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Guide for the Development of Volunteering

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTIONFEHLER! TEXTMARKE NICHT DEFINIERT.

CONTEXT OF FORMAL VOLUNTEERING BY AND FOR SENIOR CITIZENSFEHLER! TEXTMARKE NICHT DEFINIERT.

Analysis of the initial situationFehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.

Goal definition for the volunteer activity / initiative / project / program Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.

MANAGEMENT PROCESS FOR FORMAL VOLUNTEERINGFEHLER! TEXTMARKE NICHT DEFINIERT.

Activity profile and assignment agreement8

Creating good framework conditionsFehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.

Public relationsFehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.

Quality management9

COORDINATION PROCESS FOR FORMAL VOLUNTEERINGFEHLER! TEXTMARKE NICHT DEFINIERT.

Recruiting and hosting of volunteers10

Implementation of volunteer assignments11

Accompaniment and promotion of volunteersFehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY12

Securing financial resourcesFehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.

NetworkingFehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.

Promotion and further development of a culture of volunteeringFehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.

INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of the **three-year Interreg project Co-AGE**, the five partner organizations in Eastern Austria and Western Hungary have been working on **the creation of age-friendly communities** in various pilot communities of the project region.

The activities included, among others, **the implementation of mini-projects developed by volunteers and trusted persons**, the **establishment of a pool of volunteers** and the **placement of volunteers**, as well as the creation of appropriate framework conditions for an enriching volunteering activity for all participants.

Based on the expertise that Chance B was able to contribute after 10 years of volunteer exchange, as well as the practical experiences gained by the trusted persons in the pilot communities, **one bilateral and four regional models** were developed **for volunteer work by and for senior citizens**.

These theoretical results, as well as the experience gained and the evaluations from the pilot communities, are incorporated into the present **Guide for the Development of Volunteering**, which aims to collate **the experience gained and the knowledge acquired** during the project period and to **provide practical recommendations for action with a view to developing successful, effective, cross-border and sustainable volunteering**, and is geared towards actors and interested parties in the field of **formal volunteering**.

Despite the fact that **volunteering has not enjoyed as long a tradition in Hungary as it has in Austria** and many Hungarians have fewer opportunities to engage in volunteering due to time and financial constraints, the recommendations for action in this guide **can be applied in both countries**.

The **volunteering strategy** presented below incorporates an **analysis of the initial situation and context** in which volunteers are deployed, the **design, management and coordination of volunteering activities** and the promotion of their **sustainability**.

CONTEXT OF FORMAL VOLUNTEERING



Analysis of the initial situation



Definition of goals for the volunteer activity

MANAGEMENT PROCESS



Activity profile and deployment agreements



Creation of good framework conditions



Public relations



Quality management

COORDINATION PROCESS



Recruitment and hosting of volunteers



Implementation of volunteer assignments



Accompaniment and supporting volunteers

SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES



Securing financial resources



Networking



Promoting and developing a culture of volunteerism

CONTEXT OF FORMAL VOLUNTEERING BY AND FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

The proportion of people over 60 in the total population is continuing to rise in Europe. This means that people of working age will be confronted with more and more people who have already completed their working lives. The **proportion of very elderly people**, i.e., people in their fourth stage of life, is **also sharply increasing**. There are two reasons for this development. Firstly, the **ever-increasing life expectancy** of the population, especially in the Western world, and secondly, the **steadily declining birth rate** here. In addition, more and more people can look forward to a longer **physically active and mentally healthy retirement**, following the end of their **active working life**. (Gross, 2009).

In light of these developments, **the requirement to care for and support senior citizens** in their everyday lives is increasing and, with it, the **need for voluntary and unpaid activities as part of associations and organizations** active in this field. However, many project partners **in Hungary** have found that **older people are often suspicious** of unpaid assistance and cannot believe that anyone would wish to help them voluntarily.

In addition, however, there is also a growing **need for voluntary activities** with which **seniors** can organize their **own leisure time after retiring and give their existence a sense of meaning** as many of them have access to health and financial resources which allow them to actively participate in the community, even at an advanced age.

If these **voluntary activities are carried out within the framework of an organization or association**, they are referred to as **formal volunteering**.

Formal volunteering can be performed in **a variety of contexts**, both in terms of content and organizational structure – as part of a church or secular organizations, in public sector institutions and in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or non-profit organizations (NPOs), in associations and (citizens') initiatives.

The **activities** carried out **in the Co-AGE mini-projects** are all a formal **voluntary nature**, with the various sponsoring (organizations) in the pilot communities originating in the church sector as well as in the administrative and social service provider sector.



Analysis of the initial situation

In order to get an overview of the concrete situation in one's own community or region, e.g., the needs of the elderly population or potential collaborative partners such as political or church communities, associations, NPOs/NGOs from the social and/or health sector, community nurses, village wardens, etc., **different analytical instruments** were developed within the framework of Co-AGE.

