



Guide on How to Write a Position Description (Hay)

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

Treasury Board Secretariat

What is a Position Description?

A position description defines the objectives and purpose of the job against the environment in which the job exists. It describes the position as it currently exists (not as it was or how it will be) and focuses on the requirements of the job and not on the skills and abilities of the incumbent. A good position description should be clear, concise and easy to understand by someone who may not be familiar with the work. It should be gender neutral and free of judgment or bias; use active verbs and simple language without jargon, technical language or acronyms. Emphasis should be given to the complexities of the job and not on the volume of activity.

Contents of a Position Description

Type of Evaluation Requested

This section captures the type of evaluation being requested: new position or existing/Previously classified position.

Identified Changes

This section must be completed for existing/Previously classified positions. Changes in scope and/or organizational structure since the position was last classified must be identified here. Please note that for a position to be re-classified, substantive change must have occurred.

If the identified changes impact other positions within the Department/Division, such as scope/responsibilities being absorbed from or allocated to other positions, these position descriptions must be submitted and any changes identified.

Position Identification

This information is required to properly identify the position's place within the organization, and provide information for systems and record purposes.

Classification Title: The official position title assigned by Treasury Board Secretariat to all existing classified positions. If submitting an existing classified position for review you must include the official classification title. If submitting a new position for classification you may leave this field blank or propose a title; however, final classification titles will be determined by Treasury Board Secretariat.

Treasury Board Secretariat Issued Position Control Number (PCN): The unique number assigned by Treasury Board Secretariat to all existing classified positions. If submitting a new position for classification, the PCN field is to be left blank. A PCN will be assigned by Treasury Board Secretariat upon completion of the review.

Name of Incumbent: The name of the individual currently occupying the position being submitted for review and whose signature is included in the Approval's section. If it is a new position, please leave blank.

Department/Entity: The full department or entity (Agency, Board or Commission) name.

Division: The full division name.

Location: The geographical and/or building location of the position.

Classification Title of Immediate Supervisor: The official position title assigned by Treasury Board Secretariat of the immediate supervisor of the position.

PCN of Immediate Supervisor: The unique number assigned by Treasury Board Secretariat to the immediate supervisor of the position.

Section 1 – Purpose of the Position (General Accountability)

This section requires a brief but specific statement intended to give an immediate impression of what the position does (its primary purpose), the overall context of the job and end results expected. The statement should be no more than one or two sentences in length. It must clearly distinguish the job from others, in particular its supervisors and any subordinates.

The following format applies:

“The full position title is responsible for overall purpose/function of the position within general context to ensure stated end result.”

Sample Purpose of the Position

- The Director of Finance is responsible for the development, maintenance, and implementation of Departmental financial administration programs for budgetary, planning, expenditure control, accounting for revenue, and operating costs in accordance with departmental and government policies, regulations and procedures.
- The Assistant Director of Dietetics is accountable for providing nutritionally balanced quality meals for patients and staff in an 850 bed hospital.

Check List

- ✓ Overall purpose clearly stated?
- ✓ Overall context stated?
- ✓ Overall end result stated?
- ✓ One paragraph in length?

Common Errors to Avoid

- ✗ Including specific impacts that should be in the Nature and Scope Section.
- ✗ Summarizing the duties and specific accountabilities rather than stating the primary purpose of basic end results.
- ✗ Too lengthy with a detailed list of activities taking 5 to 10 lines.
- ✗ Unclear language.

Section 2 - Structure

This section identifies reporting relationships including the position's immediate supervisor, other positions that report to the same immediate supervisor as well as positions that report into this position. Use position titles and provide a brief summary of the activities carried out by those positions reporting directly to this position.

The following format applies: "This position is one of total number of positions reporting to the full position title. The other remaining number of positions are full position title, full position title, full position title, etc."

If the relationships between the positions are not clear from the titles or content, add a sentence or so explaining the special relationships. For example, there may be several positions with the same title as yours. Are they all doing the same work? If yes, say so. If not, explain why and in what ways this position is different.

Next, outline how your subordinate staff, if any, are organized and what they do. The following format applies:

"Specific functions of the total number of positions reporting to the incumbent are:

- Full position title directs the _____
- Full position title plans and co-ordinates the _____

If your position is that of an individual contributor, with no subordinate staff, say so and/or describe any functional relationships associated with the position. The following format applies: "There are no subordinates reporting to this position."

It may also be appropriate to describe any functional non-supervisor relationships associated with the position, such as: "This position provides functional direction on all human resources programs to the six Human Resource Consultants."

IMPORTANT: A current official organizational chart must be attached and be reflective of the information contained in the position description. Official classification titles and PCNs of all positions must be noted on the organizational chart.

Sample Structure Statement:

This position is one of six reporting to the Executive Director. The other five are the Director of Field Services, the Director of Planning Services, the Human Resources Manager, the Legal Advisor and the Administrative Officer.

