



E+ VOLUNTEERING TRAINING AND EVALUATION CYCLE GUIDELINES AND MINIMUM QUALITY STANDARDS

1. INTRODUCTION

Taking part in an E+ volunteering activity is a truly non-formal learning experience, which enhances the participants' professional skills and competences and thus makes them more attractive to potential employers. At the same time, it increases their sense of solidarity, develops their social skills and promotes active participation in society.

One of the key features of E+ volunteering is the training and evaluation it provides. Firstly, guiding young volunteers through a non-formal learning process before, during and after their period of activity abroad. Secondly, supporting accredited organisations in offering a qualitative frame for the volunteering experience to take place.

The training and evaluation dimension within E+ volunteering aims at:

- ~ Providing young volunteers with continuous guidance and support throughout their activity period. Such training and evaluation contributes to the education and development of each young person. It also helps resolve conflicts and prevent risks, and it provides a means of assessing the volunteers' experience.
- ~ Providing organisations involved in E+ volunteering with the necessary support and tools to develop and carry out qualitative projects as well as the opportunity to exchange and network with other E+ volunteering actors.

The purpose of this document is to introduce minimum quality standards within the various E+ volunteering training and evaluation formats supported.

Quality is the main objective of preparation, training and evaluation. Given the diversity of countries, National Agencies (NAs), accredited organisations and volunteers, there is a large degree of flexibility in the training format, whereas the quality indicators should be common to all training sessions.

This document outlines the minimum that should be covered by a training/evaluation session. Trainers and organisers are of course free to add any country-specific or project-specific features they deem necessary or interesting for the people attending their training/evaluation event. The minimum quality standards clarify what can be expected to be achieved at a training/evaluation session, whether by the organisers of the event, the project supervisors, the mentors or the volunteers themselves.

At the same time, concerning training of volunteers, the NAs, regional Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities centre (SALTO) and the participating organisations should as far as possible try to ensure that the training/evaluation opportunities offered to each volunteer are in line with his/her specific needs.

Training providers can link the different training/evaluation stages while avoiding any overlaps in the content, and can thus help create a continuous learning process for the volunteers before, during and following their activity period.

2. TRAINING AND EVALUATION CYCLE OF VOLUNTEERS

To harmonise E+ volunteer training and evaluation, the Commission has designed a 'Training and Evaluation Cycle' (TEC) for which the NAs or regional SALTOs are responsible in Programme Countries and in neighbouring Partner Countries in Western Balkans, South-Mediterranean region, the Eastern Partnership and the Russian Federation.

This TEC also facilitates contact between volunteers, participating organisations and NAs/SALTOs. It complements other ongoing support offered by the Sending, Receiving and Coordinating organisations before and during the activity period.

The Training and Evaluation Cycle of volunteers consists of the following:

- ~ pre-departure training;
- ~ on-arrival training (activity of 2 months and longer);
- ~ mid-term evaluation (activity of 6 months and longer);
- ~ annual E+ volunteering event.

Volunteers have a right and an obligation to attend both the on-arrival training and the mid-term evaluation sessions and the participating organisations must ensure that their volunteers take part in the TEC, which is considered an integral part of the volunteering activity.

NAs/SALTOs have to provide training and evaluation sessions for all volunteers in long term activities in their country/region (including those from projects selected at centralised level by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency). Given the large numbers of volunteers, and in view of particular situations that may arise, NAs/SALTOs can opt to delegate all or some of the training/evaluation sessions to subcontractors. However, the NAs/SALTOs should remain involved in the sessions as much as possible and keep regular contact with the trainers. It is also good practice to involve former volunteers in training and evaluating new volunteers.

Training and evaluation events are expected to complement each other, taking place at different stages of the activity and of the volunteers' non-formal learning process.

The TEC and the minimum quality standards also apply to Partner Countries which do not have a NA or a SALTO organising the TEC. In these countries, the training and evaluation sessions are organised by E+ volunteering Receiving or Coordinating Organisations.

If the activity, both long term and short term, involves young people with fewer opportunities, funding for training and evaluation sessions and tailor-made trainings is available if requested in the application form. The trainings should complement any training session provided by NAs/SALTOs but not overlap these.

