

How to... ?!

Mini-Manuals Supporting Growth of Emerging Youth Workers

Context NextGenResp

A partner consortium from the socioMovens network with the participation of Germany, Poland, Croatia and Romania has developed the pilot programme NextGenResp for the qualification of young professionals in youth work in 2024/25. The partner organisations identified sustainable engagement and the assumption of responsibility by alumni as multipliers as a common central challenge. In particular, the unstable life situation of alumni between finishing school, university and training or moving to other cities makes medium and long-term commitment difficult.

The project activities were aimed at realising new recruitment and training opportunities – in a European exchange network. The piloted qualification approach is based on three pillars: Firstly, interested alumni receive local and transnational training on their role as multipliers in youth work. In the second activity, this training is deepened through individual coaching and opportunities for peer-to-peer exchange. Thirdly, in order to put what they have learned into practice, the participants realise their own mini-project and have the opportunity to participate in international job shadowing to gain practical experience. The results of the project are now being integrated step by step into the regular work of the partner organisations.

As an output of the project, mini-manuals for the practical experience pillars have been written and are shared with the interested youth work community.

Manual I: How to organise a volunteer job-shadowing?

This short manual differentiates three perspectives of the sending organisation, the host organisation and the volunteer. Before sending a volunteer on a job shadowing all of these parties involved need to agree on a financing model, that covers travel expenses, subsistence costs and hosting costs. Besides the organisations own budget, a financial support via Erasmus+, bilateral youth funds or private foundations is possible.

Sending Organisation	Host Organisation
Organisational pretext	
<p>strategic decision on transnational <i>Learning Cooperation</i> with possible job shadowing partners (recommended, but other models, depending on the needs of the sending organisation possible)</p> <p>identification of suitable volunteers via a transparent application, possible criteria: motivation, understanding of youth work, eagerness to learn and share, language skills</p> <p>communication of the possible job shadowing with the hosting partner</p>	<p>strategic decision on transnational <i>Learning Cooperation</i> with possible job shadowing partners</p> <p>sharing good timings and communication partners for the job shadowing with the sending organisation</p>



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Preparation steps for logistics and contents	
orientation session to discuss the purpose, expectations, and benefits of job shadowing, possibly provision of info regarding the cultural context of the host organisation	expectation call with volunteer and internal contact persons for a detailed job shadowing program that outlines the activities, learning objectives, and schedule
travel arrangements, including visa, transport (favouring green solutions), checking insurances and, if necessary, criminal record	discuss and agree on logistical and time requirements, support, if possible, with the local transfers and suitable accommodation
During the job shadowing	
short check-in with the volunteer to monitor their progress and address possible issues	<p>welcome session to introduce volunteer to the organisation, its mission, and its staff</p> <p>activities to help volunteer integrate into the work and understand the organisational culture, including proper opportunities to observe / participate in youth work activities</p> <p>short a mid-term review to assess the progress of volunteer and address any concerns</p>
Follow-up	
internal feedback mechanism for volunteer to share their learnings and suggestions	internal evaluation to gather feedback and to discuss learnings
joint session with the host organisation to look back, agree on possible PR and check future cooperation	joint session with the sending organisation to look back, agree on possible PR and check future cooperation

Recommendations for the Volunteer(s)

1. Preparation

- Research the host organisation and the cultural context of the country you will be visiting.
- Set clear goals and objectives for what you want to achieve during the job shadowing experience and communicate them with your contact person.
- Consider what you have to share during the activity. Also think of a little sign of gratitude to bring to your partners.

2. During the Job Shadowing

- Actively engage in all activities and take initiative to learn and contribute – where possible communicate your specific interests and own experiences.
- Build relationships with mentors, staff, and other volunteers to expand your professional network.
- Keep a journal to reflect on your experiences, challenges, and learning outcomes.



3. Follow-up

- Provide constructive feedback to the host organisation and your mentors to help improve the programme – discuss together how the cooperation could be developed further.
- Prepare a report summarizing your experience, key learnings, and recommendations for future volunteers.
- Maintain contact with the host organisation and your new network to explore future collaboration opportunities.

