

International Evaluation Report of the trainings for volunteer coordinators

- a summary of results achieved -

Name of trainers involved in the preparation, facilitation and evaluation of the trainings:

Germany: Perdita Wingerter, Kathrin Zenger, Sophia Cramer, Luisa Gruber

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Number of direct beneficiaries:

In total 116 persons participated in the full length of the training. Another 239 persons took part only in certain training sessions. Most often the size of the actual working group was between 10 to 15 participants.

General schedule of the training

The basic schedule of the sessions varied from training to training. Depending on the context, specificities of the target group and the objectives to be reached, a variety of options exist. Two opposite approaches which were tested and proved to be efficient are:

- intensive trainings with continuous sessions for 5 days, with 6 working hours / day;
- regular meetings (weekly or more rarely) of various length over a longer period of time (up to 4 months), approaching a certain modules every time.

Target group:

- mixed, with a range of various backgrounds, with more, less or no experience in participating in such trainings;
- with similar environment in their volunteer coordination activities, with a mixture of experience (advanced-level volunteer coordinators *versus* beginners) or with a rather uniform level of experience;
- experienced volunteer coordinators who attended the training for more a refreshment and to a certain extent for an introduction to certain topics.

The most usual objectives of the training were the followings:

- to offer general information and specific knowledge related to the content and way of organization and functioning of a volunteer programme and that of a professional volunteer management system;
- to develop the skills and know-how necessary for a successful volunteer programme coordinator and volunteer coordinator;
- to offer useful models of tools and methods in working with volunteers, as well as in the management of programmes/ services/ organizations in which these volunteers are involved;
- to offer an appropriate frame for the initiation of a sustainable volunteer coordination team / network / structure through which long-term projects can be implemented;



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- to offer an appropriate frame for the exchange of experiences among the participants and among the participants and the team of trainers.

Topics included: Volunteering, Objectives/roles, Project/ time management, Communication, Human resources, PR in NGOs, Event management, Networking, Finances, Legal issues

Always consider adding additional training sessions / modules to your design in case there are relevant topics for your objectives which are not included in the proposed modules.

Pros

Presents the most relevant tools for volunteer and volunteer programme management and provides a huge and diverse amount of information. It includes various, very different topics merged into a spectrum where the matched / connected components create the “big picture” or the “all around package”.

In this sense, the training works better with new volunteer coordinators than more experienced ones, offering the frame to develop the skills and increase the knowledge of volunteer coordinators. However, even in case of experienced participants, the training is able to bring novelty through the introduction of certain, less-accustomed topics and new methods, tools, techniques.

Creates the context in which volunteer coordinators with various background can teamwork, collaborate and share experience.

Cons

This is a very good introductory course, but in case the participants were having different areas of action in the involvement as a volunteer coordinator, they had the need to discuss certain aspects in further details and with more case studies.

In case of trainings where participants with a range of various backgrounds and differing levels of experience were present, it proved to be more difficult to introduce topics or undertake activities that satisfied *all* participants, as well as to keep them always engaged.

In case there are working days one after another, the training is intense and therefore demanding for both the trainers and the participants. Also, time pressure exists due to the fact that a variety of topics and a lot of information has to be included and therefore challenges in time management might arise. Participants might feel that more time is needed to reflect on certain topics in order to formulate their questions.

There is sometimes difficult to find the clear link or connection between the theoretical part of a module and the practical exercises that are included within.



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Recommendations related to the topics involved:

Volunteering – the quiz helping to identify the own motivational factors and the information provided is well appreciated. The module can provide both a wider overview on volunteering understanding the meaning and importance of it, as well as a good overview on the work that is done at a certain NGO. As the training is within the volunteering sector, you might consider spending more time on this module. In case the group is homogeneously interested only in a certain type of volunteering activity, provide more information about that specific field. Also, with experienced volunteer coordinators this might be less relevant as they are well-informed about the aspects included in this module.

Objective / roles – It is important to include these, more than they might seem at a first glance, especially in order to (re)define the role / position of a volunteer coordinator and clarify the very different expectations the coordinators might have from the same volunteering programme. Also, through structuring thoughts and ideas, the module makes the participants better understand how essential it is to set / define / agree joint objectives, so that these objectives can be clearly transferred to the volunteers. Regarding the writing of the objectives (smart, pure, tips and tricks), these might be already understood by the participants. The theoretical part of this module is more difficult to approach, while the exercises are useful for the volunteer coordinators in training the volunteers. You might also encounter the challenge to make the trainees understand the difference between leading objectives and action points / methods to reach the objectives. In order to identify the profile of the volunteer coordinator, the “Development cards” proved to be very much appreciated instruments. When working with volunteer coordinators from a certain NGO, this module is useful to reflect on what the NGO is trying to achieve through its activities.

Project / time management – useful for setting up new, concrete projects and outline the format of various activities included. Still, it might be less relevant for certain target groups. The new methods / tools and well prepared materials are considered a strong point of this module, as they can be an efficient help for the trainees in order to develop realistic projects and working plans for various fields of action. Working in smaller groups contributes to the teambuilding process.

