

Volunteering



Youth participation is a process in which power is shared with young people, during decision-making or other project processes. Youth participation is essential in both team and individual volunteering projects. The participation of volunteers should therefore be planned

The tools in this module are focusing on:

How to involve

volunteers in implementing a volunteering project

How to ensure

the volunteering project is really designed to be inclusive and accessible to young people with fewer opportunities

How to support

volunteers so they may 'learn participation' during the volunteering project

How to ensure

volunteering projects are contributing to more youth participation

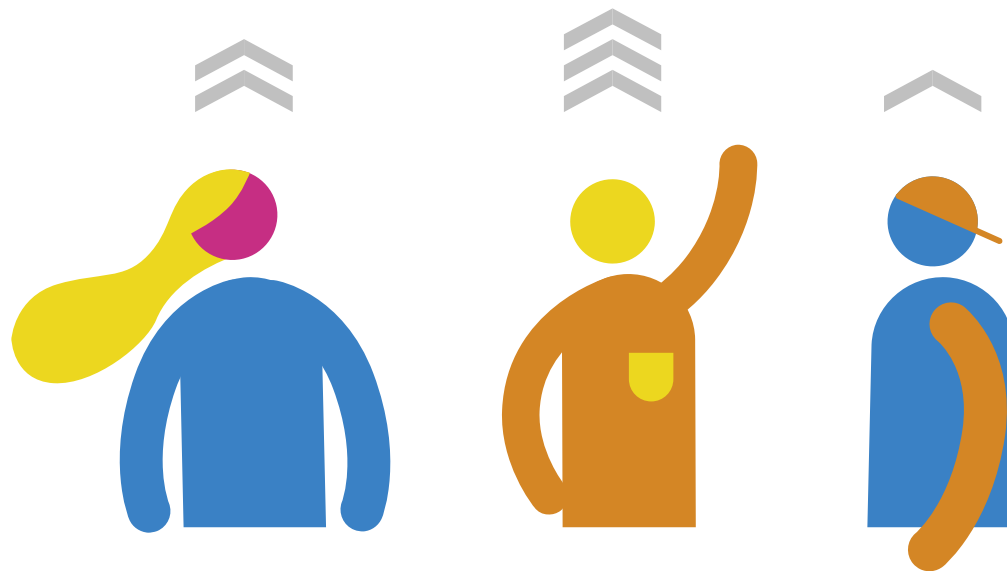


If you are not sure where to start, there are youth workers around you that might have experience of doing this kind of activity and who can offer you advice or answer your questions. They can be in your organisation, in some other organisations near you, in the National Agency for European Solidarity Corps, online or are perhaps already sharing their experience. There are also people who volunteered through this programme before and have valuable experience. Some of them have come together in the [Euro Peers network](#). Look them up, reach out to them with your questions and ask for support!

How to involve young people in implementing volunteering projects?

Before you start » The participatory approach places the focus on the **process**. This changes the **power relations** between the project staff and the participating volunteers. It also **increases the sustainability** of the project action beyond the end of the project because the volunteers continue to take responsibility, and have developed their social, civic and political efficacy. Choosing a participatory approach is, therefore, a political act.

To maximise the participation of volunteers, you must have a good handle on your goals and overall project dynamic. For a start, you should make sure that volunteers are aware of the opportunities for participation that their volunteering project offers and that they actively choose the most appropriate level of engagement for them.





Evaluating Volunteers' Participation Needs

Support volunteers in understanding the opportunities for participation that are available in the context of the volunteering project. You could ask some of the following questions:




Why have they joined the volunteering project?



How much would they like to/could they invest in this volunteering project (ideas, skills, time)?



Share with them the  [Degrees of Participation](#). Ask them about where they feel confident to engage. Also ask them what they would like to experience, test or improve when it comes to different participation opportunities?



Support volunteers in exploring their participation interests. They may be interested in engaging more, such as operating their own mini-projects during their volunteering time, e.g. with additional national funding or through an involvement in solidarity projects with local youth during their volunteering posting.