Specific functions of the three positions reporting to this position are:

- Chief Accountant coordinates the day to day activities of the division including the preparation of accounting reports, recording of financial transactions, and analysis of financial accounts. Staff of 12.
- Financial Controls Officer provides financial control and audit reports on the activities of the division. Staff of 6.
- Cost Accountant develops cost data and analysis of public housing and land assembly projects. No staff.

Check List

- ✓ Reporting relationships identified?
- ✓ Summary of activities for subordinate positions listed?
- ✓ Information reflects the approved organizational chart attached?

Common Errors to Avoid

- ✗ Organizational relations (upwards or subordinates) are confusing, incomplete or contradict organizational chart(s).
- ✗ Significant lateral organization relations omitted (e.g., peer positions who report to same supervisor).

Section 3 – Nature and Scope

This section is the narrative part of the position description and describes the nature of the position, its requirements and challenges, the environment in which the position exists and the freedom to act permitted in the position. It outlines the overall accountability of the position and impact on the environment in which it operates. The Nature and Scope is information regarding the context in which the position operates so it may be easier to finalize once the Specific Accountabilities section has been completed.

This section follows the order below and contains, at a minimum, the pertinent information relevant to the following headings:

3.1 - Environment of the Position

Provide a brief description of the division/department and how this position operates within that environment.

3.2 - Functions Performed by the Position

Briefly describe 5-6 key high-level responsibilities or functions the position is responsible for. These will be expanded further under Specific Accountabilities (section 4).

3.3 - Major Challenges

This section should highlight major challenges and how the challenges are met. Include examples of situations that require new or conceptual approaches to resolve or address challenges. Do not completely focus on parts of the job that the incumbent personally finds most difficult and thereby downplay or eliminate those that they have mastered but are substantially more difficult.

3.4 - Decision Making & Autonomy

This section gauges the degree of independence the position has to make decisions to meet expected results and the significance of those results to the organization; it should note the authority the position has for action under legislation, departmental policies or regulations; principle rules, regulations, precedents and controls within which the position operates; types of problems that must be referred to a superior for resolution or for approval of your recommended solution. The decision-making ability and the impact of those decisions on the organization should be noted, particularly for positions that have an impact that is difficult to express in direct relation to a financial magnitude.

Please record the measurable areas upon which the position has either direct or indirect impact. Also indicate whether the figures shown are for the section, division or department. Figures must be relevant to the position and include a breakdown where possible. The relationship of these figures to your position must be clearly defined. Approximate figures are acceptable.

Dimensions must include:

- Total number of positions supervised
- Annual salary budget
- Annual operating budget

3.5 – Internal and External Contacts

This section must indicate the purpose of significant (internal and external) contacts; significant contacts with other areas within and outside the department – frequency and purpose; type of problems that require consultation with others to resolve; committees involvement/membership – purpose and role; job-related outside organizations of which you are a member – to attain what results.

Sample Nature and Scope:

Environment of the Position

The Department of Industry, Energy and Technology is primarily responsible for the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs to enhance the growth, development and sustainability of the Province's natural resources base including minerals and energy. The Energy Branch has been given the mandate to provide a leadership role and focal point for the energy plan for the province which includes developing strong linkages and partnerships with interested stakeholders and being accountable for shared strategies and programs.

Functions Performed by the Position

The Director of Marketing and Promotion is responsible for planning, organizing and directing a marketing and promotion program including the development and coordination of a strategic marketing and awareness plan for the province's energy resources and related energy issues.

Major Challenges

As a result of the magnitude and complexity of energy program, a major challenge is to build and maintain strong and effective partnerships and collaboration with a number of stakeholders for the fulfillment of its mandate.

Decision Making and Autonomy

The Director exercises a broad range of independent action and judgement in advising the Assistant Deputy Minister on all aspects of the Marketing and Promotion program within the context of applicable legislation, regulations and guidelines.

Internal and External Contacts

This position has frequent contact with officials in the department and other related departments on the preparation and development of policies and programs and the provision of advice and guidance on divisional activities. Frequent contact is also maintained with federal government departments, boards, Crown corporations and the private sector on matters pertaining to all aspects of energy development.

Check List

- ✓ Relevant legislation, acts, and regulations included?
- ✓ Major or relevant contacts of the position stated?
- ✓ Nature and variety of typical challenges/problems identified?
- ✓ Is the total number of staff the positions supervises (if applicable) listed?
- ✓ Are salary and operating budget provided?

Common Errors to Avoid

- ✗ Nature and Scope contains information that reads as a specific accountability
- ✗ Committee memberships included with no description of the role of the committee and/or of the incumbent on that committee.
- ✗ Does not recognize the role the position plays in the overall administrative process.
- ✗ Does not mention the greatest challenge or major problems faced by the position.
- ✗ Does not mention where the incumbent can obtain assistance with their problems, either inside or outside the department or division.
- ✗ Attempt to be too precise – approximate figures or data are sufficient (e.g., within 10-20 per cent).
- ✗ Capital, Revenue Budgets included.

