

ServeNebraska
Creating Inclusive AmeriCorps Position Descriptions

The first step in creating an **INCLUSIVE NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAM** is to review your program's current service descriptions.

Before you can begin to recruit and select, you need to be certain about the tasks that need to be accomplished, the environment where the participant will serve, and other important position details.

Things to Consider

Taking the time to ensure that your service descriptions are inclusive will assist you, just in general, and in outreach and recruitment. It will send a clear message that you are actively inclusive and will help you make good management decisions.

Many position seekers consider position descriptions a valuable screening tool. Conveying expectations and requirements in a written position description can attract qualified and interested candidates.

A properly prepared service description will aid you in:

- Crafting your recruitment message to target potential National Service participants who possess the skills your program needs;
- Writing appropriate interview questions; and
- Determining whether a person is qualified to perform the essential functions of the position **with or without a reasonable accommodation.**

Matching an applicant with a disability and a service position is virtually the same as matching any other applicant with a service position. Spending time to create a current, thorough, and clear service description is well worth the energy and will increase your ability to make good matches for all participants.

If an individual is qualified to perform essential position functions except for limitations caused by a disability, you must consider whether the individual could perform these functions with a reasonable accommodation. *Special Note: if you determine a reasonable accommodation is needed, you can contact your State Commission about accommodation assistance.* Remember: you are not required to reallocate the essential functions of a position as a reasonable accommodation.

You should let individuals read their position descriptions, voice any concerns, and sign their descriptions.

Position descriptions should be accurate. To ensure accuracy, combine the input of all your stakeholders.

Finally, evaluate service positions periodically. Positions change and you should reflect those changes in the service description.

Elements of Inclusive Service Descriptions

Inclusive service descriptions contain all the elements of a good service description, but also clearly demonstrate the essential and marginal functions of a position. When writing an inclusive service description, the position should be analyzed to determine the following:

- Purpose** – the reason for the position
 - ⇒ What are the particular contributions of the position toward the accomplishment of

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the overall objectives of the organization?

⇒ What are the reasons for the position's existence? Document the particular contributions of the position to the organization's overall mission.

- ❑ **Essential Functions** – the tasks or duties that are fundamental and critical to the performance of the position - An essential function is one that is critical to the position. If it is not performed, then the nature of the position is fundamentally changed. Teaching is an essential function of a tutoring position.

Three factors that make a function essential:

- ❑ The position exists to perform a specific function. For example, a person is hired to proofread documents. The ability to proofread accurately is an essential function, because this is the reason that this position exists.
- ❑ There are a limited number of other participants available to perform the function or among whom the function can be distributed. For example, it may be an essential function for a file clerk to answer the telephone if there are only three employees in a very busy office and each employee has to perform many different tasks.
- ❑ A function is highly specialized and the person in the position is selected for special expertise or ability to perform it. For example, an AmeriCorps program places members in communities where Spanish is the first language. In order to work effectively with the community, the position requires a person who can communicate fluently in Spanish. Fluent communication in the Spanish language is an essential function of the position.
 - ⇒ What three or four activities actually constitute the position? Does the position exist to perform these functions? Is each activity really necessary? For example, in order to perform essential duties, is it necessary to type, file, answer phones, and take dictation?
 - ⇒ What is the relationship between each task? Is there a specific sequence that the tasks must follow?
 - ⇒ Do the tasks necessitate specific physical activities such as sitting, standing, walking, lifting, carrying, etc?
 - ⇒ How many other people are available to perform an essential function? Can the performance of that function be distributed among any others?
 - ⇒ How much time is spent in performing each particular function? Are the less frequently performed tasks as important to success as those done more frequently?
 - ⇒ What happens if the task is not completed in a certain timeframe?
 - ⇒ Would removing an essential function fundamentally alter the overall purpose of the position?
 - ⇒ What is the end result of what I should see when the activity is being accomplished? Make sure to distinguish between methods and results.
- ❑ **Marginal Functions** – those activities that are seldom or intermittently performed. The position does not exist to perform these functions and their removal would not fundamentally alter the nature, purpose, or result of the essential tasks to be

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accomplished by the National Service participants

- **Setting** – the work station and/or conditions where the essential functions are to be carried out

⇒ Is the setting compliant with ADA requirements? If not, what accommodations can be made to bring it into compliance or to change the setting?

Consider the following areas and questions:

A. Service Site

- ⇒ What is the physical layout of the service site?
- ⇒ What equipment is used?
- ⇒ Where are the essential functions performed?
- ⇒ What conditions are required for task completion? Conditions include environmental (hot/cold, inside/outside, noise level, lighting, ventilation, etc.) and social (works with the public, works under deadlines, works alone, etc.).
- ⇒ Is the service site accessible (parking, entrances and exits, doors)?
- ⇒ Does the service necessitate completing tasks in multiple, alternate, or off-site locations?

