

# Writing a Role Description

Role Descriptions (also known as position descriptions or duty statements) are essential for volunteer recruitment and ongoing management. A Role Description outlines the tasks associated with a volunteering role and other pertinent information related to the role. Role Descriptions are also a useful tool for managing expectations on both sides: they help the volunteer and the organisation understand what is in scope and out of scope for the role.

Good Role Descriptions are a fantastic recruitment tool. They demonstrate to prospective volunteers that your organisation is professional and organised. Further, the information in a Role Description correlates directly with the fields on GoVolunteer, Volunteering Australia's national volunteer referral database. This reduces the workload of volunteer recruitment, meaning Managers of Volunteers can focus their time on getting new volunteers through the door.

Volunteering Australia recommends thinking about the following when writing a Role Description:

## Position Title

Ensure your volunteering role has a title that reflects the nature of the work to be undertaken. If you are recruiting volunteers to provide companionship to isolated persons, your title could be Social Support Volunteer. If you are recruiting a volunteer to assist your in-house marketing team, the title could be Marketing Support Officer. The more prescriptive you are, the more likely people are to read through the rest of the role details.

## Time Commitment

Be direct about the time commitment you are looking for from volunteers. If you need people at set times or for a set number of hours, include this information. If you are vague about the commitment required, volunteers may self-screen out of applying because they may either overestimate or underestimate the commitment you are looking for. Being upfront about the commitment required makes recruitment easier, because only applicants who are able to commit to what you are looking for will apply. If your role can be flexible, including the ability for volunteers to work remotely or virtually, include this information too.

## Location

Detail where the role will take place. This is especially important if your office has multiple sites. Many volunteers search for roles via location, and GoVolunteer is able to geo-locate positions by postcode. If positions can be undertaken remotely, make this clear in the role description.

## Description of Role

Include a description of the role and a list of tasks the volunteer will be required to undertake. Provide an accurate description of the role and try not to 'dress it up' in an attempt to make your role sound more attractive. The description is one of the most important parts of the Role Description because it paints a picture of the role to the prospective volunteer and enables them to imagine themselves in the role. Be clear on which tasks are required, and which tasks are negotiable to ensure your position is inclusive.

## Outcome/Goals

Detail the intended outcome or goals of the role. Most volunteers identify a motivation to help others and make a difference as reasons for becoming a volunteer. People want to know how their involvement makes a difference. Being clear from the outset about the purpose of the role will enable applicants to understand what they can hope to achieve as a volunteer, and how this will make a difference for your organisation, your clients, or the broader community.

## Training

Detail any training the volunteer will be required to undertake as part of the role. Be clear about whether this training must be completed prior to starting in the role, or whether it will take place on the job. Volunteering Australia recommends that costs for training are not passed on to the volunteer, as volunteers should not be out-of-pocket as a result of their volunteering. However, we recognise that sometimes organisations may ask volunteers to contribute some or all of the costs for training. If your organisation requires this of volunteers be up front about this, and ensure you consider alternative options for those who may not be able to overcome a financial barrier to participation.

## Background Checks

Be clear if the role requires volunteers to undergo a background check and provide information on what checks are required and why. Background checking differs between jurisdictions so be sure to check your state or territory's legislation. Background checking is sometimes required as part of delivering services in particular industries such as disability support. Specify whether your organisation covers the cost of background checks, including working with children/vulnerable people checks, noting that in some jurisdictions background checks are free for volunteers.

## Qualifications

If you require a volunteer to have a qualification be clear about this in the Role Description, especially if this is non-negotiable for funding or compliance reasons. Be clear if you will provide a qualification for those who are interested in undertaking one as part of the role.

## Benefits

Detail the benefits of the role, and don't underestimate what your organisation can provide. Volunteers are motivated for a variety of reasons, and these motivations can be catered for through numerous benefits such as meeting new people, learning new skills, and undertaking training. If there are particular forms of recognition your organisation provides, detail them in the benefits section.

## National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Role Descriptions are a wonderful tool to help with volunteer recruitment and manage expectations. Further, they provide a tool for ongoing support and development of volunteers. The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement recommend that Role Descriptions should be provided for all volunteering positions. They are a key mechanism for ensuring volunteers are suited to the role they have applied for, and they enable your organisation to effectively plan for volunteer engagement by thinking through the requirements of any given role. Finally, Role Descriptions are an important tool for meeting your work, health and safety obligations to your volunteers and ensuring you are complying with insurance requirements by clearly providing a scope for the role.