Section 4 – Specific Accountabilities

This section outlines the activities, in order of importance, the incumbent would perform to accomplish the responsibilities derived from the information contained in Section 1: Purpose of the Position and Section 3.2: Functions Performed by the Position. Each statement of accountability should contain two elements:

1. The end result that must be achieved.
2. The means, the “how”, by which the end result will be achieved.

Ensure the main activities of the position are briefly described using between eight to ten statements and are listed in order of importance.

Sample Specific Accountabilities

- Maximum possible protection of department assets by devising, introducing and maintaining internal control policies and practices. (Director of Finance)
- Ensures that all employees are aware of the provisions of the Labour Standards code through the development and implementation of public promotion programs. (Director of Labour Standards)
- Assists in the preparation of realistic plans and budgets by providing necessary cost data and advice. (Cost Accountant)

Check List

- ✓ Are the accountabilities listed in order of importance?
- ✓ Are the specific accountabilities listed unique and avoid repetition?
- ✓ Are the activities relevant and derive from the information contained in Nature and Scope section?
- ✓ Are the appropriate activity levels indicated (Assists, Coordinates, Manages)?
- ✓ Are activities described beyond a ‘task’ level?
- ✓ Is the information written in concise, active language and beginning with a verb?

Common Errors to Avoid

- ✗ Duplication of accountabilities, or they are unclear, or disconnected from the purpose/nature and scope.
- ✗ Wording of the end result and/or “how” is too general.
- ✗ Wording impacts information that pertains to the nature and scope.
- ✗ Dated accountability statements are continuously ‘recycled’ and not updated as the position is submitted for each classification review.
- ✗ One specific accountability statement covers several end results to the extent that it encompasses 70 per cent or more of all that is expected from the job.
- ✗ Restatement of activities or duties, rather than major end results.
- ✗ Too many specific accountabilities listed.

Section 5 – Working Conditions (not mandatory for Agencies, Boards and Commissions)

Working Conditions identify the unusual and unavoidable, externally imposed conditions under which the work must be performed and that create hardship for the incumbent, beyond a normal working environment. The frequency, duration and intensity of the imposed condition must be indicated in order for a value to be assigned. This section documents the conditions of work, not the effect it may have on an employee.

5.1 - Physical Effort

This involves physical effort and/or strain performed by the incumbent in carrying out the responsibilities of the position, beyond what is required in a standard office environment. Examples include lifting, handling of materials or objects, stretching, pulling, pushing, climbing, walking, carrying, sitting, standing, and/or working in awkward positions, or other unusual circumstances.

“The incumbent will be required to lift boxes weighing 30 to 50 lbs., for 2 hours, approximately 3 times a week.”

Note: For a regular office environment, the following statement is sufficient: “No unusual physical effort.”

5.2 - Physical Environment

This includes conditions in the work environment that have potential for negative physical impact on the incumbent. Examples include fumes, temperature, noise, vibration, dirt, dust, inclement weather conditions and unavoidable exposure to hazardous substances, equipment and/or situations.

“The incumbent will be exposed to construction site hazards when on site for 3 hours a day for 3 days every other week. Intensity of construction varies.”

Note: For a regular office environment, the following statement is sufficient: “No unusual physical environment.”

5.3 - Sensory Attention

Sensory attention is an intense, combined use of 2 or more of the 5 senses required to accomplish activities. Most commonly found in trades, direct patient care positions and some public safety type positions. Examples include auditing, inspecting, monitoring, proofreading, analyzing data or listening to others.

“The incumbent will experience moderate levels of intensity for 4 to 6 hours using the combined senses of sight, smell, hearing and touch while performing patient assessments and providing patient care.”

Note: For a regular office environment, the following statement is sufficient: “No unusual sensory attention.”

5.4 - Mental Stress

Mental stress indicates psychological impacts that are an unavoidable part of the job and place increased mental demands on the incumbent. Examples include disruptions in lifestyle caused by work schedules or travel requirements; boredom resulting from work repetition; lack of control over work pace because it is irregular; emotional deprivation resulting from isolation or lack of privacy; exposure to stressful situations; directing a team; requirement to work under strict deadlines that are imposed by legislation or regulations; dealing on a regular basis with confrontational situations; working within competing priorities over which the jobholder has little or no control.

“The incumbent will be required to travel to all regions for a period of 5 days every month of the year.”

Note: For a regular office environment, the following statement is sufficient: “No unusual mental stress.”

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (optional)

This section is not required for the purposes of job evaluation.

This information should be obtained from and/or confirmed by your Human Resources representative.

- Knowledge: identifies the acquired information or concepts that relate to a specific discipline.
- Skills: describe acquired behaviours and may cover manual aspects required to do the job.

- Abilities: describe natural talents or developed proficiencies required to perform the responsibilities of the job.

Section 6 – Approvals

This section ensures that the information detailed in the position description was reviewed and is an accurate representation of the position. The current incumbent(s) (leave blank if vacant), the immediate supervisor and the Permanent Head/Delegate will need to certify the content of the position description by signing and dating the Approvals section.