Communication – communication presented as a general process and information related to group dynamics might be considered a topic too basic for the level of knowledge of the participants, but for the “more beginners” it is a real value. Learning new techniques / methods, understanding better communication (internally within the group and externally) and improving communication skills is fulfilling and enjoyable for participants. Certain elements of the communication exercises might be more difficult to successfully include due to the necessity of opening up within the exercises. Also, as this is a huge module, might be useful to link certain elements of this module (e.g. presentation, moderation, public speaking) with the module “Event management – PR in NGOs”.

Human resources – even if some of the participants have experience in HR, the steps of volunteer management (recruitment, selection, instruction and orientation, supervision, monitoring, motivation, recognizing the merits and evaluation of volunteers) are highly appreciated, as they offer a logical and synthetized structure, adapted to the specificities of working with volunteer. All these help the trainees to discover the necessary components of being a successful volunteer coordinator.



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Creation of the job description (defined roles and duties) before any recruitment and the information about the phases of a team were usually well appreciated. In case the module is preceded by various activities which might directly impact the teambuilding process of the trainees, it is recommended to reflect on this process. Participants found important to think about new approaches / ways / methods to recruit volunteers and was generally a valuable module in all trainings. You might have the request to include methods and exercises related to the topic of “difficult volunteers”.

PR – the practical exercise and bringing explanations into detail are considered a strong point, but you might want to cover more NGO-specifically this topic in order to increase its usefulness. A way for doing that can be a press conference performed, a press release written, a leaflet designed and / or a website initiated about the training / volunteering programme. This contributes to the promotion also. In case of participants working within the same volunteering programme, consider searching for / setting up an extended network of people / NGOs from the same field of activity.

Event management – for some participants the practical tools and the detailed materials this module includes can be easily integrated and used in the everyday work; such participants appreciate these and are eager to use them in the preparation of their own events. Make sure that the event being planned supports the leading objective previously set. If not working on a concrete planning, participants usually consider the tools and materials too detailed.

Networking – some participants might feel that they already know the networking techniques presented which makes the module less appealing. Insisting on the identification of new networking opportunities, in relation also with the resources available, can improve the way this module is perceived. It was found useful to introduce an activity where participants could talk about issues they encounter at their association, making possible not only to know more about each other's work, but also to give advice to each other and establish ways for deeper connection (cooperation and mutual support). This also helps with the group dynamics and connecting the group better.

Finances – many volunteer coordinators don't have to deal with taxation or finances and the volunteers they recruit are far removed from this, so the information provided by this module was found to be less interesting for certain participants. Even though, in other trainings this module proved to be one of the most appreciated topic, especially through the “monopoly money” activity where trainees could better understand the motivation of sponsors when fundraising. Appreciating / calculating the resources and budget needed for the proposed events can also be added here.

Legal issues – the part concerning the legislation on how to set up an NGO might be unnecessary if participants are already involved in NGOs take part at the training. Even if not very much appreciated by the participants, the module provides useful learning points about safeguarding and disclosures. Many questions related to this module might arise during the previous modules (especially in the module “Volunteering”), therefore a list where aspects to go into further details can be gathered. In case the participants are involved in a specific volunteering activity, include relevant legal issues connected to that.

The modules of “Event management”, “Project / time management” and “PR in NGOs” can be approached using the main frame of the planning of a public event / a social campaign.



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Tips and tricks

In case there are participants with more experience on certain modules / topics (more advanced coordinators and beginners), adjust the used activities so that you give more space for / enhance the peer learning process and assure the involvement of both parties. Find ways to motivate the more experienced members so that they help and support the less experienced.

In case of experienced participants make sure that as a trainer space is given for more facilitation and guidance than leading and providing information. In such cases it's important to attain a higher level of discussions than in case of beginners.

In case of trainings where participants have a similar environment in their volunteer coordination activities (e.g. are involved in the same project, initiative, etc.), consider adapting or replacing certain modules so that you include project- and context-specific information. Also, to increase the impact of the training, you can adapt the modules so that through them you can help the participants setting up certain improvements in their volunteer coordination context.

In order to increase the impact of the training on the represented NGOs, the development of a personal action plan at the end of the training could be considered; such a plan could include the actions each participant would like to carry out at their organization in order to improve the quality of the volunteer management process.

It is very much recommended to obtain the support of the decision makers from local level from the very beginning, as it helps within the whole process of training delivery, extending also the possible impact of the training on the local community.

When making the schedule, difficulties might arise due to the fact that joint training dates and hours has to be identified, fitting with the availability of the trainees from various backgrounds.

Always consider making the training more “juicy” and less “dry”, meaning to introduce various practical exercises (based on own experience) and provide adequate materials / handouts related to the topics being discussed in order to help the participants better integrate the knowledge the training aims to pass further. Also, participants many times happen to know to a certain extent the theoretical part and the practical aspects need real improvement.

In case you feel less experienced with a certain module, consider the option of inviting a specialist in the field (e.g. Finances, Legal issues, Event management).

Final remark

Most of the trainings had to be adapted to the real context of the country and the participants' profile, covering certain topics into more detail and focusing less on others, restructuring the order and adding new ones. This highlights the difficulties of developing a pan-European set of training.