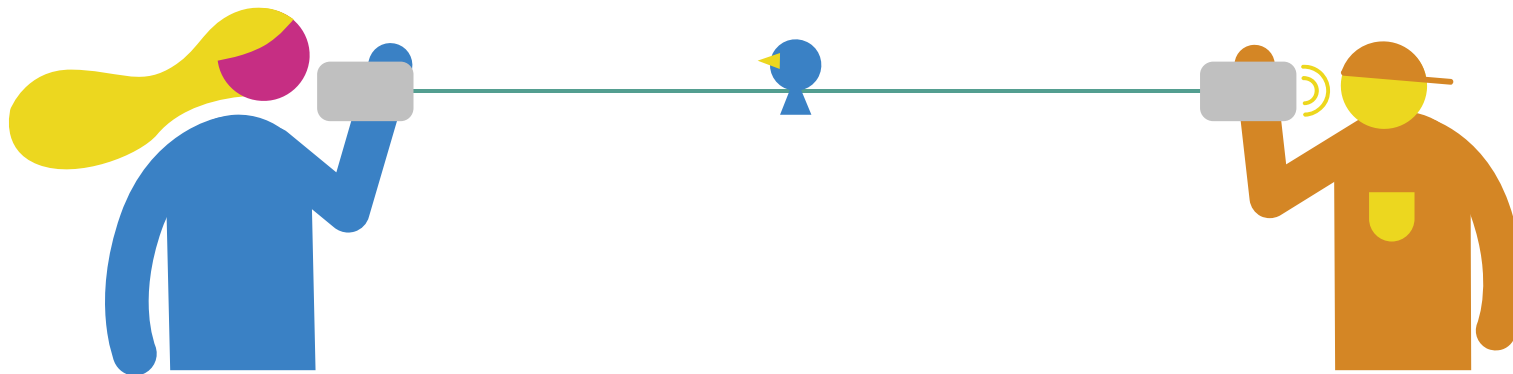




Informing, consulting and sharing decisions with volunteers

To involve the volunteers in a timely and supportive manner, it is important to have an **information and/or consultation channel**.

Agree with the volunteers on the channel that is most appropriate and then use this channel to inform and/or consult them on any relevant milestones and issues. To begin with, make sure the volunteers understand the programme they are joining, including its aims and why it was set up, its funding scheme, their rights and responsibilities as a volunteer and who is intended to benefit from their volunteering - the local community where they will volunteer, their local community when they return, Europe as a whole, the world and themselves! This is the shared responsibility of the supporting and hosting organisation, and it is best if both are involved.



Not sure what to consult volunteers on and which decisions should be shared?

Here are possible suggestions. Note, however, that what to consult on really depends on the specific volunteering project, as well as the interest and competencies of the volunteers. You can also involve volunteers in the preparatory visit, so that they are better informed and involved from the beginning.





Informing, consulting and sharing decisions with volunteers



Preparation phase – You should involve volunteers in sharing their opinion and participating in the decision-making regarding:

Practical arrangements for travel and accommodation – support volunteers in considering different options by looking at accessibility, environmental footprint, digital aspects, costs and ways they would prefer to distribute the expenses.

Weekly Volunteer Timetable – support volunteers in considering their competences, interests and different learning styles and learning needs.

Volunteering agreement set up – support volunteers in sharing their expectations and considering the difference in expectations compared with the supporting and hosting organisation.

Preparation before departure – support volunteers in identifying and sharing their preferred learning styles and learning needs regarding linguistic, intercultural and task-related preparation.





Informing, consulting and sharing decisions with volunteers



Follow-up phase - You could involve volunteers in sharing their opinions regarding different elements to be implemented at this stage.

You may consider using **online tools and platforms** that have features for the easy collection of opinions, online polling, voting and visualisations, particularly in the case of volunteering teams. In that case, bear in mind that there may be GDPR or internet security considerations to take into account when working with young people under the age of majority. Explore the participation resource pool to find more info about [internet safety](#) and also support volunteers in exploring on their own.



Make sure to inform volunteers beforehand on the issue in question and the platform you are using, so that they can confidently participate in consultations. Informing them may include organising a specific face-to-face meeting and/or preparing material for them to read/watch/listen to.



Be open to considering and valuing innovation and out-of-box thinking that could emerge in the ideas, interests and needs expressed by a volunteer.



Before you start » The inclusion of all young people in participatory processes is about supporting young people from all backgrounds and with different life experiences to access volunteering and participation opportunities equally. Once involved, it is for them to have their voice heard and specific experiences shared, as well as to take action and assume leadership roles within a volunteering project.



Mapping who is left-out

You can start by considering which groups of young people are most likely to get left out when you plan your volunteering project. Share that information with your partner organisation.

Mapping questions:



Which young people are usually not involved in volunteering projects?



Which young people are not usually included in volunteering projects on this topic?





Mapping who is left-out



Which young people may have some interest in engaging with the topic of the volunteering projects?



Which young people would really benefit from experience in volunteering projects, regardless of topic?



In the community in which I do my youth work – with which groups of young people have I least contact with?

Which groups' realities, traits and backgrounds do I understand and know the least?

Once you have your map, you can embark on finding ways to reach out and inform those young people of volunteering opportunities and involve them. Additional funding and support, as well as different rules about the length of a volunteering project, apply to facilitate the easier access of young people with fewer opportunities. Find out more in the [European Solidarity Corps programme guide](#).



