

Always think creatively about the ways in which volunteers could become involved with and enhance the work of your organisation.

By developing a range of volunteering options that your organisation could offer, you can maximise the number and 'types' of people who would consider volunteering with you. Try to be as imaginative as possible and be specific on both **what** volunteers will do and **how** they will do it.

Consider all the issues that might influence a potential volunteer in deciding whether or not to make a commitment to your organisation:

Why?

It is vital that the work you ask volunteers to do is meaningful and brings clear and identifiable benefits to the service users, the community or the environment. While most people have a number of motivations for volunteering in the first place, the feeling of satisfaction is essential to ensure they keep coming back!

What will the volunteer be doing?

Time is a valuable commodity. Research commonly identifies flexibility and variety as two of the key things that people want from volunteering. Try to avoid the habit of thinking about voluntary work within the limitations that dictate how paid jobs are organised and make the most of the uniquely flexible approach that volunteers can bring. Try to offer *variety* through short-term volunteer assignments with a limited commitment, as well as ongoing volunteer roles needing a longer commitment. Many people who initially volunteer for a one-off event or short-term assignment are prepared to make a longer commitment to the organisation once they get involved.

Where and when will the volunteer carry out the role?

Thinking outside the employment model can also produce a much greater degree of *flexibility* in your volunteer opportunities. While it may seem easier to manage regular, rigid work patterns, more flexible ways of working can actually require less management in the long run, as they encourage volunteers to take responsibility for achieving results rather than completing tasks. Some kinds of work demand a regular time commitment, such as a team task, where everyone must be in the same place at the same time. However, many administrative and one-to-one activities could allow the volunteer to set his/her own hours. Think about the location for the work too. Must volunteers come to you (or the service-user) or can they volunteer from home, e.g. through 'virtual volunteering' or telephone befriending.

Who will the volunteer work with?

A key benefit from volunteering is meeting people and making friends, so it is important to be clear about whether the work is solitary, one-to-one or part of a team effort. Of course, there is no reason why many solitary activities could not be organised to allow social contact.

Potentially tedious jobs for an individual, such as stuffing envelopes, can be done more quickly by a group of four or five friends who also get the opportunity for a good old chat. Try and also identify particular tasks that offer the potential for groups or families to volunteer together on an ongoing basis. Another issue to consider is the relationships between the volunteer and paid staff. What is the nature and level of contact between them?

What supervision and support will be offered?

If you have been imaginative in designing roles or assignments, you may also need to show the same imagination in the ways in which you support volunteers and supervise their work. The initial induction, which introduces new volunteers to both the wider organisation and their particular role, becomes even more important when flexible volunteering options make regular, direct contact with some volunteers more difficult. If you are expecting volunteers to work autonomously, perhaps at a different site from their supervisor, additional training may be required. In any case, it is always useful to allow a 'settling in period' when the volunteer can expect a little extra support and any potential problems can be identified at an early stage. Don't forget about very practical forms of support too, i.e. what out of pocket expenses will a volunteer receive?

What's in it for the volunteer?

While most volunteers are motivated to some extent by helping to meet a need or fulfilling a moral or social duty, it is important to be able to identify more direct or personal benefits that they could get from a particular role too. Although every individual will have his or her own unique set of motivations for volunteering, it may be helpful to be aware of the most common reasons which may be in relation to values, career, social, learning, building confidence, etc.

If you really can't think of any potential benefits, you will need to think again, or maybe try redesigning the role. However, if you can, it may give you some ideas about the sorts of people who might be most interested in undertaking it. This leads to the final question in this part of your recruitment plan...

What skills/qualities will the volunteers need?

When you have addressed each of the key issues listed above, you are already halfway to answering this question. By specifying what exactly the role requires, it becomes increasingly clear what experience, skills, knowledge and qualities an individual needs to possess to fulfil the role. This means that you will know what to look for when potential volunteers make contact with your organisation. However, make sure that you distinguish between what is desirable for the role and what is truly essential, otherwise you may have excluded a whole group of potentially suitable individuals from becoming volunteers. Consider too if volunteers must already possess the identified skills, qualities, etc., or if they could develop them in the role or through training.

The following table illustrates how clarifying the nature of the role will help you to identify the right volunteer(s) for the role.