2.1. On-arrival training

Objectives of the training

The main objective of the on-arrival training is to introduce the volunteers to the host country, preparing them for the activity period and the E+ volunteering experience. On-arrival training helps the volunteers adapt to cultural and personal challenges. It allows volunteers to get to know each other and to build a network. Volunteers should also receive guidance on conflict prevention and crisis management.

At the same time, this training session equips the volunteers with communication skills, including aspects of intercultural learning. It helps them become aware that cultural differences require different models of behaviour. The training is also a good time for the volunteers to plan the coming months and to develop their own personal goals for their activity period, in line with the non-formal learning philosophy of E+ volunteering. If volunteers have already spent time in their Receiving Organisation, they exchange their first experiences and clarify questions related to their project.

Framework of the training

Conditions and training practices will vary from country to country, but the following indicators describe the most common operational framework for on-arrival training:

- ~ Timing: within 4 weeks after the arrival of the volunteer;
- ~ Duration: on average 7 working days;
- ~ Venue: residential.

For the training to be of maximum benefit it should take place shortly after the arrival of the volunteer. For volunteers in activities with a duration of less than 2 months, the Receiving or Coordinating Organisation has to organise training in line with these minimum quality standards, although possibly with a shorter duration.

Expected achievements of the training

On-arrival training will vary according to national conditions, realities and training practices. Nevertheless, it should ensure that each volunteer:

- ~ is aware of and has the chance to discuss questions about visas, residence permits, her/his legal status as a volunteer, insurance, the E+ volunteering Agreement and 'What to expect from E+ volunteering';
- ~ knows the insurance and crisis management systems (Cigna documentation and procedures);
- ~ knows what support is available from the NA and the SALTO;
- ~ has received information on the host country's history, political and social situation, on key aspects of the host culture and on how to get involved in the local community;
- ~ is aware of how to deal with cultural differences and with conflicts;
- ~ is familiar with the role of each partner (Sending Organisation, Receiving Organisation, Coordinating Organisation, volunteer) in the activity and knows her/his own rights and responsibilities;
- ~ has the chance to meet and network with other volunteers;
- ~ receives basic information about the European Union and its policies and programmes in the field of youth;
- ~ learns about the objectives and principles of E+ volunteering and the Erasmus+ Programme;
- ~ knows the meaning of being an E+ volunteer;
- ~ has identified clear goals and ideas for his/her volunteering activity (and future achievements which could be included in the Youthpass).

The training should also contain modules for language learning in the host country's language or the language used in the context of the activity if such language training is not offered through the Online Language Support or through grants for language learning. Furthermore, when needed, support should be offered to participants following the Online Linguistic Support for taking language assessments and courses.

2.2. Mid-term evaluation

Objectives of the evaluation

The mid-term evaluation allows volunteers to assess their experience so far and to reflect on the activities, role and support of the Receiving Organisation and on their own contribution. The mid-term evaluation is essential for risk prevention and crisis management and it thus facilitates conflict resolution — if necessary! In addition, volunteers share experiences and increase their motivation.

The evaluation provides the opportunity to learn from everybody's 'E+ volunteering story' and enables the volunteers to plan developments and/or further improvements in their activity and to think about what they will do in the longer term, once their experience is over. The evaluation should also raise awareness of the personal learning process, linking it to the key competences of the Youthpass.

Overall, the mid-term evaluation should offer a relaxed and informal atmosphere so the volunteers feel comfortable in sharing experiences and saying whatever is important for them.

Framework of the evaluation

Conditions and training practices will vary, but the following indicators outline the most appropriate operational framework for mid-term evaluations:

- ~ Timing: min. 2 months after on-arrival training and min. 2 months before end of activity period;
- ~ Duration: on average 2.5 working days;
- ~ Venue: residential.

It is essential that the event be designed as a meeting between volunteers. It takes place long enough after their arrival for the volunteers to have gained enough experience to review their situation, but also sufficiently long before the end of the activity period so that there is still time to improve the situation if necessary.

The mid-term evaluation is only for volunteers doing an activity of six months or longer.