You would need to work closely with your partner organisation responsible for supporting, preparing and training participants before departure. The supporting organisation could potentially reach out to the young people you have identified as at risk of being left out and plan together their engagement with the volunteering project. Reaching out is about making initial contact and finding out if they would be interested in joining your volunteering project. Sometimes, it can be easier to make contact with them in their comfort environment (their neighbourhood and places they visit and are comfortable with e.g. park, youth club/space) or online using channels they are comfortable with. Also, you might need to start by explaining what the volunteering project is and how they can register for the European Solidarity Corps.



Identifying participation needs and interests

At the early stages of preparation of a volunteer for departure and their arrival, you should attempt to find out what their participation needs and interests are. Also, unmet participation needs and interests could be the reason for a decline in your volunteer's motivation.




Discuss this and ask them:

What are their participation needs?

What might be an obstacle for their involvement?

How could you support them in their participation?

Could they invest themselves in this volunteering project if adequate support is provided?

Share with them the  Degrees of Participation. Ask them about where they feel confident to engage. Also ask them what they would like to experience, test or improve when it comes to different participation opportunities?



How can we support young people so they may 'learn participation' during volunteering project?

Before you start » Participation is best learned through experience and reflection. Therefore, even though you may want to share with volunteers some theory on [participation and degrees of engagement](#), the most important thing to remember when designing your volunteering project is that it must create conditions for the experiential learning and reflection of volunteers about their own participation.



Volunteer project review

You can review the design of the implementation phase of the volunteer project to check if there is space in the design of activities to add an experiential learning dimension. For example, you could consider adding an activity whose main focus is to provide volunteers with an experience of participation. This activity should, of course, be adapted to the theme and integrated in your volunteer project. Think about ways in which volunteers can share their VOICE or take an ACTION in relation to the topic of the volunteering project.

There are also many good reference manuals for participation specific activities that can be adapted to the topics of volunteering activity. One such manual is [Compass - Manual on Human Rights](#). Here are some examples of activities for experiencing participation:



[To vote or not to vote?:](#) Volunteers go into the community to find out what community members think on any given subject. In this activity, the topic is voting. You can adapt the topic to be more relevant for your volunteering project.





Volunteer project review



🔊 **Let every voice be heard:** Volunteers engage in discussion about what might need to be improved about a given topic. Together with people from the community where the volunteering project is taking place they design a democratic system through which young people can have a say in bringing about the desired improvements. In this activity, the topic is education and young people having a say about the kind of education they are receiving. You can adapt the topic to be more relevant for your volunteering project.



🔊 **On the ladder:** Volunteers reflect on the meaning of youth participation and discuss ways of increasing their own participation in the project and in their host organisation and local community, as well as in their supporting organisation and other communities they belong to.



🔊 **A mosque in Sleepyville:** In the case of volunteering teams, volunteers could take on roles in a simulation of a town council meeting. In this activity, the topic is freedom of religion and discrimination. You can adapt the topic and respective actors to be more relevant for your volunteering project.



You could design a complementary activity for the volunteering project with the aim of raising awareness of the value of volunteering and youth participation for young people and for communities as well as at strengthening the recognition of the competences gained by the volunteers. As the European Solidarity Corps Guide envisions, complementary activities could include: job shadowing, meetings, workshops, conferences, seminars, training courses, coaching or something different where you focus on youth participation and volunteering.



Reflection to learning

To support volunteers in reflecting on their participation and learning, you could start by reviewing the role and place of the mentor in the volunteering project. Be excited about their role and the whole concept of reflection on participation and learning! You could implement some of the following strategies:



Allow for enough **reflection time slots** in the volunteering project design



Reflecting on one's own learning is a demanding task, and even more so if volunteers have never done anything like that before. Volunteers might show resistance or appear to struggle with the task. That is nothing out of the ordinary. It might make sense to involve more than one mentor and make ongoing 'reflection on learning' an offer, something that volunteers can choose to do rather than an obligatory activity, but which the volunteering project provides infrastructure and support for. Keep in mind that volunteers will need support and time and make sure you offer that to them. You can also consult the [Learning by doing](#) module for more ideas!




Reflection to learning

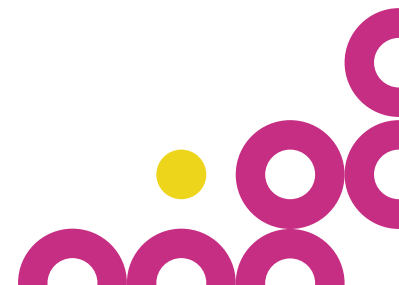


Propose that the volunteers create a **learning diary** that would be useful for their meetings with their mentor. It can take different forms – written in a notebook, scrapbook from activities with side notes and drawings, written in notes on a phone, recorded as audio or video on a phone, physical or online in any format they like, etc.



