

Try it another

way

Methodology for Volunteer Centers and Organizations
Involving Volunteers on How to Engage Unemployed
Volunteers



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Matej Bel University, Banska Bystrica

and

the Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations

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Volunteers

2013

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1. Why this publication and what you will find in it

What you hold in your hands is a guide for all organizations that would like to include unemployed individuals into their pool of volunteers. This guide should help you, to understand what the system of work with unemployed volunteers is, and offer a description of necessary steps to take into consideration in order to ensure all activities, in which you get involved, are beneficial for all involved parties.

Unemployment, especially long-term, represents lots of issues. People without employment are often dependent on the state support systems. A bad financial situation is only one of the consequences of life without a work. The consequences of unemployment are much broader and impact psychological, emotional and social aspects of life. The impact and consequences on personality and individuality of the unemployed person include the acceptance of job uncertainty, inability to develop a job career, bad self-esteem, social exclusion, lost work habits or self-created helplessness. Very long unemployment contributes to the creation and lasting phenomenon of unemployability, permanent social dependency on assistance in material need and other social benefits.

The aim of this publication is to explain the specifics of volunteer management of unemployed volunteers and to motivate volunteer centers and organizations involving volunteers to include this target group. Inside, you will find all relevant terms, the specific description of cooperation as well as the roles of individual partners – labor offices, volunteer centers and organizations involving volunteers.

This methodology is based on the experience of volunteer centers that participated in the VOLWEM project in 2012-2014 in Slovakia and the volunteer program for unemployed implemented in the Czech Republic.

Why is it important to involve unemployed people into volunteering? We think there are several answers at hand. Volunteering is offering:

- Possibility to develop and gain new skills and competencies;
- Possibility to maintain and improve work habits (Volunteers, despite not being paid, must obey and respect rules agreed with their coordinator. They should always be on time, fulfill tasks they commit to, often they need to be part of the team, take on responsibility, communicate with other volunteers, coordinators, other employees of the organization and in some cases also with its clients.);
- Socialization (During their volunteering experience volunteers make many new contacts and create relationships with various people.);
- Possibility to gain experience in different fields of expertise. This helps them to decide on possible alternatives and/ or consider a change of their job if necessary;
- Feeling that they are needed and people count on them which has positive impact on their self-confidence;

- Possibility to acquire various training or work experience certificates that can help to get a new job.

Despite all the benefits mentioned above, we need to emphasize that although one can grow, learn, and acquire new experience through volunteering, it is not a 100% recipe for a successful job search. We see it more as a tool to increase the possibility to get employed. Even the best volunteer coordinator can't guarantee for any unemployed person that he/she will find and get a job because of the volunteering experience. We would like to ask you, if you decide to involve un-employed individuals as volunteers in your organization, that you communicate this to them very clearly.

We believe that this document will provide you with a realistic image of the unemployed volunteer coordination and will convince you that this cooperation can be beneficial for all parties involved.

2. Terminology used

Terminology in this publication utilizes resource references from the following:

- The Act of the National Parliament of the Slovak Republic no. 406/2011 Coll. on volunteering and subsequent amendments
- The Act of the National Parliament of the Slovak Republic no. 330/2008 Coll. on the employment services and subsequent amendments
- The Act of the National Parliament of the Slovak Republic no. 417/2013 Coll. on help in material need

Based on the above laws, several key differences exist in definitions of volunteering and a volunteer.

Volunteering

Volunteering is any activity that involves spending unpaid time, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. Volunteering can be done for various types of organizations or could be mediated by them. In such a case, this is considered formal volunteering. Volunteering takes place outside of the scope of formal organizations as well (neighbors help, community work etc.). This type of volunteering is called informal volunteering.

A volunteer

According to the Act on volunteering, a volunteer is an individual person (older than 15 years) doing pre-agreed volunteering work/activity for a third party entity or contributing to public benefit, based on his/her free will, without financial remuneration, and based on his/her skills, expertise or knowledge; he/she should meet all requirements set by this law.

Unemployed

The term unemployed defines an individual person who does not have a paid job, is able to work, ready to be employed, and is actively searching for a job. The term unemployed is very similar to the term job applicant. It is as well true that not all unemployed individuals must be registered as unemployed at the labor office (a person can be voluntarily unemployed as well).

Job applicant

According to the Act on employment services the job applicant is a citizen that can work, is searching for a job, and is registered at the labor office database of job applicants. Job applicant:

- a) is not an employee,
- b) is not self-employed,
- c) is not working in other EU members states or abroad,
- d) is working but the wage or remuneration does not exceed 65% of the subsistence minimum for one adult individual.

Material need

Material need is a situation when the income of the members of household does not meet the level of minimum subsistence as defined by a special decree¹ and members of the household can't secure or increase their income by work or other ownership rights.

Volunteer activities in the context of the Act on Volunteering

Volunteer action, according the Act on volunteering, is an activity done from free will, with no payoff, in favor of a third party entity or contributing to public benefit. Volunteer activity according to the Act is not:

- Activity between a husband and a wife or other closely related individuals
- Activity executed within the enterprise activities or other gainful activity,
- Activity implemented during employment relationship, state services relationship, official public services or in relationship with study responsibilities,
- Mutual help among citizens or neighbors,
- Activities carried out by individuals younger than 15 years old.

A volunteer is doing agreed volunteer work based on a valid volunteer contract signed between him/her and the recipient of the activity or the sending organization.

Volunteer activities in the context of the Act on Help in Material Need

In the interpretation of the term volunteer activities; there is a disagreement when looking at it from the perspective of the Act on volunteering or the Act on material help. Basic criteria of volunteer activities as interpreted by the Act on volunteering state that the volunteer activity is free of charge, based on free will and done in favor of someone else. According to the Act on help in material need as valid from January 1, 2014, the volunteer activity is one of the preconditions to receive the financial benefit in the material need. This is, according to our opinion, in direct contradiction with two fundamental criteria of volunteering – activity based on free will and done free of charge. It is very difficult to agree that, if the activity is a precondition to receive financial benefit, it will be based on free will.

