

## Developing Task Descriptions

Task descriptions may seem more suited to employee roles but they are an important part of how you work with volunteers in your organisation. Many organisations don't have task descriptions, preferring to define roles around individuals skills and aptitudes. It may seem that working in this way would allow you to be more inclusive and flexible but in fact the opposite is often true. If you do not **work out** what your needs and boundaries are then it is difficult to judge whether an individual has the skills that you need and whether you can offer them the support that they need. This very flexible approach either leads to organisations being very conservative about who they will take on because they have not really assessed the level of support and types of roles that they can offer. Or at the other end of the spectrum it can leave volunteers floundering because they are unsupported and have no clear role.

Writing a task description allows you to sit down and work out exactly what role volunteers will play in your organisation and what work you need them to do. By looking at this you can make a clear and logical assessment of the skills that you would need a volunteer to have. Be sensible; in an ideal world you may want a volunteer with a fast typing speed and office experience but to get the task done maybe all you need is someone with basic computer literacy. However also be realistic if someone could not possibly do the role without a certain skill then you are setting both the volunteer and yourself up to fail if you take on someone without this skill.

There is still room for flexibility. If you look at a task description carefully you may find that there are ways of including people who don't have all the skills that you need. You may have money for training so that someone with limited IT skills can learn and then help with computer work. Or maybe the role can be split up so that you have volunteers with different skills doing different tasks. If there is only a small part of the role that an individual can't do then maybe that part can be given to someone else to do. If a volunteer needs a lot of support maybe it would be possible to take another volunteer on to support them, or maybe they already have a support worker who would be able to help them settle into the organisation. However do be realistic if there is no scope for flexibility it may be better to help the individual find a more appropriate role in another organisation.

You may find that there is a core task that you need volunteers to do but there is room for flexible role development outside the core task. For instance an organisation may be looking for volunteers to help out at a youth club, the core role is supporting and supervising young people taking part in arts classes. So primarily the organisation is looking for people with the appropriate skills to do this. However as well as this core role there is opportunity for volunteers who are interested in marketing, fundraising and DTP to get involved in those areas, so the role can be developed to suit volunteers with additional skills.

Having a clear task description will help you to recruit volunteers. People are much more likely to contact you regarding roles that they can imagine themselves doing. If you are vague about what you need volunteers for then you will only be approached by people interested in your organisation. If you are advertising a specific role then you will be approached by people interested in your organisation and people interested in the role. A task description also lets potential volunteers decide whether the role is appropriate for them. You are more likely to keep someone on if they are fully aware of the types of work that they will be doing before they start.

Useful things to think about when developing a task description might be:

- What tasks do you have that you need volunteers to do?
- How might these tasks be combined to create a role?
- How much training could you give?
- How much support and supervision can you give?
- Are there any areas of role development?
- What skills would the volunteer need to have already?