By performing a **needs assessment of the age-friendliness of communities**, based on the dimensions of "age-friendly cities" defined by the WHO, residents of a community are asked about the status quo and needs in the following areas:

- Public space
- Mobility and public transport
- Housing
- Involvement in my community and personal environment
- Participation in social life
- Communication and information
- Health and health promotion

By carrying out a **survey of associations and voluntary organizations**, an overview of the actors in the field of voluntary organizations and associations can be obtained. Among other things, the following aspects are queried:

- Existing resources and structures
- Organizations' fields of activity
- Opportunities for involvement
- Potential need for support

Templates for both surveys can be provided to interested communities.



Goal definition for the volunteer activity / initiative / project / program

Once a need has been identified that can/should be met with the help of volunteers, the activities can be fleshed out by answering the following questions.

- Who is receiving support?
- What is being offered?
- Who is carrying out these volunteer activities?

It should be borne in mind that the **target group for volunteer activities** is, by definition, **people outside the volunteers' own household**.

The support that is on offer is always a **service that is provided voluntarily and without payment**. It should not be provided in competition with paid services.

Depending on the nature of the activity, volunteers may need to have certain qualifications or prerequisites. It may therefore be necessary for volunteers to

also participate in **personal and professional training and take developmental measures** to be able to perform the activity.

For the Co-AGE mini-projects, different objectives and target groups were defined in the partner regions, ranging from intergenerational offers for seniors and young families, visiting services for the elderly and organized neighbourhood assistance for cultural projects and the organization of community-building events and leisure activities.

MANAGEMENT PROCESSES FOR FORMAL VOLUNTEERING

Management processes include all tasks that create the **conditions and framework** for the individual assignments to be handled by specific volunteers.



Activity profile and assignment agreement

The **activity profile** for volunteers should answer the following questions:

- How much time is involved in the activity?
- Do certain requirements have to be met in order to perform the activity?
- Are there certain obligations associated with this activity?

A distinction must be made between **selective and regular engagement**. In the case of regular engagement, it may be necessary to define the **frequency of assignments** or the **number of hours or days** for which volunteers are available in a given period.

Depending on the nature of the activity, volunteers may need to meet certain requirements, such as **having a driver's license and their own vehicle, being of a certain age, exhibiting certain personal characteristics**, etc. In certain cases, and/or sensitive matters, a **selection process** may be necessary to determine the suitability of volunteers for the activity. Depending on the type of activity, a certain level of **prior technical knowledge** and/or **specific training** may also be required prior to the start of the assignments.

For example, it was decided that volunteers who wished to visit elderly people in their homes as part of the mini-project "ZeitGeschenke" must provide an extract from their **criminal record** and come to a **personal interview** to clarify whether the volunteer is suitable for the specific assignment.

From the respective activity profile, **assignment agreements** can be made, which also **create a certain sense of commitment** despite the fundamentally voluntary nature of the activities. This **ensures reliability and high standards**. These agreements can range from a **commitment to a certain amount of time to a duty of confidentiality**.



Creating good framework conditions

Essential for ensuring high quality volunteer work is the creation of appropriate framework conditions within which volunteers make their time available free of charge.

In Austria, for example, it is possible for volunteers to take out **accident and liability insurance** for the duration of their activity.

In the event that the volunteer incurs travel expenses during the volunteer activity, **travel allowances or an expense allowance** can be granted.



It may be necessary to provide **working materials or infrastructure** such as premises or equipment.

For activities with specific professional requirements or particularly demanding or stressful tasks, it is necessary to provide **training and educational courses and/or supervision**, and participation may also be mandatory for volunteers.

In addition, it is advisable to offer the volunteers **opportunities to share information and experiences**. One way of doing this is to provide and maintain **communication platforms**, such as the virtual village squares in the Co-AGE project.

Creating and maintaining the appropriate framework is essential for volunteer organizations. Usually, one or more people are assigned as **volunteer coordinators**, who are available to the volunteers as **competent contact persons**.

In the Co-AGE project, special training was designed to qualify the so-called **trusted persons** to work proficiently with the elderly **target group** and to support **volunteer management and coordination**.

Public relations

Public relations in connection with a volunteer initiative pursues several goals and is usually employed both externally and internally.

One immediate goal of public relations is to provide **information about existing initiatives**.

On the one hand, it draws attention to the **services that are on offer** and can be taken advantage of; on the other hand, it serves to inform **potential volunteers about the activities which they can get involved in** and encourages them to participate.

Above and beyond the obvious benefits to specific volunteer initiatives, public relations should also **raise awareness of civic engagement** in general, reduce societal mistrust and promote a **culture of recognition**.

The **communication channels** used depend on the **respective target groups** and the **extent of the offer**. In the Co-AGE project, both analogue channels such as print media and digital channels such as social networks are used.



Quality management

The measures taken to develop, implement and optimize standardized processes can be summarized using the term quality management.

Regular and targeted evaluation and volunteer reflection is essential for orderly management of volunteer activities and to ensure that the desired goals are reached. This means any necessary corrective measures can be implemented in good time and this helps to ensure **continuous further development**.

In the project Co-Age, two tools are used to measure quality objectively: an **evaluation form** for mini-projects and feedback forms for volunteers and those receiving support.

COORDINATION PROCESS FOR FORMAL VOLUNTEERING

Coordination processes include all tasks required for the **organization and implementation of the individual assignments** by the volunteers.