¹§2 of Act no. 601/2003 Coll. on minimal living wage and subsequent amendments

Volunteer activities in the context of the Act on Employment Support Services

The Act on help in material need is closely related to the Act on employment services. This law defines volunteering in §52 as a form of activity of a job applicant who is performing this for a public benefit in order to retain his/her working habits/skills. This type of work must be at least 10 hours a week. Participation in these “volunteer” activities is based on free will, but, according to the Act on help in material need, if an individual performs this activity no less than 64 hours and no more than 80 hours a month, he/she is entitled to receive the public benefit. Volunteer activities are based on an agreement between the labor office and the administrator of the volunteer activity. All legal or private entities involved in the administration of the volunteer activities are entitled to receive financial benefit to cover partial costs for the administrative activities. The provision of this benefit is based on a signed contract with a specific labor office.

Different varieties of volunteering done by unemployed people in Slovakia

Aspect	Volunteering activity based on free will, no remuneration and in the favor of others	Volunteering activity as a condition to receive the financial benefit in material need	Volunteering activity as a form of the activation work
Legal	Act no. 406/2011 Coll. on volunteering	Act no. 417/2013 Coll. on help in material need	Act no. 330/2008 Coll. on the employment support services and Act no. 417/2013 on help in material need
Time	No time limit defined	Minimum of 32 hours a month	Minimum 64 hours but not more than 80 hours a month
Financial	An unemployed person has no claim for any financial reward. An organization has no right to claim any expenses related to the administration of volunteering activity.	An unemployed person is entitled to receive the financial benefit in the material need, if he/she is in the material need. An organization has no right to claim any expenses related to the volunteering activity administration.	An unemployed person is entitled to receive the activation benefit. An organization administering the volunteering activities is entitled to receive financial compensation for expenses related to it.
Organizational	Volunteering activity is based on an agreement between an unemployed person and a sending or receiving organization.	Volunteering activity is based on an agreement between an unemployed person, a sending or receiving organization and a labor office.	Volunteering activity is based on an agreement between the unemployed, the sending or receiving organization and a labor office.

Organization involving volunteers

Under the term organization involving volunteers, we understand an organization that needs and uses volunteering activities for fulfilling its goals. This could be a non-profit, or public organization and the help of volunteers should support its goals. A volunteer organization can have paid employees but not necessarily.

Recipient of volunteer activity

Private or legal (excluding business) entity can be a recipient of a volunteer activity for which a volunteer based on a volunteer contract performs volunteer work. The recipient of the volunteer activity selects, registers, coordinates the volunteer and signs a volunteer contract with that person.

Sending organization

A Sending organization selects, registers, assigns work, and signs volunteer contracts with volunteers. According the Act on volunteering, a sending organization can be:

- A civic association,
- A non-profit organization providing publicly beneficial services,
- A church, a parish or other legal entity deriving its legal registration from a church or parish,
- A school or a school institution,
- State institutions, a higher territorial unit, villages, and legal entities founded by them.

Volunteer center

A volunteer center (VC) is a service organization that provides information service to the general public and other organizations; is interested and where possible also involved in all aspects of volunteering – including volunteers, organizations and projects in which volunteers may participate.

Basic functions of the VC include:

- Serving as a hub – connecting organizations and volunteers, maintaining and managing database of organizations, volunteer opportunities, and volunteers. VC has good knowledge about organizations in its geographical area, knows the quality of their volunteer management and the type/kind of volunteers these organizations need,
- Promoting volunteering, seeking and motivating people to participate in volunteering in its geographical area,
- Communicating with volunteers and informing them about available volunteer opportunities – recommending volunteers to organizations, informing new volunteers about their rights, responsibilities, ethical standards, volunteering opportunities and inquiring about their expectations,
- Working with volunteer organizations, offering trainings, consultations and supervision in the area of volunteer management,
- Providing networking opportunities for volunteer organizations and supporting their experience and expertise exchange in the field of volunteer management,

- Cooperating with companies – developing and supporting corporate volunteering – sending corporate volunteers to volunteer organizations, helping to define and create corporate volunteer programs in line with the companies and volunteer organizations expectations,
- Actively promoting volunteering and its significance and value for the society through public events focusing on awarding and motivating volunteers.
- Creating and building cross-sectoral partnerships among volunteer organizations, local governments, state and corporations,
- Implementing research in the area of volunteering – monitoring and keeping up-to-date with new developments and trends.

Volunteer coordinator

A volunteer coordinator is a key figure in the volunteer program management of any organization. He/she is responsible for management of the program and volunteers. Responsibilities of the volunteer coordinator include:

- selection of volunteers and first interviews with them,
- preparation of a volunteer job description,
- drafting the agreement for volunteers,
- preparation and implementation of the training for volunteers,
- initiation and maintaining the database of volunteers,
- coordination of volunteers in the organization,
- provision of a guidance for the volunteers,
- provision of support and supervision of volunteers,
- evaluation of the work of volunteers,
- designing and using a system of rewards for volunteers,
- terminating the cooperation with a volunteer (if needed),
- facilitating the communication among volunteers, other personnel, clients, and organization management.

3. Specifics of cooperation with unemployed volunteers

Working with an unemployed volunteer is, from the management perspective, not different than the work with any other type of volunteer. But before we start to work with unemployed volunteers we need to ask few fundamental questions to find out what are their specifics:

- What is the level of motivation of unemployed volunteers? Can it be higher or lower than the one of other volunteers while having a job or studying?
- Do the unemployed people have more or less time they can spend in volunteering than employed people or students?
- Are the expectations of an unemployed volunteer different than those of an employee or a student volunteer?
- What are the current working habits of the unemployed volunteer and will they have any effect on his work? (This question can be, but not necessarily related to the length of the unemployment period of the volunteer.)
- Is there any difference in what an unemployed or an employee/student are trying to achieve by volunteering? Can the goals be different; and if yes, to what extent?

Although it may seem that an unemployed volunteer would be more motivated, have more free time, equal expectations, and lost working habits; it is not necessarily true. There is no universal definition and/or set of attributes that are typical for all unemployed volunteers. A coordinator who will work with unemployed volunteers in a volunteer center or an organization should not forget that there are individual differences and capabilities which are unique for each volunteer. He/she should choose such a form of communication and cooperation with each individual that will respect their personality and individuality. To find answers to the above mentioned questions, we can use various tools described in this publication.

