

Setup Inclusive Volunteering Networks Among ViOs

Suggested activities and tools

INTRODUCTION

For inclusive volunteering to succeed, particularly at the local level, it is essential to establish a strong network of organizations, including both volunteer and host organizations, that collaborate effectively. This cooperative approach aims to foster an environment where inclusive volunteers feel supported, and where volunteering opportunities are abundant and accessible to everyone, regardless of their background, abilities, or circumstances. By building this network, Volunteer Involving Organizations (ViOs), volunteers, and community stakeholders can work together to share best practices, pool resources, and create impactful, accessible volunteering opportunities that benefit all.

Key objectives:

- Build local networks to help organizations share experiences and refer volunteers to each other.
- Create wider networks to connect organizations nationally and internationally for sharing resources and volunteers.
- Build stronger relationships among volunteer coordinators to improve support and sharing.
- Improve communication to help volunteer centers support host organizations in welcoming inclusive volunteers.
- Encourage teamwork to promote collaboration between volunteer and host organizations for better management.
- Increase volunteer involvement by offering more accessible opportunities to get more people involved in volunteering.

Levels

Setup of networks is possible at those levels:

- Local and regional level
- National and international level
- Digital level

Local level:

The most crucial and intensive collaboration will likely occur among local ViOs. Local organizations are closely connected to the most pressing issues in their communities and can effectively focus on addressing them together. A local center can be any organization or initiative coordinating

efforts with other organizations on a local scale. This may include, for example, a city-based volunteer center or community group, depending on who takes the lead in organizing activities, facilitating communication, and fostering networks within the immediate locality. Regional volunteer centers, on the other hand, often play a broader role, but they can also contribute to specific local efforts when needed.

The content of this local centre can be, for example:

1. Organization of regular meetings

We consider the organization of meetings, workshops and training and other necessary events as one of the most important tasks of the central organization in general. For example, the central organization can organize regular meetings to exchange ideas and experiences, to address various difficulties in inclusive volunteering together (recruitment efforts, support for inclusive volunteers, accessibility, disability awareness, fundraising).

Meeting organizations can be **informal** - getting to know them on a more personal level can also bring:

- facilitating communication between individuals in organizations;
- understanding the work of each organization and their volunteering opportunities;
- understanding the structure in colleagues' organizations - knowing who to contact

There are many ways to meet:

- meeting can be an informal breakfast together (take inspiration from the Stakeholder Breakfast concept <https://professional-volunteering.eu/results/>)
- organizations can meet in joint volunteering events where volunteers can meet ViOs staff and coordinators from volunteer centers (e.g. joint cleaning of the grounds)
- celebrations with volunteers and their coordinators (volunteer appreciation opportunities or Christmas party)

2. Organization of workshops, trainings

It is optimal if the central organization provides training for all stakeholders according to proven strategies and materials - inclusion volunteers, inclusion buddies, coordinators, parents and carers. Training, especially for coordinators, also has a great potential to connect organizations, or give coordinators from different organizations a chance to get to know each other.

3. Additional events and features - the central organization (local volunteer center) can also act as:

- Library of materials on inclusive volunteering: sharing guides and curricula on best practices for inclusive volunteering;
- the possibility of borrowing compensatory aids for PWD needed for volunteering
- local volunteer centers can work with local businesses, municipalities and schools to promote the importance of inclusive volunteering and the running of the volunteering sector itself.

National and international level

This level is also important for the smooth running of volunteering. Organisations operating in other cities or countries can enrich each other's experience, training materials or even volunteers.

The importance of networking nationally and internationally:

Experience - for example, some countries have a high volunteer or inclusive culture - use your contacts and get to know more experienced colleagues, you may be able to avoid some mistakes

Materials on inclusive volunteering - through relationships with other organisations you may have better access to resources, and likewise you may be able to build relationships with other organisations through the materials you create.

Training at national level - organise training, conferences and other learning events at national level - invite different organisations, you will hear from those who are interested in inclusive volunteering or even those who are already working with inclusive volunteers.

The same applies as at local level: you can organise training for all stakeholders in inclusive volunteering: training for inclusive volunteers, inclusion buddies, coordinators and parents and carers.

Training at international level - organise training, conferences or training events online.

The same applies as at local and national level: you can organise training for all stakeholders in inclusive volunteering: training for inclusive volunteers, inclusion buddies, coordinators and parents and carers.

Volunteers - some volunteer centres and ViOs are included in programmes or projects for volunteer mobility. Organisations can exchange volunteers with each other, it is possible to be both a sending and receiving organisation.

Digital world

As already mentioned, you can use the online environment to connect with organisations that are not locally accessible, i.e. connecting with more distant organisations would be time and cost

consuming. After the covid era, organisations adapted most of their activities to the online environment. This is why networking at national and international level is important today, as distance no longer plays such a role and organisations can now connect and enrich each other in all aspects.

The possibilities of networking in a digital world:

- Create a centralized digital platform that connects all ViOs in the network
- Transfer of experience, materials
- Create an online library of training materials on inclusive volunteering
- Discuss or brainstorm together online about your inclusive topics
- Organise educational events
- Share contributions between ViOs to promote inclusive volunteering and overturn stereotypes about people with disabilities
- Organise online training sessions for colleagues from other states, other countries, for example
- Share with other ViOs the demand for local volunteers
- Share the range of volunteer positions offered by ViOs in your area
- Share online the demand for digital volunteers with disabilities
- Share the offer of digital volunteer positions

More tips for your network

Assessment, evaluation

For a functional network where all members are happy is good from time to time:

- assess and evaluate the needs of the ViOs in the network: from time to time send an evaluation questionnaire to the collaboration, during meetings or training sessions ask for feedback on your collaboration
- Measure success: track metrics such as:
 - Number of ViOs involved in the network and their practices for integrating volunteers.
 - Increased engagement of inclusive volunteers.
 - Impact of joint projects and shared resources on ViO performance.
 - Volunteer sustainability and satisfaction rates

Fundraising





You also need funding to keep volunteering going, and you are likely to find it easier if you have established good relationships with other organisations at whatever level. You can take inspiration from each other or educate each other in this area. For example, you can apply for grants together; partnering with other nonprofits or coalitions can help you apply for funding as a consortium and strengthen your chances of success. You can work together on social entrepreneurship, or

organize your own fundraising events, crowdfunding events, where you raise money for a specific project.

Volunteering Ambassador

If you have a large number of volunteers, appoint a volunteer ambassador to represent inclusive volunteers. He or she can promote volunteering opportunities amongst inclusive volunteers, offer feedback to the volunteer centre or even the host organisation on the running of the volunteering scheme and provide advice to new volunteers.



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| Project Title | IMProVE 2:0 – Inclusive Method in Professional Volunteering in Europe | |
| Lead partner organisation | Dobrovolnické centrum, z.s. Czech Republic |  |
| Partners | Jaunuolių dienos centras (JDC) Lithuania |  |
| | ASSOCIAZIONE UNIAMOCI ONLUS Italy |  |
| | Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V. Germany |  |

