

Writing the Job Description

A clear and comprehensive job description is key to attracting strong candidates. Before embarking on this process, you will need to have developed a clear sense of the qualifications, responsibilities, and expectations for the position you wish to fill.



Once your team has clarified these dimensions, you can begin to craft the job description. Here we offer a few tips.

Begin the job description with an overview of your organization. The overview includes information such as the organization’s mission, size (both budget and staff), location, and structure of the organization. This content will help candidates assess whether your organization is a good fit for them.

Highlight the position’s reporting relationship(s) and key responsibilities. This section is the heart of the job description. A candidate will use this information to compare his or her qualifications with the opportunity and the specific job requirements. In our experience, having three key areas of responsibility works well; having more than that may mean the position is too broadly defined.

Create a realistic set of qualifications. Ask yourself what specific skills, educational background, experience, and other attributes are the “must haves” for a successful candidate and which ones are the “nice to haves.” Setting realistic expectations will help you attract the best candidates. You also will avoid scaring off highly qualified individuals who may lack one specific attribute listed as a requirement when in reality it is a “nice to have.”

Decide on a salary and benefits range. Identify a salary and benefits target, but give yourself enough range to attract an extraordinary candidate. To determine an appropriate target range, consider asking peers at similar organizations what they’re currently paying, studying compensation surveys such as *The NonProfit Times* salary survey, and/or using websites like GuideStar. Discuss whether or not to publicize the salary range, and if so, at what stage of the process to do so. An advantage to publicizing the salary range is that you’ll avoid talking to applicants who are beyond the compensation your organization is willing to pay. The downside, especially if there is some flexibility, is that you might miss out on a great candidate who is just beyond the range you’ve publicized. Occasionally,

job posting websites require compensation ranges, and some have preset ranges, which can require you to choose a range that extends beyond the parameters your organization has set. However, you can often choose to say: Compensation is commensurate of experience.

Decide on a title that makes sense both internally (in the context of other job titles) and externally. Avoid odd titles that only make sense internally. Test potential titles with people who are unfamiliar with your organization; the more quickly they can ascertain what the job is, the better.

Use the final job description to create job announcements for networking and candidate-development emails. These communications are condensed versions of the full job description. They should include such details as your organization's name, its mission, and what you ideally seek in a candidate.

The job description is your primary vehicle for announcing the open position to external and internal audiences, and is a valuable tool for finding the candidates best-suited to your organization's needs. Investing the time and effort in writing a clear job description will enable your organization to accurately articulate the opportunity to potential candidates.

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