

Guidance notes for writing and editing volunteering opportunities

Introduction

Well-written and clearly expressed opportunities are far more likely to attract potential volunteers.

Spending some time editing and re-writing opportunities before posting will pay off in the long run.

Sell, sell, sell

An opportunity has to attract people's attention in just a few seconds and the prompt them to request more information.

Start with the opportunity description. Make it short, sharp and to the point.

Make clear what the benefit is to the volunteer as well as what will be required of them. What skills will they develop? Who will they be working with? What benefit will their volunteering bring to the organisation as a whole? How much fun will they have?

If there is no way that the opportunity can be made appealing, perhaps it needs to be re-designed.

Reading on the web

Reading from a screen is harder than reading from a page. Research shows that most users scan pages, so opportunities that are concise and logical are much more likely to be read.

On the web you have to grab people's attention. Instead of spending a lot of time on a single page, users tend to move between many pages and try to pick the most useful segments of each.

Writing for the web

- Aim to make the word count for the online version of a given topic about half that used when writing for print.
- Keep sentences short.
- Keep paragraphs short.
- Always put the most important information at the top.
- Make the title eye-catching but clear - you don't want people to have to guess what the opportunity is about.
- Use an objective style, but don't be too formal.
- Always check spelling.
- Avoid jargon.
- Don't CAPITALISE - it makes words more difficult to read.
- Make clear what benefits the opportunity will have for the organisation and the volunteer.

Further reading

Writing for the web: www.sun.com/980713/webwriting/wftw1.html

How users read on the web: www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html

Some examples

MARKETING ASSISTANTS

The Trust manages more than 60 reserves covering a wide range of wildlife habitats, from peat bogs to sand dunes, woodland to limestone grassland. All these habitats require management and voluntary help is vital for practical conservation tasks and surveys.

Excellent opportunity to gain work experience in public relations, fundraising and event organisation.

Good clear information about the organisation, though could do with more information about what the role will entail. Good description of what the volunteer will get from it.

MENTORS

To increase the involvement of local communities as volunteers working in crime reduction and to provide access to resources that offenders may use in developing their own potential.

Tasks include: Befriending, providing support, giving advice, helping with writing letters, help with conveying forms, escorting to appointments.

Good clear information, including volunteer tasks. Could add something about what the volunteer will get out of it.

SAFER SEX SQUADDIES

Approach gay men on the commercial gay scene and discuss a health topic in approximately 5 minutes. To distribute handout appropriate resources to gay men whilst on duty. To refer gay and bisexual men to relevant agencies when appropriate. To carry out admin tasks directly linked to Squaddies project.

CONSERVATION VOLUNTEER

If you enjoy fresh air, exercise and meeting new people while helping the interests of wildlife and the environment, give voluntary conservation work a try. It's rewarding, fun and something different to do on a Sunday!

A nice bright and lively sales pitch.

Eye-catching title!