Before you start

If your organization makes the decision to work with unemployed volunteers, it is important to know what are your goals and reasons why you want to use this opportunity. One of the fundamental motives is to provide the volunteer opportunity to all individuals (unemployed people in Slovakia belong to the category of citizens with lowest participation in volunteering²). Another reason is to help the unemployed to maintain, develop or to restore their work habits and to show them that the society can utilize their skills. Volunteering is beneficial for all involved parties. An unemployed volunteer has the opportunity to demonstrate, expand and utilize their potential and skills for individuals or organizations that need their help.

² Brozmanová-Gregorová, A. *et al.*: Volunteering in Slovakia – research reflections. Bratislava: Iuventa, 2012.

The group of unemployed can be very diverse. You can have one volunteer that can be managed very easily but in the same group you can have another volunteer that may face various issues. We recommend you evaluate your own internal capacity, if you are thinking about starting to work with this target group. You should make a SWOT analysis of your organization with a focus on work with unemployed volunteers.

A SWOT analysis is a complex method that will help you to evaluate the internal as well as external organizational environment. It offers an insider view on the organization's functionality from reflecting on the past as well as future perspective. The method offers analyses of the basic factors divided in to the internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats. A SWOT analysis is very good for evaluating new ideas. It works with the assumption that the organization will achieve its goals by capitalizing on its internal strengths and external opportunities, and at the same time minimizing weaknesses and deferring threats.

SWOT analysis example – engagement of unemployment people into volunteering:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • motivation • sufficient free time available • successfull distraction from negative reality • self-realization, satisfaction from feedback • improved self-esteem • feeling important for the society • strenghtening or restoration of work habits • motivation to search for a new job • volunteering is increasing the quality of services • development of services • meaningfully time spent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • volunteers lack information about his/her rights and responsibilities • employees of organizations do not know (or don't want to) understand the role of a volunteer and perceive him/her as a threat or competitor • long-term unemployed people are missing basic work habits • employees do not know how to integrate the volunteers into the work process • volunteers could be perceived negatively by clients (they appear as not profesional enough) • insufficient time for planing and for work with volunteers • time needed for orientation and integration of volunteers into the organization (mandatory trainings)

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • capable volunteers can be offered a regular position based on their performance • recommendation of the organization may help with their job search • restoring or gaining new work habits • better relationship with other social environments • improved cooperation between an NGO and and public administration • change in the perception of unemployed people about volunteering • increased awareness about volunteering • NGO brand recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blending of volunteering by unemployed volunteers and other activities done by unemployed people (i.e: activities done according to other acts than the Act on Volunteering) – leading to decreased prestige of volunteering • lack of interest and motivation of an unemployed person to volunteer • complicated cooperation with a hosting organization • irresponsibility (among those who are motivated only by social benefits) • replacement of employees with volunteers

Based on the SWOT analysis results, an organization can draw conclusions and further steps.

Don't forget – facts and challenges

Unemployed volunteer has his/her own goals when volunteering in an organization. They want to help but they also want: to gain new skills and knowledge, to learn how to better communicate with other people, to be able to clearly express their opinion or just to be helpful. Volunteering can help them to set up short as well as long-term personal goals which provide them something to look forward to, a positive attitude, and a chance to see the results of their work. Additional positive experience that a volunteer can gain and spread further in his environment is reached when he/she has good relationships in the new team and gets the support from the management of the organization. Within volunteering, he/she can also make new contacts that can potentially help him to find a regular job. In some cases organizations allow volunteers (not only unemployed) to take requalification courses and become part-time or even full-time employees.

An unemployed volunteer is often looking for something new and is more willing to try something he/she would not dare as employee bound by a contract. This is for him/her a unique opportunity to “taste” something never done before and to decide whether or not to focus on this area in the future.

Unemployed volunteers can have vast knowledge or subject matter experience from his/her previous jobs/education that the organization can use. It is therefore very good if the organization is asking the opinion of a volunteer. This way the volunteer receives more than the feeling of satisfaction. An additional bonus is that the organization can receive from volunteers, valuable feedback and input. Feedback from unemployed volunteers can provide answers to questions that the organization employees are reluctant to answer because it may jeopardize their position or job in the organization.

Successful cooperation between an unemployed volunteer and an organization contributes not only to increased publicity and positive PR but also to the support for the concept of volunteering of unemployed people, to the elimination of stereotypes about unemployed people, and last but not least, to new cooperation opportunities.

Barriers

There are some barriers that create obstacles in involving unemployed in volunteering, They include for example:

- other motivation of the volunteer for volunteering,
- the necessity of more precise and thorough selection of applicants – it requires more time and effort from the coordinator,
- more extensive preparation/training of volunteers,
- higher risk for a volunteer coordinator that he/she would be more directive in the management with unemployed volunteers,
- increased need for self-reflection of obtained skills and competencies – focus on personal growth,
- differences in the interpretation of volunteering in the context of individual legal regulations

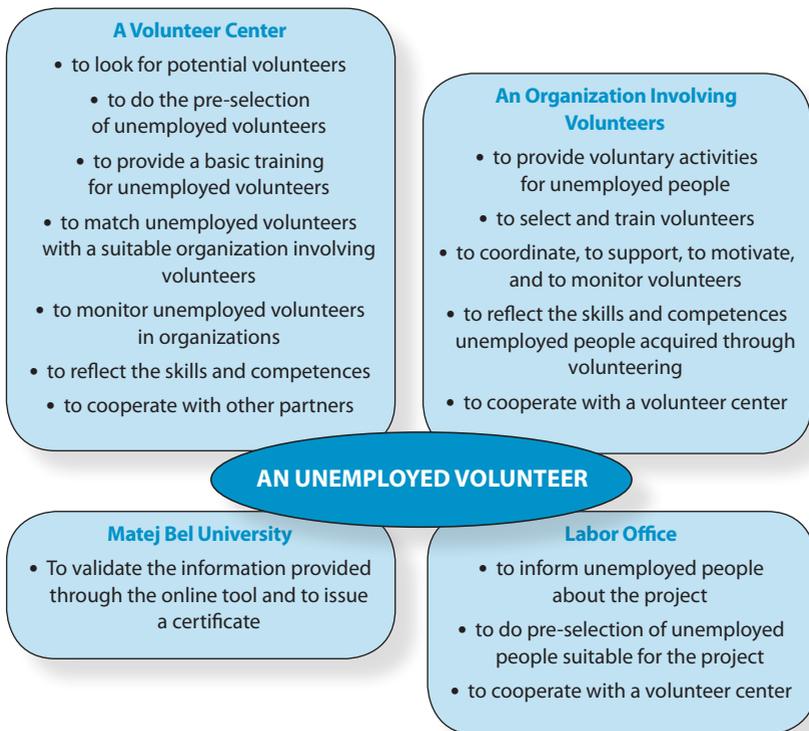
One of the main attributes of the volunteering definition according the Act on volunteering is that it is an activity done free of charge and based on free will. Motivation of an unemployed volunteer to volunteer should not be limited and related only to the chance to gain an allowance or benefit. A Volunteer should not perform activities that would replace the paid jobs of an organization's employees (i.e. health or social care, assets repairs, accounting etc.).

