

Activity Descriptions



2. Volunteer Activity Descriptions

Why Activity Descriptions are Important?

We all know that activity descriptions should be developed and shared with volunteers however this is often neglected. It is one more thing we just don't have time to do! The activity description is one tool that has the potential to assist you in many ways. It is a planning tool. It helps volunteers understand the results to be accomplished, the tasks and skill required and other important details about the role.

Designing volunteer roles and writing activity descriptions are the most important activities performed in volunteer management. **It is very important to ensure that the activity description is in writing. A written activity description establishes WRHA authority to direct and control the activities of non-salaried workers. Written activity descriptions must be discussed in detail with all volunteers prior to commencement of service. The activity description must be signed by both the volunteer and the placement supervisor, dated and then appended to the volunteer's file.**

One of the reasons volunteers leave an organization is because they do not know what is expected of them. Without written activity descriptions most role information is shared verbally. This can create misunderstandings. With written activity descriptions, information can be communicated, reviewed, and re-evaluated periodically.

How Can Activity Descriptions Help You?

The volunteer activity description makes it easier to recruit the most qualified volunteer for your program. Recruitment efforts are enhanced because duties and skills required for each role are outlined and the potential volunteer can “self-screen”. As a result, time is saved by not having to conduct unnecessary interviews.

With a written activity description the work to be done is discussed completely and consistently during each interview. Selecting volunteers is based on the qualifications outlined in the activity description. With an honest activity description you will know that volunteers have agreed to do what you have asked.

The activity description is the basis for supervision and evaluation of the volunteer. There is a shared understanding of the work to be done and expectations to be met. The activity description also creates continuity in a role from one volunteer to the next. It is a living document that will be revised as the program changes or the volunteer develops during his/her service

Elements of a Volunteer Activity Description

The more creative, challenging or fun the roles you ask volunteers to do, the more you can expect to find volunteers who match your program. If you include the following elements you will develop a meaningful and useful activity description.

Title

A title reflects the content of the assignment and can assist with recruitment. People are more likely to respond to a title that is descriptive of the activity and gives the volunteer a sense of where he/she “fits” within the organization.

Responsibilities

Outlining responsibilities help to define the potential of the activity and the limits of the role. Expectations of the volunteer are made clear.

Necessary Qualifications and/or Skills

Identify the skills, past experience, education and personality traits that are required for the activity.

Benefits

Identify the tangible and intangible benefits for the activity.

Length of Commitment

Be clear on the time frame required. The minimum number of hours per week or month to accomplish the given task should be defined. The duration of the time the assignment will continue should be identified. Is there a special schedule? If the work is ongoing, what is the minimal initial commitment required of the volunteer?

Supervision

Supervision indicates how the volunteer will be supported throughout their volunteer experience.

Orientation and Training

Identifying the training that will be provided tells how the volunteer will be prepared to do the work well.

Risk Level/Screening Standards

Each volunteer role is assessed for risk to the volunteer, client and the organization. Appropriate screening and/or risk management standards for each volunteer role are assessed using a set of criteria established by Volunteer Services.

All volunteer activities require that volunteers are interviewed in person and three references checks are conducted. Depending on the role, volunteers may also be required to complete a criminal record check and/or child abuse registry check.

A template with the identified elements of a volunteer activity description has been developed for your use and is available on the WRHA’s INSITE. This form is to be used when developing any volunteer activity for the WRHA. It will ensure that all aspects of the activity are developed and that there is consistency within the WRHA.

Prior to writing a new activity description check with the Manager of Volunteer Services to determine if another site or program has already developed a similar activity description. If so, the activity description can be adapted to meet your site/program needs.

Once the template has been completed it is forwarded to the Manager of Volunteer Services. Activities will be assessed for risk, appropriateness of the activity and violations of the collective agreements. WRHA Human Resources may be consulted to review activity descriptions as needed.

Keep volunteer activity descriptions updated so they accurately reflect the work volunteers do for the WRHA!