

Less Time, More Impact

Suggestions for Surviving in Organizations

Position Descriptions for Volunteers

Your community organization can fulfill its mission more effectively by engaging the talents of its volunteers. People enjoy serving their community and will help your organization if they are asked, if they see the value of your organization's activities, and if they have a clear sense of what you need and expect from them. Position descriptions are the key tool for recruiting and maintaining an effective volunteer base.

What is a Position Description?

A position description is a general description of a job to be done by a particular individual or group. Position descriptions can help a group tread the fine line between successful activities and futile efforts. Good descriptions help volunteers in their jobs, cut down on unclear interpretations, and are constantly referred to for guidance that everyone can agree on.

Position Descriptions:

- ✓ Will clarify what the individual or group is expected to do
- ✓ Provide ideas to discuss in recruiting volunteers
- ✓ Define work that needs to be done
- ✓ Offers volunteers a chance to change jobs and grow
- ✓ Helps systematically plan for program expansion



A position description tells an individual what he/she needs to know.

- 1) **Title:** The “official name” of the job or position-states it in two or three words.
- 2) **Purpose:** States why this job is important and describes how it will affect other volunteers.
- 3) **Time:** A statement of the time needed to do the job-starting and ending time and the total amount of time needed.
- 4) **Responsibilities:** A clear description of what is to be accomplished and lists responsibilities in order of importance or sequence to be done. This list should be limited to ten items or less. A “How the job is to be done” will be developed in the job agreement.
- 5) **Qualifications:** Basic requirements the volunteer needs to do the job—describes previous experience or training the volunteer needs to get started. It is assumed additional training will be provided.
- 6) **Contact Person:** Who the volunteer will look to for help and assistance-identifies the person who is to be available and “on call” to help the individual. If there is more than one person the primary contact is designated.
- 7) **Resources Available:** Human and material resources available to do the work-identifies training available and specific resources the individual can use.

How Can We Best Use Position Descriptions?

Here are four ideas to consider and follow:

- 1) Where do you need position descriptions? Write a list of the problems you need to solve. Then think of roles to be filled to solve them and develop a set of descriptions that will fill those roles. What do you want to accomplish and in what ways?
- 2) Assemble the above list into priorities. Divide your list into two groups, one you “must have” and one you “should have”. The “must have” fill the needs that are pressing. The “should have” fill roles that will embellish your “must have” list.

- 3) Prepare specific descriptions for your roles and think in terms of new volunteers. How clear will the descriptions be to someone who has never been to one of your meetings and knows nothing about your group?
- 4) Contact prospective new volunteers and show them the responsibilities you have listed. If they understand what you have written and are willing to take on the outlined responsibilities then you are almost home. This step will show how well you did your homework and polished your descriptions.

Position descriptions should be clear and to the point or they will not solve the problems you identified above. Your priorities must be in line with the roles you are defining and these roles truly meet pressing needs.

How Will Position Descriptions Help your Organization and Volunteers?

Specific guidelines will help new people identify with and help new people join your group. Finally, good position descriptions will lessen people's hesitancy to take responsibility because they will see there are "no surprises" hidden in the job.

Experience shows volunteers gain increased satisfaction, do a better job, and stay on the job longer when they know specifically what they are expected to do. Within the basic framework provided by a job description their jobs then need to be individualized to their own interests and capabilities and to the local situation in which they are working.

The time spent in writing good position descriptions will help eliminate any confusion. The person asking questions will be able to find answers easily and do a better job. Think of position descriptions as a key to a more effective organization, one that will be a credit to your community, country, and world.

Resources:

Using Job Descriptions and Writing Job Agreements with 4-H Leaders, Publication 410, Kansas State University.

Leaders Have Several Options, Extension Bulletin E-1223, Michigan State University, February 1988.

Delegation, Concepts in Leadership Development paper, Gayle Skinner, University of Wisconsin-Extension, 1983.

Volunteers/Leader Position Analysis, Concepts in Leadership Development paper, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Terry Gibson, 1983.

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*An Oconto County University
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