4. The coordination of unemployed volunteers and tasks of individual partners

In this chapter, we would like to introduce you to the process of coordination of unemployed volunteers and to the tasks and roles of individual partners involved into the VOLWEM Project. While working with unemployed volunteers, you can use the practice described and recommended in this publication or you can adjust it to your own conditions. In case you are working in a region without an active volunteer center, the roles of this partner should be taken over by the organization involving volunteers.

The following scheme provides a brief overview of tasks for individual partners during the coordination of unemployed volunteers.

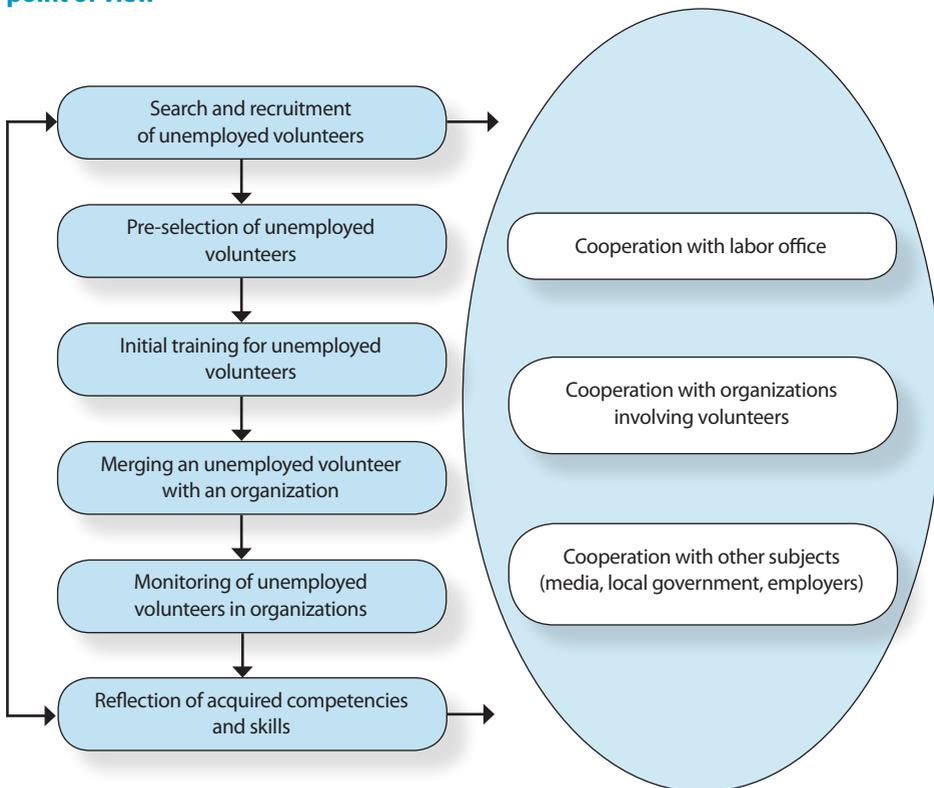
Tasks of individual partners within the work with unemployed volunteers:



4.1 Volunteer center and its role in work with unemployed volunteers

A volunteer center plays a crucial role in the system of work with unemployed volunteers. It cooperates with all involved: unemployed, organizations working with unemployed, and labor offices. Basic phases of work with unemployed volunteers – from the volunteer center point of view – are described in the following flow chart:

Basic phases of the work with unemployed volunteers from the volunteer center point of view



Cooperation of a volunteer center with unemployed volunteers

The work with unemployed volunteers consists of: searching, recruiting, pre-selection, training, introduction to a specific organization involving volunteers and position, monitoring of volunteers in organizations and reflecting on competencies gained by volunteers. A coordinator in a volunteer center has several key roles. He/she serves as a contact person, leads the initial interview with volunteer applicants, maintains direct contact with them, and later (based on the agreement with the coordinator from the volunteer involving organization) also monitors/registers, provides support and feedback to the volunteer, and ensures/executes administrative tasks related to volunteering.

Search for unemployed volunteers

A volunteer center searches for long-term unemployed volunteers through promotion at labor offices, schools, through interviews and media coverage, through relevant web pages and social media, emails, and through the disposal of leaflets and posters in public spaces (libraries, health care centers etc.) Information published on promotion materials should – among others – include contacts for a local volunteer center where unemployed volunteers can find more information.

Pre-selection of unemployed volunteers

Pre-selection process is implemented in several steps. First contact and enquiry about volunteering is usually done via phone call or email. The coordinator can – even in this first stage – identify basic characteristics of a potential volunteer, such as verbal/written expression, reasons for volunteering, level of his/her motivation, or an indication of area of interest. It is not a rule, but a good coordinator can estimate from emails the level of computer literacy of the applicant, his/her understanding and knowledge of electronic etiquette, use of the language and grammar and can sensitively adjust their form of communication. This might be important information for the organization. During the first contact with an unemployed volunteer, it is crucial to remember that it might have been very difficult for the person to make the decision to contact the volunteer center. The professional communication of the coordinator plays an essential role as it can positively reinforce the unemployed volunteer that they made a good decision.

After the first contact, a coordinator sends an electronic version or directly completes the entry questionnaire with an unemployed volunteer (in the project we have used volunteer registration cards which you will find on the web page <http://VOLWEM.dobrovolniccentra.sk>). At this stage, a coordinator can learn a significant amount of information about the volunteer, such as his/her qualification, skills and interests, expectations, and time limits as well as any previous volunteer experience, etc. Based on the expressed interest in one or more specific areas, the coordinator can evaluate his/her capabilities for a position that will suit best the expectations and capabilities of the unemployed volunteer.