Recruiting and hosting volunteers

By providing a **description of the host organization** and information about the volunteer activities, interested parties can get an idea of the volunteer opportunities on offer, what would be expected of them as volunteers and whether they would like to get involved.

Volunteer initiatives can be promoted using **information campaigns** via print media, social networks, events, etc. **Online platforms** also offer the possibility to connect organizations and interested volunteers (e.g. the mima App or the Service Platform „Freiwillig engagiert“ (<https://www.freiwillig-engagiert.at/jetzt-engagieren>) in Austria or in Hungary <https://kot.gov.hu/> (Közérdekű Önkéntes Szervezeti Regiszter) and <https://onkentespiacter.hu/>).

In many cases, a more **in-depth exchange of information takes place as part of a personal (initial) interview and/or consultation**. This serves both to clarify the willingness and suitability of a person for the relevant activity and take care of any formalities.

The **provision of legal information** on the part of the organization as well as the **conclusion of assignment agreements** and clarification of rights and obligations on the part of the host organization and the volunteer and the **collection of relevant data** for coordination or insurance also fall into this phase.



Implementation of volunteer assignments

The professional implementation of volunteer assignments includes **the establishment of a placement process and confirmation of the activities on offer** during the period agreed on by the volunteers.

Depending on the scope of the volunteer activity, this process can range from interim availability over the phone to the establishment of a dedicated coordination office to enable the use of online tools for scheduling and assignment management.

Quality volunteer coordination also includes **assignment documentation** and **activity evaluation**, using feedback from volunteers and those receiving support. These measures may also be required for reporting and project funding accountancy.



Accompaniment and promotion of volunteers

Even if they volunteer their time for a good cause, **volunteers also fulfil their own needs** - be it the need for meaningful leisure time, for contact with like-minded people, personal development, recognition or belonging, etc.

In order to maintain a regular and high-quality volunteering, it is important to **accompany and support the volunteers well by taking their needs into account**.

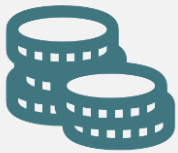
By offering training or educational courses, participants' personal development can be promoted as well as the quality of the volunteer activities offered. In cases where human relations are involved, potentially even in crisis situations, **supervision** offers an opportunity for (emotional) relief and reflection on one's own volunteer work.

The desire to belong and establish contact can be fulfilled by **creating networking opportunities**, be it **exchange meetings** related to the content of the volunteer activity, **organization of celebrations, annual festivals** or **joint leisure activities**.

Invitations to such events and assistance with personal development are also an **expression of appreciation and recognition** of the volunteers' commitment. This **culture of recognition** includes gestures such as small gifts on special occasions such as birthdays or Christmas, **honouring** long-time volunteers, **appreciative public relations work**, etc., and, especially in the case of long-term forms of commitment, a conscious and dignified **farewell** to volunteers who withdraw from volunteering.

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE THE SUSTAINABILITY

Promoting the sustainability of volunteer activities is not only in the **interest of the organizations or associations** that organize and coordinate these activities. **Politics, the church, and society** have a great interest in civic engagement, which is an essential factor in maintaining daily support services.



Securing financial resources

Even if the volunteer activities themselves are carried out free of charge, certain **financial resources** must nevertheless be made available for the **management and coordination processes** which help to maintain the activities.

This ranges from the provision of **infrastructure** such as technical equipment, premises, or office supplies, to the budget required for **training and further education** or **public relations work**, to full-time or part-time **volunteer coordinators**.

In the case of formal voluntary engagement, funding is provided by the sponsoring organization or association. The necessary budget can, for example, be raised through **donations, membership or church contributions, project funding**, etc.

Apart from concrete project ideas financed by project grants, the **public sector** also supports volunteering by **funding cross-cutting measures** that benefit the entire third sector.



Networking

An essential factor behind **support in the community or region** and the **sustainable efficacy** of a volunteer initiative is, on the one hand, a **personal and credible network** of relationships between existing political or church and civil society actors and the volunteer initiative and, on the other hand, between the volunteers and the trusted i or coordinators.

The **institutional cooperation** with (established) organizations, experts, political communities, parishes, regional administration etc. as well as the **cross-border exchange** between pilot communities, trusted persons and other projects are therefore essential elements of the Co-AGE project.



Promotion and further development of a culture of volunteering

It is not only the task of volunteer organizations to **raise awareness** about volunteering. **Raising awareness of the value of volunteering** is just as much the responsibility of politics, the church, business, and society.

This begins with people who receive support, coordinators, politicians and society **expressing appreciation** and extends to **labour law regulations** concerning leave for volunteer activities or **financial benefits and bureaucratic facilitations** such as the free issuance of criminal records certificates or the offer of group insurance for volunteers.

Provision of public reward for services in form of various non-monetary measures such as honours, reporting and the establishment of thematic focal points such as the International Volunteer Day is an essential factor in motivating individuals to get involved in volunteering.

At the same time, **making volunteer culture visible** helps to draw attention to the **value** of volunteering and to the fact that **volunteer activities are by no means a matter of course**.