Expected achievements of the evaluation

Mid-term evaluations will vary according to national conditions, realities and training practices. Nevertheless, by the end of the evaluation, each volunteer should have:

- ~ personally assessed the activity so far and reflected on the scope of his/her activities;
- ~ shared personal experiences (learning new skills and competences, being part of community life, living within a different culture, using the language);
- ~ identified problems, difficulties, conflicts faced or about to be faced and consequently received satisfying support and clues on the 'next steps' to solve these problems;
- ~ worked on developing / improving the activities he/she is involved in;
- ~ received information and guidance on opportunities he/she could be involved in after the period of activity;
- ~ understood how to draft the Youthpass;
- ~ received information about the Final Report to be produced.

3. ADDITIONAL TRAINING AND SUPPORT TO BE PROVIDED TO VOLUNTEERS

In addition to the E+ volunteering Training and Evaluation Cycle, volunteers receive continuous counselling and guidance before, during and after the activity period, while training for project managers, mentors and trainers adds up to a complex set of measures, accompanying volunteers and participating organisations throughout the E+ volunteering experience.

The Sending and Coordinating Organisations are responsible for preparing the volunteers prior to departure. As well, in addition to the Receiving Organisation, they are responsible for providing language training and personal and task related support during the activity period.

In addition to the pre-departure preparation by the Sending Organisation, certain National Agencies may, in justified cases, offer a one-day information session to volunteers prior to their departure. National Agencies are also responsible for organising Annual E+ volunteering Events for volunteers who have completed their activity. These events may serve as evaluation meetings, alumni meetings and promotional events.

3.1. Pre-departure preparation (provided by the Sending Organisation)

Objectives of the training

In order for the project to be successful and the E+ volunteering experiences to be positive and enriching for the volunteer, it is crucial that the Sending Organisation adequately prepares the volunteer prior to departure.

This preparation should take place at least one month before departure and should be tailored to the individual needs of the volunteer and the specificities of the project, the activity and the host country. Pre-departure preparation provides the volunteers with information about E+ volunteering, the project life cycle and the different parties involved. It allows volunteers to discuss their expectations, their motivation and also any concerns they may have about their future activity with their Sending Organisation.

It is essential to provide information on "What to expect from E+ volunteering" (part of the Info-Kit) — as well as on the basics of conflict prevention and crisis management. During their activity period, volunteers will be living in a different country, interacting with people from a different culture and often in a foreign language. At times this will be difficult, and volunteers are likely to face various difficult situations during the activity period. It is therefore essential to lay the grounds for guiding volunteers through the intercultural learning process and to tell them about the support available during their activity period.

Pre-departure preparation includes providing volunteers with practical and technical information on matters such as insurance, visa, pocket money and working hours, etc.

Prior to departure, each volunteer receives an Info-Kit. The pre-departure preparation is an opportunity for the Sending Organisation to go through and discuss the different parts of the Info-Kit with the volunteer. The Coordinating Organisation is responsible for ensuring that the Info-Kit is given to all volunteers involved in its project.

Expected achievements of the preparation

The pre-departure preparation will vary according to training practices, organisational possibilities and volunteer needs. Nevertheless, pre-departure preparation should ensure that, by the time they leave, all volunteers:

- ~ know about concept of the E+ volunteering and its place within the Erasmus+ Programme;
- ~ are familiar with the partners in the E+ volunteering framework and their role, i.e. the Sending, Receiving and Coordinating Organisation, the mentor and, where applicable, the National/Executive Agency, SALTO and the European Commission;
- ~ are familiar with the document "What to expect from E+ volunteering";
- ~ have shared their motivations, expectations and fears, and have reflected on their goals, including goals for learning;
- ~ have received appropriate practical and technical information on visas, residence permits, their legal status as a volunteer, their insurance, pocket money and the E+ volunteering Agreement;
- ~ understand the meaning of intercultural learning and are aware of the ongoing intercultural learning process;
- ~ have received guidance or at least hints on crisis management;
- ~ understand the importance and usefulness of getting a Youthpass;

3.2. Annual E+ volunteering Event (organised by a National Agency)

Objectives of the meeting

The E+ volunteering Event is organised by the sending National Agency and brings together former, current and potential volunteers. It may serve as evaluation meeting, alumni meeting and/or promotional event. It is particularly important as an opportunity for those who have finished their volunteering activity during the past year to discuss and evaluate their experiences and to pass them on to current and potential volunteers.

One of the objectives of the event is to ensure that the National Agency receives feedback about the projects, the participating organisations, the practical arrangements and the overall impression of E+ volunteering. A key question will be what learning effect the activity period had for the volunteer.