An individual interview/meeting with the unemployed volunteer can take part during the completion of the registration card or separately after the card has been completed and returned electronically. This direct interview/meeting enables the coordinator to make a better picture of volunteer's capabilities and needs, his/her determination, hidden characteristics, but as well of desire to move forward thanks to the volunteer experience. This interview should be done in a pleasant atmosphere, an unemployed volunteer should be offered a space to reveal his feelings, opinions and should feel free to ask questions about all aspects he/she may have concerns about. It is important to pay attention to the fact that an unemployed person can gain through his/her volunteering experience new skills and knowledge that may help him/her to find a new job in the future. It is not only about the help that the unemployed volunteer is providing to the organization but about the possibility to help him/her. The level of knowledge or skills is not always as crucial as the will to learn new things and work on self-development. Meeting like this should be beneficial for both – the volunteer as well as the coordinator, who should be able – based on the extended collected information – to evaluate and decide about the form and extent of the engagement of the unemployed person into volunteering.

It may happen that the expectations of an unemployed volunteer and an organization do not match because of different needs they have. In such a case, it is the responsibility of the coordinator not to recommend that person for volunteering in that organization. The coordinator may suggest that the unemployed person participate in a basic training for unemployed volunteers. They should agree on specific dates for this training. Until the training is completed, the unemployed can think about a relevant and suitable volunteer position.

Initial training of unemployed volunteers

Based on the number of volunteers and its focus, the initial training for volunteers could take between 1-4 hours. Training can be done individually or in a group. Each volunteer needs different amount of information and attention based on his/her education, orientation and the length of unemployment. It is up to the coordinator to decide how much attention and time is devoted to the initial training. It is very likely that this is the first volunteer experience for the unemployed and – similarly to a new employee – he/she needs to receive all basic information about rights and responsibilities. There is no formalized structure and required content for the initial orientation; it should contain essential information about the volunteer job from the sending organization (volunteer center) point of view, mutual expectations and necessary responsibilities.

Training topics:

- Introduction to volunteering
- Types and opportunities of volunteering
- Clarification on motivation – why are they interested in volunteering, why are they interested in specific type of volunteering, what are their interests and expectations
- Essential rights and responsibilities
- Ethical principles and confidentiality
- Other questions.

Initial training does not replace the deeper orientation that needs to take place at the organization the person will volunteer for.

After the initial training, the volunteer is connected with the organization. This organization is now responsible for the selection, further orientation and direct engagement in activities.

The volunteer and a suitable organization agree to conditions favorable for both parties. This would be the best time to identify the specific forms and extent of the expectations of the volunteer. For the purpose of collection of information from all volunteers, an entry questionnaire³ can be used. This questionnaire allows a volunteer to express his/her interest related

³ Today, you can find a lot of similar questionnaires but if you are interested in the specific one used within the project, you can find it on volvem.dobrovolnickecentra.sk.

to the benefits volunteer activities can bring to him/her and provides a space for open ended answers related to expected volunteer achievements. An unemployed volunteer can perceive his volunteer experience as an opportunity to try out new or specific tasks, to test his/her abilities and set new boundaries and goals. It is recommended to file and keep the questionnaires for further use.

A volunteer center can agree with a volunteer on regular email, phone or direct communication and monitoring.

After some time, it is good to reflect on competencies and skills gained thanks to volunteering. This helps to evaluate the development level of specific skills that can help the unemployed volunteer find a new job (preparation of CVs or motivation letters). A volunteer center coordinator collects and verifies that the questionnaires are completed and signed by the volunteer coordinator from the organization this volunteer is working for. All available evidence about each unemployed volunteer related to the skills he/she has gained (photos, videos, created and completed documents etc.), if available, is collected and stored.

In case of the pilot project VOLWEM, the coordinator and volunteer agreed in advance on the time when the online tool *V-skills for employment* (developed during the project implementation) will be completed⁴. The completed questionnaire was verified by the Matej Bel University accreditation committee, together with the Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations, issued the V-Skills for employment certificate for the unemployed volunteer. The certificate can be submitted together with a job application form as the verification of experience and skills gained through volunteering during the time of unemployment. It is necessary to say that the activity of unemployed volunteers may not end up as described above. The goal of the project is to find ways how to identify and validate experience and skills gained during the volunteer activities and to develop a system that would lead to acceptance of such skills in the process of a job application.

After the volunteer assignment in the hosting organization is concluded and all the above mentioned exit questionnaires are completed, it is possible to emphasize the positives aspects of volunteering that may help the unemployed volunteer to position him/herself more favorably on the labor market. We can help the volunteer to include his/her gained skills in relevant form and extend into their professional CV. The self-confidence of the unemployed volunteer regarding his/her gained skill could be either very low or very high. It is therefore important that professional and unbiased feedback is provided to the volunteer by the coordinator. Based on a common agreement, the coordinator can provide a recommendation for future employers.

Cooperation between a volunteer center and an organization involving volunteers

Before an unemployed volunteer is sent to an organization involving volunteers, this organization needs to be briefed and prepared for such cooperation. The role of the volunteer center is to seek and approach organizations that can work with unemployed volunteers in its geographical area. Not all organizations have the capacity to receive and work with unemployed volunteers.

⁴ You can find more on V-Skills at volwem.dobrovolnickecentra.sk

It has been clear in the VOLWEM project that usually organizations that have a good and developed volunteering program, have high level volunteer management skills, and have an assigned volunteer coordinator who is capable of including and successfully working with unemployed volunteers. It is equally important that the organization has a clear idea about the volunteer job description, implemented regulations, and volunteer management procedures (selection principles, orientation/training, motivation, evaluation, and retention of volunteers). In the ideal case every organization involved in the project went through an accredited training on volunteer management. Basic management training focused on the work with unemployed volunteers is offered by a volunteer center to all interested organizations.