B. Workstation

- ⇒ How is the workstation arranged?
- ⇒ How do participants obtain and discard equipment and materials?
- ⇒ How is the service organized?

C. Activities

- ⇒ What is the required output level for the position?
- ⇒ What are the expected results?
- ⇒ What is the relationship between each task? If there is a task sequence or a task hierarchy, document this order.
- ⇒ What are the necessary physical and mental requirements needed to accomplish the position?
- ⇒ Is specific training necessary? Document what required experience, certificates, and education are necessary.
- ⇒ What are the safety and quality control measures in place? Document potential workplace hazards and the measures taken to eliminate them.
- ⇒ What happens if a task is not performed appropriately?
- ⇒ What level of responsibility is necessary?
- ⇒ What happens if the end result is not achieved?
- ⇒ Are there specified time frames for completing a task?

- **Qualifications** – the minimal skills an individual must possess to perform essential functions

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⇒ Do the qualifications define the skills required to perform the essential functions and not the person who performs them?

Elements of Strong AmeriCorps Position Descriptions

Every AmeriCorps Position Description should strive to include the following key components, to allow applicants to determine if they are qualified to perform the essential functions of the position, with or without a reasonable accommodation, and to assess the program's expectations. These specific pieces not only help to ensure any individual wanting to join the program can assess their abilities and opportunities with or without a reasonable accommodation, but also to ensure the program is creating an expectation for all what the year will be about.

Following are the recommended components:

1. **Name of Organization and AmeriCorps Logo as a Header**
2. **Service Position Title and Type:** Indicate title and service term and hours. Additionally, include the words "AmeriCorps Member"
3. **Immediate Supervisor Information:** List name, title, phone, and email.
4. **Location(s)** where service will be performed
5. **Service Position Summary (Main Purpose of this Position):** Briefly describe the responsibilities of the position in a narrative format.
6. **Essential Functions of Position:** List all basic duties that must be performed with or without reasonable accommodations. Identify only the tasks essential to the position. Focus on function, not "how to's." For example, if the essential function is to get from A to B to conduct training, do not say driving or a driver's license is required.

Sample language:

- Analyzes, reviews, and rewrites programs, using workflow chart and diagram, applying knowledge of computer capabilities, subject matter, and symbolic logic. (10%)
- Converts detailed logical flow chart to language processible by computer. (10%)
- Resolves symbolic formulations, prepares flow charts and block diagrams, and encodes resultant equations for processing. (10%)
- Develops programs from workflow charts or diagrams, considering computer storage capacity, speed, and intended use of output data. (10%)
- Assists computer operators or system analysts to resolve problems. (10%)
- Assigns, coordinates, and reviews work and activities of programming personnel. (10%)
- Compiles and writes documentation of program development and revisions. (8%)
- Prepares or receives detailed workflow chart and diagram to illustrate sequence of steps to describe input, output, and logical operation. (7%)
- Revises or directs revision of existing programs to increase operating efficiency or adapt to new requirements. (7%)

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- Collaborates with computer manufacturers and other users to develop new programming methods. (5%)
 - Trains subordinates in programming and program coding. (5%)
 - Consults with managerial and engineering and technical personnel to clarify program intent, identify problems, and suggest changes. (4%)
 - Writes instructions to guide operating personnel during production runs. (4%)
7. **Marginal Functions of Position:** List additional duties that are preferred, are re-assignable to others, or can be eliminated or otherwise do not change the nature of the position.
8. **Principal Working Relationships:** Identify internal and external working relationships required for successful accomplishment of responsibilities.
9. **Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:** Identify the specific areas of knowledge and abilities required to be qualified for the position, as well as any required skills.

Sample language:

Knowledge and Critical Skills/Expertise

- Bachelor's degree in related field or Associate's degree plus two years full-time directly related work experience.
- One year full-time directly related work experience beyond requirement above, including experience in a 4th generation language.
- Demonstrated skills in items four and five below may be substituted for education and experience.
- Thorough knowledge of electronic data processing coding practices necessary for developing programs of instructions for an electronic digital computer and related peripheral equipment.
- Ability to prepare clear, detailed, and efficient programs of computer instructions using COBOL, CICS Command Level COBOL, or other current industry standard programming languages for optimum machine utilization.
- Ability to establish and maintain positive working relationships with other employees.
- Ability to work independently with minimal supervision.
- Ability to operate mainframe electronic digital computerized systems, including operating systems and applications software.

Language/Communication Skills

- Apply principles of logical thinking to define problems, collect data, establish facts, and draw valid conclusions.
- Interpret an extensive variety of technical instructions.

10. **Academic, Training and Experience Qualifications:** List minimum qualifications and experience required to be eligible for the position. Do not include "nice to have's."