Framework of the meeting

Conditions and practices again vary, but the following indicators outline the most appropriate operational framework for E+ volunteering Events:

- ~ Timing: normally once a year in each country, although some NAs may decide to organise regional events;
- ~ Duration: 1-2 days;
- ~ Participants: costs can be covered only for volunteers who have finished their activity during the past 12 months, although the event may gather a much wider group including previous, current and potential volunteers, participating organisations, media and other stakeholders.

Expected achievements of the meeting

E+ volunteering Events will vary according to national conditions, realities and practices. Nevertheless, by the end of the event, each volunteer who has finished their activity during the past year should have evaluated their E+ volunteering experience in terms of:

- ~ the cooperation between the volunteer and the participating organisations, and the personal support and supervision received;
- ~ their personal contribution to the activity;
- ~ the overall pedagogical approach and their own learning achievements (personal, professional, social), including being aware of their personal capacities and skills and (if relevant) having finalised their Youthpass;
- ~ their increased knowledge about Europe, changes in their attitude towards Europe and their greater understanding of cultural diversity;
- ~ having shared their E+ volunteering experience with peers.

Moreover, the E+ volunteering Event may be:

- ~ a chance for potential volunteers and participating organisations to meet experienced volunteers;
- ~ an opportunity to promote E+ volunteering and its impact through contacts with stakeholders, decision-makers and the media;
- ~ a networking event for previous volunteers to explore and develop new projects and other ways of using their experiences;
- ~ a showcase for successful projects;
- ~ a celebration of volunteering.

4. TRAINING AND EVALUATION CYCLE OF ORGANISATIONS

The Training and Evaluation Cycle of accredited organisations consists of the following:

- ~ training for newly accredited organisations under E+ volunteering;
- ~ annual event for accredited organisations under E+ volunteering.

NAs are responsible of organising such trainings for all accredited organisations in their country. For accredited organisations in Neighbouring Partner Countries, the relevant SALTOs are the ones in charge. NAs/SALTOs may decide not to organise such trainings if other instruments are in place to ensure monitoring and quality implementation.

NAs/SALTOs can opt to delegate all or some of the sessions to subcontractors. However, the Agencies/SALTOs should remain involved in the sessions as much as possible and keep regular contact with the trainers.

Accredited organisations have a right and an obligation to attend those sessions.

4.1. Training for newly accredited organisations under E+ volunteering

Objectives of the training

In order for the project to be successful and the E+ volunteering experiences to be positive and enriching for all actors involved, accredited organisations need to have a thorough understanding of the core values and features of E+ volunteering and on their roles and responsibilities as sending, receiving and coordinating organisations.

During the training, newly accredited organisations will focus on the elements that make an E+ volunteering a successful experience and reflections how on their project should be thought through and developed .

The training should:

- ~ ensure understanding of each organisation's roles and responsibilities;
- ~ give appropriate practical and technical information on the project management;
- ~ raise awareness on the important features of E+ volunteering such as specific support for young people with fewer opportunities, Youthpass, Online Linguistic Support, role of the mentor, etc;
- ~ provide necessary support and tools to develop and carry out qualitative mentorship;
- ~ support organisations in developing qualitative projects (selection of partners and volunteers, development of the tasks of the volunteers, crisis management, dissemination, etc.).

The training also provides networking and partner-building opportunities for organisations.

Frame of the meeting

Conditions and practices vary, but the following indicators outline the most appropriate operational framework for trainings for newly accredited organisations under E+ volunteering:

- ~ Timing: once or twice a year in each country;
- ~ Duration: 1-2 days.

4.2. Annual event for newly accredited organisations under E+ volunteering

Objectives of the training

This yearly event should gather representatives of all accredited organisations (dormant and active) with the aim of sharing and confronting experiences, ideas and practices, showcasing success stories, and developing and reinforcing networks/partner building. The event is also the opportunity to remind the core values and features of E+ volunteering.

It will, additionally, allow to assess the difficulties encountered by E+ volunteering organisations and the reasons of inactivity of some accredited organisations.

Frame of the event

Conditions and practices again vary, but the following indicators outline the most appropriate operational framework for newly accredited organisations annual events:

- ~ Timing: normally once a year in each country, although some NAs may decide to organise regional events;
- ~ Duration: 1-2 days.