Training for volunteer involving organizations– how to work with unemployed volunteers

Duration: app. 4 hours

Content and topics:

1. Opening, introduction of each organization and project that the unemployed volunteers can be involved in, quality verification of the volunteer management in engaged organizations.
2. Project introduction, duration of the volunteer involvement, project contribution, outcomes, V-skills and competencies, work with employers, project leaflets.
3. Who is an unemployed volunteer and how to approach him/her? Specifics of work with unemployed volunteers⁵.
4. Basics of volunteer management – job description, work time, volunteer's profile (age, education, conditions for engagement, etc.), selection⁶ (questionnaire, interview), orientation/training, retention and motivation, evaluation, agreements.
5. Project progress – volunteer is involved since the beginning till the end – since the introduction into the organization until the exit questionnaire is filled in and verification of V-skills done.
6. Evaluation and monitoring of volunteers in the project, tracking the progress changes of the volunteer and his improvements.
7. Competence questionnaire – explanation how to fill in the questionnaire together with the volunteer coordinator in the organization.
8. Cooperation with the volunteer center – regular meetings, phone conversations, email exchange with the volunteer center coordinator, feedback, and explanation how the volunteer center will do the monitoring.

⁵ Volunteer centers can also interview representatives of organizations about their experience and perception of unemployed volunteers. Are the unemployed people a specific target group? It is important not to emphasize that this group of volunteers is different, but rather focus on situations which may occur and organizations should be ready for. Define opportunities and threats – selection of the volunteer may take longer or the orientation/training may be different, etc.

⁶ Despite the fact that the unemployed volunteer is identified and pre-selected for the organizations by the volunteer center, he/she may not fit the organization in the end. Each organization must therefore run its own selection and orientation/training process.

Support materials used during the training:

- Volunteer agreement
- Volunteer card
- Entry/Exit questionnaire
- Competence questionnaire

The cooperation between the volunteer center and the volunteer involving organization consists of regular monitoring of unemployed volunteers, reflection on the experience of employees and volunteers of the organization, and also of an evaluation of the volunteer program.

The volunteer center can organize group supervision meetings for volunteer coordinators to discuss and evaluate individual volunteer programs. Such meetings can provide valuable feedback on the cooperation between organizations and unemployed volunteers that may contribute to identification and solutions for possible issues when working with this specific target group. Meetings of volunteer coordinators are important also for organizations whose expectations haven't been met. This allows them to understand reasons for the lack of interest in volunteering, but also to gain information how to motivate unemployed volunteers.

Cooperation between the volunteer center and the office of labor, social affairs and family

The aim of the volunteer center is to identify long-term unemployed applicants that are interested in volunteering. The labor office is one of the best institutions to be able to acquire relevant contacts for unemployed volunteers. During the implementation of the project VOLWEM (Volunteering – way to employment), the platform of volunteer centers and organizations approached the *Central Office of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family* and received a green light for informal cooperation in all regions where volunteer centers operate. The task of the volunteer centers was to approach the directors of the individual labor offices in their regions and convince them to cooperate in the project. Volunteer centers offered and organized briefings for the employees of the labor offices that work directly with unemployed individuals.

Briefing for the Labor office employees

Duration: app. 1 1/2 hours

Content:

1. Introduction of the volunteer center, goal and duration of the briefing, and participants.
2. General information about volunteering (participation in volunteering in Slovakia, legal framework for volunteering based on the Act on Volunteering, differences in definitions of volunteering in Act on Volunteering and in Act on Employment Services etc.).
3. An unemployed person - discussion about characteristics of an unemployed client and what are the obstacles for his/her employment.
4. Unemployed people as a target group. Introduction of criteria for selection of unem-

ployed individuals for the project – typology of suitable unemployed individuals for the project: reliable, open to new challenges, not addicted, suitable for volunteering, should be long-term unemployed, but he/she could be also a graduate; duration and frequency of volunteering; volunteer opportunities for unemployed people, benefits for unemployed volunteers.

5. The role of the labor office – what are the steps to take if an unemployed individual expresses an interest to be involved in the project. Explain what is the role of the labor office employees – that is to connect the unemployed individual with the volunteer center and explain to him/her what will happen next. The volunteer will visit/call the volunteer center and if he/she meets the criteria for specific volunteer activities listed in the database of volunteer opportunities, he/she will be connected with specific organization for initial orientation etc.
6. Feedback for the project – agreement on the further communication between the volunteer center and the labor office.
7. Other questions, discussion.

The meetings took place, either during the regular scheduled meeting of the labor office employees or in another setting – based on their agreement. All participants of the briefing could receive a certificate for their participation in this meeting. Handouts, leaflets, and posters were distributed to all participants of the briefing. These materials were later distributed to their unemployed clients as a recommendation and alternative way for gaining new skills.

4.2. The Labor office and its role in the work with unemployed volunteers

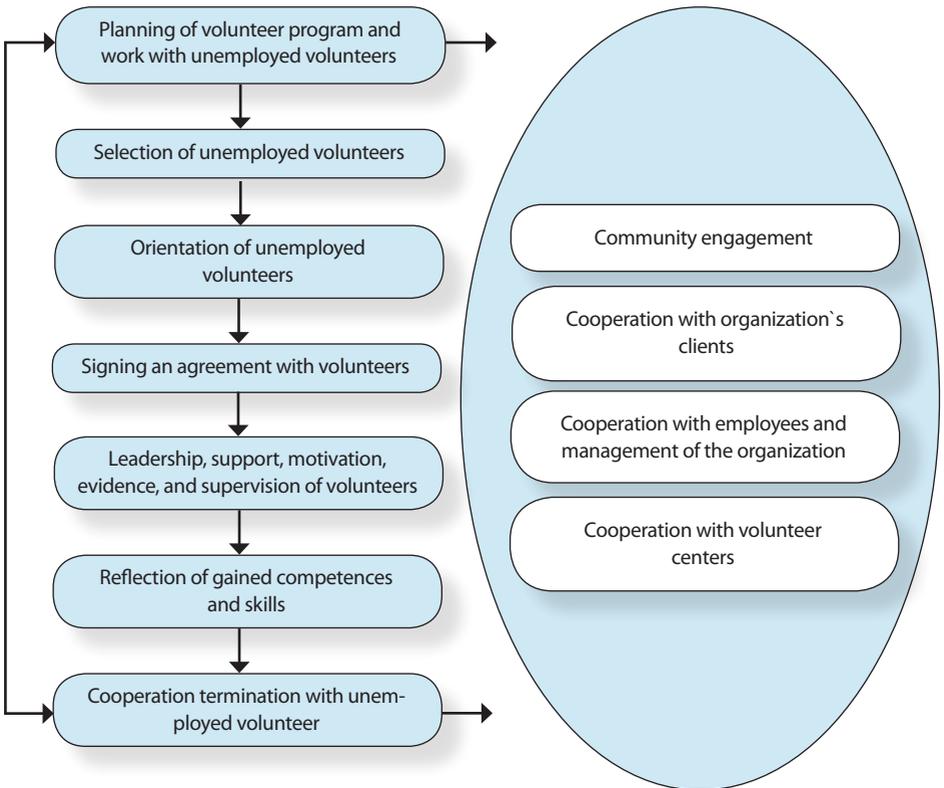
To be able to achieve the goal – to involve unemployed people as the target group of project into volunteering – it is necessary that the volunteer centers will engage in close cooperation with the labor office in their geographical area. It is crucial that the employees of the labor offices identify potential volunteers and connect them with the volunteer center. As we mentioned above, to promote the project at labor offices, handouts, leaflets, and posters can be disseminated. The labor office employees should emphasize the benefits of volunteering and the impact it can have on the increased chances of unemployed people to improve their position within the labor market. Volunteering is a natural part of regular offer of labor offices in other countries. In the case that an unemployed person is not able to find an appropriate job, he/she may take on some volunteer activity that helps him/her to maintain his/her work habits but as well to gain new skills, connect with new people and maintain active social contacts.