Manual II: How to support volunteers organising their own mini-projects?

This short manual looks at three steps of implementing a mini-grant scheme for volunteers. As a background, it is important to establish a financial framework, that both offers opportunities, but also clear limits to the volunteers. Depending on the scope of activity between 500 and 1,500 Euros are considered a manageable amount. Besides the organisations own budget other project applications are possible, sometimes the kind of activity is named “sub-granting”.

Preparation and Participatory Opportunity Advertising

A structured approach is crucial for **supporting volunteers** in their (often first) project development journey. This involves identifying interests and skills through interviews and skill mapping, ensuring volunteers are following a project idea that aligns with their abilities.

In order to arrive at an interested group of volunteers, **advertising the project opportunities** is key. E.g. **brainstorming sessions** encourage creative thinking and address community needs, at this stage, little **volunteer teams** are formed to follow the ideas further – that is usually easier than following an idea alone. At this moment it is also crucial to jointly identify and agree on a **max. duration** of the project.

The established teams with mini-project ideas are **supported by a mentor** from the organisation. They receive help with a **feasibility analysis** to refine ideas into realistic plans. **Effective budgeting** and **material support** are provided to ensure a fitting resource allocation.

Internal **communication** channels and external **outreach** strategies, such as social media and local partnerships, are shared with the volunteers in order to publicise their projects and attract further support. It is generally recommended to communicate to the participants, that they are **trusted** with the project realisation, but this offers rather a **room for learning and experimentation** without them being forced to produce a success.

Mini-Project Realisation

To enable volunteers to realize their own projects supported by the mini grants, it is essential to provide a **structured and supportive environment**. Initially, focus on planning and coordination by helping volunteers develop **detailed project plans** that include timelines, milestones, and task assignments. It can be helpful to give them space for the planning in the beginning and discuss/comment the outputs **only afterwards in a mentoring session**, to design a full learning experience.



Accompanying the project implementation by **training and coaching elements** (e.g. with workshops on project management, communication, and other relevant skills) was a very helpful practise in NextGenResp to empower the volunteers. Mentoring is helpful to keep track and stay aboard.

During the implementation of the projects, it may proof helpful to have the mentor as a **“back up” person available at the spot** to support in case of concrete doubts, such continuous support helps keep the project on track and ensures that volunteers feel valued and heard. This is especially helpful to ensure, that volunteers have **continuous access to the resources** they need, including materials, equipment, finances and advice, to overcome obstacles they may encounter.

Last, but not least supporting the volunteers in (learning) documentation plays a vital role in tracking the project's progress and outcomes. This provides valuable insights for future initiatives and the further development of the volunteers. Additionally, creating a visual record is helpful to be shared with stakeholders and the community.

Experience Evaluation

Supporting volunteers in evaluating their experiences after completing a mini-grant project involves **active listening, and creating a space where reflection feels valuable** rather than evaluative. It is recommended to schedule a meeting **shortly after the activities** finished.

The volunteers should be encouraged to view the evaluation as a chance for **personal growth and community** insight rather than a formal report. It is possible to guide the conversation with gentle, **open-ended questions** that prompt storytelling: What did you hope to achieve? What moments stood out? What surprised you – positively or negatively? Help them trace the journey from idea to outcome, highlighting decisions made along the way and their impact.

Since the mini-projects are not considered a “success generator” but rather a **“learning generator”** it is good to focus on exactly this aspect, considering how the process went, what skills they developed, and how their understanding of the community or issue changed. **Group reflection sessions** are especially powerful – sharing successes and challenges helps build a culture of learning and collaboration. In this process, volunteers should also consider what they would do **differently next time** – incl. the agreement of **next steps**. Very important: **Always celebrate the effort invested!**

It is also a good possibility to give the volunteers a stage for a **broadier presentation** of their mini-project after the internal evaluation – this can additionally motivate and help to continue.

