

June 13, 2025: Job Descriptions: A Tool for Recruitment

The term “member” applies to those who attended the Roundtable and contributed by speaking or in the chat. Individual names and library names are not used to keep information anonymous.

Attendees and HRAF Board members introduced themselves, stating their position and library.

Managing expectations is the key component to job descriptions. What are the essential functions of the position? What tasks that if *not* performed, the job wouldn't exist. Non-essential functions – if not performed, the job would still exist – don't necessarily need to be included.

Q. How do you determine the physical demands (weight thresholds, being able to stand for extended time period, bend and reach, etc.) for a job description?

Members discussed things to consider to determine a position's physical demands. It's important to include this information for a variety of reasons and helps set the expectations of potential applicants.

- Consider what has been used previously for the position. Does it need to be changed? Consider *why* this requirement is in the description.
- Be sure the description meets ADA compliance; include language “with or without reasonable accommodations.”
- What is a reasonable weight to be able to lift and distance to carry or push/pull said weight?
- If possible, determine the weight of your “standard” book cart or other often-used equipment.
 - One library's director likely did weigh a cart at some point to determine their requirement of being able to push, pull, and/or lift up to 50 lbs.
 - May need to push/pull a specified amount of weight along with a 2nd person.
- Potential applicants may have a preconceived idea that (all) library jobs involve a lot of sitting. This isn't true of all positions so including physical demands such as “standing for extended periods of time” helps manage expectations.
- “Standard office environment” is what one library uses for many of the descriptions' physical demands.

It's a good idea to ask in interviews if the individual is able to do the physical demands (with or without reasonable accommodations).

Q. Annual review of job descriptions – what does this entail?

One member implemented an annual review of their library's job descriptions in 2019

An annual review of the descriptions helps you get connected and familiar with the descriptions. This way, if there are tasks not covered in anyone's description, you know it needs to be added. This member provided their process, below:

- Go through each description to see if that's what the person/people are doing, what should be added, what should be deleted.
- A few hours each week over a few weeks. Their library has 20 unique job descriptions.
 - This could do in a rolling quarterly basis or by department the more positions you have.
- If a staff member in a key position leaves, they go ahead and review the job description right away.

A member provided a recent example from reviewing the library clerk description. Previously, the description stated "clerical experience" but was updated to state "customer service experience."

Members who have done job description reviews had no major, fundamental changes in recent years.

Other things to consider when updating job descriptions:

- Feedback from managers helps to make sure descriptions are accurate. You may not know all the intricacies of the jobs.
- Change language to be sure it's inclusive and up-to-date.
- Include key requirements for *all* positions at the top of every description. These are the key components to the library's culture. Then break it down to the individual positions.
- Have employees regularly sign off on their job descriptions (annually recommended), not just upon hire. This ensures staff are aware/reminded of what's in their job description but can they can also help with updating the description if things have changed.
 - Can be helpful when having disciplinary issues or a person is not meeting all the requirements.
- Have certain standard language for consistency. "If this is a supervisory position, put in this language..." This helps prevent wording the same idea differently each time.
- Have a standard template with a header for each job description.
- Job descriptions are super helpful as the same position may have different requirements at different libraries.
- The value of the job is based on the description. The position may do other things not in the description so *what* is the position being hired for, how much will you be compensating for that, how much time is allotted for the job, etc.

- List behavior skills in the description. This will help drive interview questions.
- Include a “casual day in the life of” description as well as a detailed list of requirements.

Having robust and accurate job descriptions:

- Can help in legal situations. It’s the first thing a lawyer will ask to see.
- Gives a good bottom-standard for employees to know how they’re doing.
- Help guide questions for annual reviews, setting goals, areas to focus, etc.

Have any libraries adopted “equivalent work experience” in lieu of education?

The “paper ceiling” is the invisible barrier facing individuals who lack a traditional bachelor’s degree. There seems to be a push towards skills-first hiring, which helps avoid putting up unnecessary barriers and garner a wider array of potential applicants.

This also gives you a loophole, if you need to use it. One member gave an example. They were hiring for a librarian position and an individual had 10+ years’ experience in a library, doing the skills needed for the position but didn’t have the degree. The hiring supervisor said they couldn’t teach this person anything they didn’t already know. They were able to hire the person because they had “equivalent work experience.”

One member’s library includes the following: “A combination of education, professional experience, and lived experiences that demonstrate the ability to meet the position’s requirements successfully may be considered.”

When updating the job description, ask if the position really needs the specified education. Some positions will but some won’t.

A few other thoughts:

- Provide a copy of the job description in every interview. While they should have seen this in the application, it’s good to have in the interview. It allows the opportunity to relist the schedule associated with job and the requirements.
- Send interview questions and job description to the interviewees so they can prepare.
 - “Have you had a chance to review the job description and can you fulfill the requirements with or without reasonable accommodations?”
- Be sure to ask at some point during the interview (some members ask at the beginning; others ask at the end) if the individual can meet the physical demands with or without reasonable accommodations.