It would be ideal, if labor office employees would – during their consultations with job applicants – offer volunteering as an alternative activity which, despite not being paid, can help a long-term unemployed person to gain new skills and experience. In the case that a good candidate for volunteering is identified, they can connect him/her with a volunteer center or provide him/her with handout/leaflet and explain him/her what will be the next steps. It is crucial that a potential volunteer understands that this is not paid work, and if he/she fits the criteria for volunteer activities in the actual project list, a volunteer center will connect him/her with specific organization involving volunteers that will provide the initial orientation and train him/her for specific volunteer tasks.

4.3. Organization involving volunteers and its role in working with unemployed volunteers

The main role of the organization involving volunteers is to provide activities for an unemployed volunteer. Crucial and also basic criteria for an organization involving volunteers that would like to start with the cooperation with unemployed volunteers are the existence of a volunteer coordinator and good volunteer management in place. Basic aspects of volunteer management are outlined in the following flowchart.

Basic elements of volunteer management from the point of view of an organization involving volunteers



Volunteer program planning is an important part of the volunteer management not only for organizations willing to start to cooperate with volunteers, but also for those organizations which are cooperating with volunteers for a long time or those directly dependent on the work of volunteers. Before an organization accepts a volunteer, it should have a clear idea about the profile of a volunteer it is looking for, about his/her job description, work assignment, selection criteria, orientation/training, ways of support, motivation, and also evaluation. Organizations should have a hired volunteer coordinator.

Accepting unemployed volunteers into an organization may lead to a change in its activities. Such a change may be not acceptable for all organization employees and stake holders. The fear of organization employees of the newly introduced element – a volunteer – can represent a serious barrier in the work with unemployed volunteers. Therefore it is necessary to make all employees familiar with the concept and principles of volunteering, involve them in the volunteer program development and use their input and recommendations related to the volunteer's activities in the organization. This kind of preparation should be done during the preparation of the organization involving volunteers for the introduction of unemployed volunteers into its operation. An organization should not forget to inform its clients and their families about the volunteer program, as they may significantly contribute to its implementation.

Despite the fact that the unemployed volunteer is identified and pre-selected for an organization involving volunteers by a volunteer center, he/she may not fit the organization in the end. Each organization must therefore run its own selection and orientation/training process. Volunteers' selection must be adjusted to the volunteer program of the organization. Advanced diagnostic and selection process may be required for complex and more demanding volunteer programs.

Selection process of volunteers usually has a form of a semi-structured interview. The interview should be led by a volunteer coordinator in conjunction with other organization employees (i.e. director, supervisor or psychologist). The interview can provide a complex picture about the applicant (personality, time, family, work or out of work capacity, and motivation of the applicant). It also serves as a tool for clarification of expectations of the volunteer and organization, job description, and time-consumption of the volunteer activities.

Orientation or training of the volunteers is the next step after pre-selection process. Orientation or training of volunteers (its duration and content) varies from organization to organization. It depends on the skills and capabilities required from the volunteer. It includes:

- Introduction of the organization, its activities, operation, regulations and policies, funding, etc.

A volunteer manual/guide is a very good tool for volunteer management. A complex and practical manual can guide the volunteer during the whole cycle of his/her engagement with the organization. It can include:

- Basic information about the organization
- Its vision, mission, statute, etc.
- Organizational structure with names of people for specific positions
- Volunteer coordinator contact information
- Code of conduct for volunteers
- Recommendations about communication with clients
- Regulations in dress code, use of mobile phones, internet, etc.
- Work safety regulations

- Conditions for the cooperation with volunteers
- Reasons for the termination of cooperation with volunteer, etc.

The organization can enter and sign a Volunteer Activity Agreement with a volunteer. This agreement is based on the Act on Volunteering no. 406/2011 Coll. Amendments of the agreement may contain code of ethics of the organization and confidentiality regulations.

Connecting the unemployed volunteer with an organization involving volunteers

Once the orientation is done and an agreement is signed, the unemployed volunteer is placed in the organization and the organization is responsible for the provision of support, motivation, supervision, and evidence.

The first day in the organization is very important for an unemployed volunteer. It is very helpful during this day to:

- Provide additional information to the volunteer if necessary
- Make him/her familiar with the organization`s premises and structure
- Introduce a volunteer to all employees and relevant clients
- To teach the volunteer specific tasks

To achieve the best performance in the volunteer activities it is necessary, especially in the beginning, to put the emphasis on motivation and support of the unemployed volunteer. This is even more important if they have been long-term unemployed. The organization should provide them with information about their activities, its form, content, and length, etc. You can use the experience of volunteers who have already been with the organization – they can share their views and opinions with newly recruited volunteers.