IDENTIFYING VOLUNTEER QUALITIES

	Assignment/Role	Volunteer
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the purpose of the volunteer role. 	
What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List all tasks involved, identifying the key tasks. Identify any aspects that might be difficult or require particular skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What skills, experience, attitudes, etc., are needed to do the work? What qualities are needed to work with clients? Are there any physical requirements?
Where & when	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specify any set work times or minimum hours or if flexibility is required, e.g. <i>It is hoped that the volunteer will contribute 2 hrs per week</i> State where the work is carried out and transport needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a minimum/maximum time commitment? Are there set times or days? How important is reliability? Flexibility? Does the volunteer need access to own transport? Public transport? Are there any problems with access?
Who	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is this a solitary position or part of a team? Outline relationships between paid staff and volunteers. What is the management system? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What special requirements arise from working alone - or in a team? Will volunteers need initiative, team skills etc.?
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline the support systems and methods of supervision. Describe induction and/or training that will be available. Specify a 'settling in' period. Specify what expenses will be available to the volunteer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the volunteer need to be willing to ask for support? Is attendance at supervision meetings or training compulsory?
Rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify what the volunteer could get out of the role. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What might motivate people to volunteer for this role or to stay in it?

You need to compile this information for every volunteer role or activity to produce a **volunteer role description** and **volunteer specification**. It may seem a lot of work to do this for every role (it is!), but the volunteer role description and volunteer specification are the basis of good practice in recruiting volunteers. They also prove useful in all sorts of other tasks from selecting volunteers and matching them to the right role to identifying training requirements and as a basis for supervision and support systems.

Aim to produce or upgrade role descriptions and specifications for all your current volunteer roles. Depending on the number of roles in your organisation, this may take some time, but it will make your job easier in the long run! You may also find it more efficient to enlist the help of a number of colleagues, either working as a group or taking individual responsibility for the particular role they know well. Where you wish to develop a new role for volunteers, make drafting the role description and specification the first step- a pre-requisite to recruitment. This approach ensures that paid staff (if there are any) are clear about the volunteers' place and are prepared to manage their involvement effectively right from the start- especially important if there is any scepticism or resistance to developing volunteering in this area.

What follows are **planning documents** that will help you identify the key facts that should be included in a volunteer role description and volunteer specification. Note that these are planning notes and not necessarily the best format to use for your final role description and specification. You may wish to present your final role description and specification in a few short paragraphs. It is important to tailor the style and amount and type of information to the context you are using them for, i.e. part of an information pack for potential volunteers, marketing purposes, website or social media use. Overall, it is always important to use clear plain, non-employment related language, avoid jargon, make it as interesting and as short as possible.

VOLUNTEER ROLE DESCRIPTION Planning Notes

Role title:

Main purpose:

Questions/issues	Notes
<p>1. What?</p> <p>List all tasks in order of priority, identifying any client/user group the volunteer will be working with. What might be difficult or unpleasant?</p>	
<p>2. When?</p> <p>Hours per week? Day, evenings, weekends? Short or long term involvement?</p>	
<p>3. Where?</p> <p>Include everywhere the volunteer will be expected to go.</p>	
<p>4. With whom?</p> <p>Will volunteer work alone or with other volunteers or paid colleagues?</p>	
<p>5. Support, supervision, training.</p> <p>Who will support/supervise the volunteer?</p> <p>What training, support, supervision will be needed?</p>	

<p>6. Expenses etc.</p> <p>What expenses do you offer? Travel, telephone, stationery, meals etc? What else do you offer to help volunteers to carry out their role, e.g. child care?</p>	
<p>7. What does the role offer volunteers?</p> <p>Make two lists - what the role does and does not offer. A challenge? Friendship? A chance to change things? Personal development? Training? etc.</p>	

VOLUNTEER ROLE SPECIFICATION Planning Notes

Role title:

Main purpose: _____

Questions/issues	Notes
<p>1. What?</p> <p>What skills, experience, attitudes, etc., are needed? What is needed to work with clients? Physical requirements?</p> <p>Qualities to cope with difficult aspects?</p>	
<p>2. When?</p> <p>Minimum/maximum time commitment?</p> <p>How important is reliability?</p>	
<p>3. Where?</p> <p>Do volunteers need own transport, or be willing to use public transport?</p> <p>Access requirements?</p>	
<p>4. With whom?</p> <p>What special requirements arise from working alone - or in a team? Initiative?</p> <p>Team skills?</p>	
<p>5. Support, supervision and training.</p> <p>What is expected in terms of: Willingness to ask for support? Attendance at supervision or training?</p>	

<p>6. Expenses etc.</p> <p>Does the volunteer have to fill in forms to claim expenses? Are you expecting people to be out of pocket?</p>	
<p>7. What does the volunteer want?</p> <p>You cannot fill in this space in advance - it is up to the volunteer!</p>	

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