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11. **Service Conditions:** Identify the conditions under which the position must be accomplished. For example, service is to be performed in a classroom, or service is performed primarily outdoors, or service involves travel outside the state.

Sample language:

Environmental Conditions

- Indoors in normal office environment with little exposure to excessive noise, dust, fumes, vibrations, and temperature changes at least seventy-five percent (75%) of the time.
- Frequent computer use at workstation up to two hours at a time.
- Frequently work at fast pace with unscheduled interruptions.
- Responsibilities occasionally may require an adjusted work schedule, overtime, and evening/weekend hours in order to meet deadlines or to access the computer to perform program tests.
- May move from one work location to another occasionally.
- Public contact position requiring appropriate business-like apparel.

12. **Physical, Emotional, and Intellectual Demands:** Identify the degree to which these demands are applied to the requirements of the position. An example of an emotional demand might be - Patience is required because of work with children with behavioral (people may make assumptions that working with individuals with cognitive disabilities would always require patience, where as working with children with behavioral disabilities would most likely require patience) disabilities. An example of an intellectual demand might be - Duties include extensive research and analysis of data.

Sample language:

Physical Demands

- Mobility within the office including movement from floor to floor.
- Access information using a computer.

13. **Equipment Used:** List the types of tools and equipment used in this position.

14. **Special conditions of service** (if any)

15. **Inclusion/Diversity Statements**

Including a brief and accurate statement in the position description about the organization's responsibility and the individual's rights may help initiate the interactive process between your organization and an individual with a disability. Language that can and should be incorporated on the bottom of all position descriptions:

- Other than completion of marginal functions, the above functions may be completed with or without accommodations.
- The XXX organization provides reasonable accommodations upon request in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (this Act applies to programs that receive federal funding such as AmeriCorps)
- This description lists the minimum duty requirements.

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- It is against the law for organizations that receive federal financial assistance from the Corporation for National and Community Service to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, age, political affiliation, or, in most cases, religion.

16. Place for Member and Supervisor/Program Director Signature and Date

17. Date updated in footer of document

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The chart below provides explanatory examples.

The position exists to perform a specific function.	There are a limited number of other participants available to perform the function or among whom the function can be distributed.	A function is highly specialized, and the person in the position is selected for special expertise or ability to perform it.
Example: Provide education through public speaking and information dissemination.	Example: Have a commercial vehicle driver's license.	Example: Ability to understand and communicate in Spanish and English.
Example: Read stories to preschool children in their homes.	Example: Have previous experience installing drywall.	Example: Provide estate planning legal advice to participants at the senior day care center.

Each sentence should begin with an active verb and use the present tense.

In identifying an essential function to determine if an individual with a disability is qualified, the organization should focus on the purpose of the function and the result to be accomplished, rather than the manner in which the function presently is performed. An individual with a disability may be qualified to perform the function if an accommodation would enable this person to perform the position in a different way, and the accommodation does not impose an undue hardship. Although it may be essential that a function be performed, frequently it is not essential that it be performed in a particular way (EEOC, 1992).

For example, instead of "writes down notes during meetings" put "records notes during weekly meetings."

Functions should be qualified whenever possible and the desired outcome of the service should be described, rather than the method for accomplishing that outcome.

For example, instead of saying, "files folders" write that "files folders alphabetically based on category."

The position description should explicitly state the manner that an individual is to perform the service.

For example, a description of a position that requires contact with the public should include not only that the position requires the handling of public inquiries, but also that the inquiries must be handled in a prompt and friendly manner.

Your organization should also describe regular attendance and timeliness as essential functions of any positions that require regular and punctual member presence.

Key Component: Marginal Functions

A marginal function is one that is part of a service position, but not essential. A marginal function is less important: the nature of the position does not change if the function is

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removed. It may be a task that is done on an as-needed basis; or a task that can be easily reassigned. Answering the telephone might be a marginal function for a tutor.

When determining which functions are marginal:

- Identify the purpose and necessity of the task
- Consider whether the task is critical to the service position; if it is not performed, will the nature of the position be fundamentally changed?
- Consider if the task can be performed on an as-needed basis
- Consider if the task can be easily reassigned

Examples of Essential and Marginal Functions

Service Task:

Participants will provide homework help to third grade students at an after-school program. Participants will occasionally fix snacks for students as needed.

The essential functions:

- Ability to read and explain third grade subject matter
- Ability to communicate effectively with children.

The marginal function:

- Fixing snacks at the end of the tutoring session.

Service Task:

Participants will establish committees of residents in low-income housing to promote self-sufficiency and drug/crime prevention programs.

The essential functions:

- Effective communication, diplomacy and tact
- Planning, organization, and follow through on activities and goals.

The marginal functions:

- Answering telephones
- Computer skills (maybe move to essential functions since almost every position will require an individual to perform computer skills)
- Boxing and transporting materials to meetings.