It is very important to communicate with volunteers and provide them with the feedback even after he/she has settled down and gotten acquainted with the organization and their practical duties/tasks/activities. It is good to set up regular space and time where and when the unemployed volunteer can approach the coordinator with his/her questions or observations. The unemployed volunteer needs to know that:

- he/she is needed,
- he/she is doing a good job, and
- in case it is necessary, he/she should be provided with a guidance.

This is where the role of the volunteer coordinator in the organization is irreplaceable. You can't forget that the unemployed volunteer can fight with his/her own low self-confidence, longer adaptation processes, and uncertainty from the future. The experience gained in the organization – from his/her direct work activities, as well from the communication, interaction with other employees, participation in problem solving, from feedback, and increased work

related responsibilities assignment - can be very important for the unemployed volunteer. The reward lies not only in the improvement of specific skills but also in the increased self-confidence, improved reactions in conflicts resolution or stress situations, and work satisfaction from a well-done work.

Monitoring of unemployed volunteers in organizations

It is necessary to monitor, support and if necessary to direct/guide the unemployed volunteer in appropriate frequency. Similarly to employees, a volunteer contributes to short and long term goals of the organization and he/she should be informed about his/her contribution to these goals. The level of volunteer satisfaction can be identified during regular one-on-one discussions or through feedback or exit competency questionnaires. Regular meetings between the coordinator and unemployed volunteer are very effective (once a week or two even for a few minutes and/or based on need). The regular feedback from volunteers can help the organization to better understand their needs and consequently to adjust its volunteer program to meet the organization's needs.

It is up to the coordinator to identify the strengths of each volunteer – whether he/she is working with a university graduate full of ideas and enthusiasm or a long term unemployed senior with profound life experience – and to help to meet both the volunteer's and also the organization's expectations.

Proper evidence is a necessary part of the volunteer management. Evidence and good record keeping enables the organization to maintain effective contact with volunteers, to keep track of number of volunteers, their responsibilities, and last but not least, of number of volunteer hours. According to the *Act on Volunteering*, the evidence of volunteers should contain: name and surname of a volunteer, date of birth, registered address and address of residency if it differs from registered address, agreement number or place, scope and duration of volunteer activities. Aside of the above mentioned, information it is necessary to track all working hours of volunteers.

Closing the cooperation includes:

- expression of thankfulness for the cooperation,
- issuing a volunteering certificate,
- completion of a competence questionnaire.

Reflection on gained competences and skills

Once the cooperation with the volunteer is completed and closed, the coordinator sends completed exit and competences questionnaire to the volunteer center. The organization also provides it with all electronic evidence that may serve as justification and proof of the gained competences and skills of the volunteer during his/her volunteer activities. The coordinator recommends a volunteer to visit the volunteer center for the purpose of completing the online *V-skills pro Employment* based on the VOLWEM project.⁷

⁷ You can find more about the V-skills for employment at volwem.dobrovolniccentra.sk.

4.4. Matej Bel University and its role in the work with unemployed volunteers

In the VOLWEM project, Matej Bel University acts as the guarantee for the process of recognition of skills gained through volunteering. The accreditation committee, consisting of various experts, reviews each volunteer, completing V-skills on the Employment form and issues a certificate about the skills gained for him/her. This certificate can be used with the professional CV. The long-term goal is to arrive at a point where these certificates and the skills endorsed on them will be fully accepted by employers during the hiring process of unemployed volunteers. That is why the cooperation with the Matej Bel University should continue even once the project is completed.

5. Project VOLWEM

In EU countries with a longer history and tradition, volunteering is generally recognized not only as a leisure time activity, but also a way to achieve new skills and competencies that are recognized by employers. In Slovakia, the situation is quite different - there is no system for recognition and validation of non-formal education by colleges or universities (as in UK or other countries). We lack the legal framework for it and there is a low recognition of benefits of volunteering by employers in Slovakia. Also the volunteer centers (VC) lack the skills and systems necessary for work with unemployed volunteers. These are the things which motivated the VOLWEM project to be implemented from October 2012 to September 2014 by partner organizations from three countries.

Thanks to this project, a new system of informal education recognition and work with unemployed volunteers was brought to Slovakia from Scotland (where it is known as the V-Skills for Employability) and was piloted in cooperation with Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. The project is based on the active cooperation with labor offices and volunteer centers. The second part of the project is focused on systematic work with unemployed volunteers and is based on the work of the Volunteer center from Ústí nad Labem in Czech Republic. The focus of this part of the project lies in the preparation and the ability of volunteer centers and organizations involving volunteers to be able to effectively engage and coordinate unemployed volunteers. The third part of the project is focused on employers in the regions where volunteer centers are active. The aim is to inform them about the benefits of volunteering, to motivate them to endorse, and to take this type of self-development of job applicants into consideration.

VOLWEM Project would like to contribute to the creation of following conditions in Slovakia:

- job centers (labor offices) are aware and accept volunteer opportunities as a way to gain experience and motivate unemployed people for such activity;
- volunteer centers educate organizations involving volunteers in specifics of work with unemployed volunteers and NGOs are actively cooperating with unemployed volunteers;
- institutions of formal education are aware about opportunities and existing systems of recognition of non-formal education gained through volunteering;
- employers are aware about benefits of volunteering and consider the information on active engagement in volunteering of a job seeker as important.

During the pilot phase of the project, each of the four participating volunteer centers (in Banská Bystrica, Košice, Nitra, and Prešov) should engage and involve a minimum of 15 unemployed volunteers in volunteer activities. Some of the volunteers have been directly involved in the volunteer centers activities, but the majority were engaged in activities of other organizations involving volunteers working in variety of areas. The engagement of unemployed volunteers in all organizations was conditioned by the organization acceptance and willingness to work with these volunteers as well as by a good volunteer management system in place.

Information you find in the document, is not based on a study of theory or on discussions with colleagues with other countries that are working with this type of volunteers. It is based on direct practical work with unemployed volunteers in regions of Slovakia with different unemployment rates. We believe that the information provided will be valuable for you too. In case you would like to learn more about the project, please contact the Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations or any of the participating volunteer centers. For more information please visit <http://VOLWEM.dobrovolnickecentra.sk/>.

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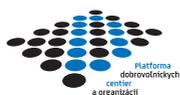
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