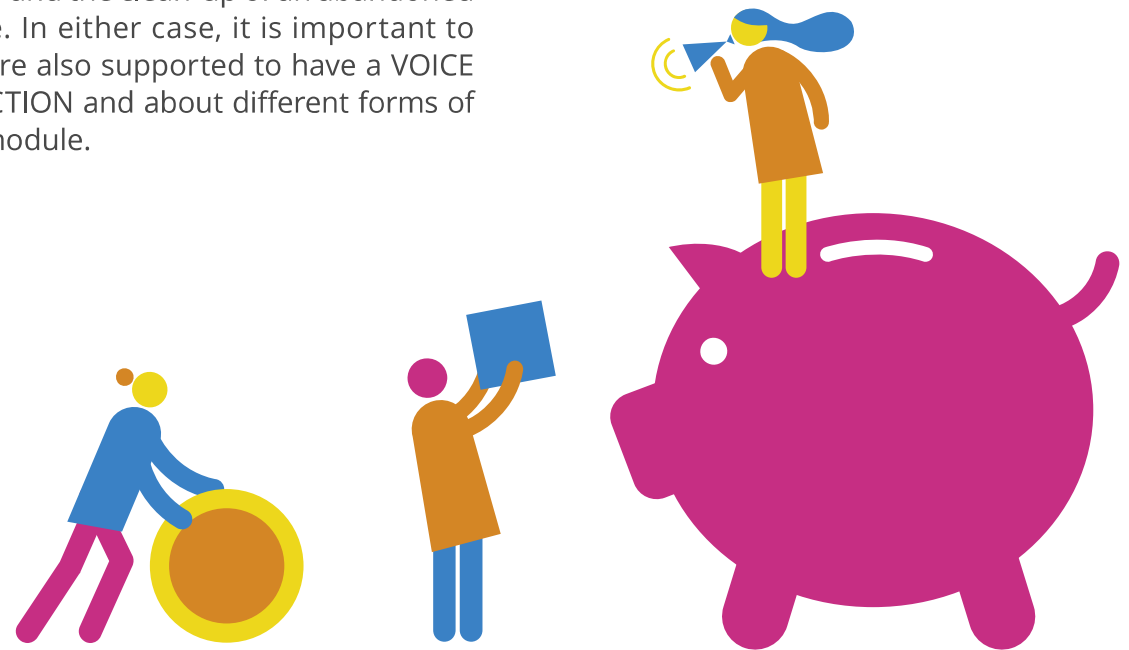
During **meetings between mentor and volunteer(s)**, ensure there is also a focus on learning around youth participation. The mentor could present the  [Degrees of Participation](#) to the volunteer and look at:


How they see their experience with participation in the volunteering project, until that moment?
Would they like to change something about it in the time to come?



How can we make sure our volunteering project is contributing to more youth participation?

Before you start » The volunteering project can focus on giving young people a VOICE, for example by organising a petition to the local council to ask for a youth space. Or it can strive to support them to take an ACTION, for example by organising a local fundraiser and the clean-up of an abandoned or empty space so they can transform it into a youth space. In either case, it is important to ensure that engaged volunteers in the volunteering project are also supported to have a VOICE and/or to take an ACTION. To learn more about VOICE and ACTION and about different forms of youth participation, go to the [What is youth participation?](#) module.



 If your organisation has young people as a target group, you could also consider including them in the recruiting and selection process of the future volunteer. Such a participation experience could motivate them to participate further. The volunteer(s) would be selected in a participatory manner and their volunteering project could follow up on that and also focus on participation with those young people.

Supporting volunteers to take ownership of a volunteering project

Some volunteers might be looking to take greater ownership and lead on certain activities in the volunteering project; you can offer them support and encouragement. In such cases, you will need to create opportunities for them to lead in certain segments of the project in its different stages of preparing, implementation and follow-up. The coordinator, mentor and other staff provide support as needed and as requested.



Discovering how best to support volunteers

You can offer support to the volunteer in areas you have observed that they might need support. They could also have different ideas about where they might need support. Discuss both and agree on a way forward. Those questions can be a starting point for discussing the following with volunteers:



What experience do you have with leading and implementing the kind of activity you are interested in doing as part of this volunteering project?

Which positive aspects would you like to keep and incorporate in the design of your activity?

Which aspects would you like to avoid/prevent from happening in your activity?





Discovering how best to support volunteers



What experience do you have with the topic that you are interested in addressing?

What makes it exciting and important? How could you translate that into the design of your activity?

Who could provide good input and advice on this topic?



Which areas overall are you still unsure about?

Who do you think could support you and how?

Make sure to outline under which conditions your support could be provided (e.g. it could be offered at a specific time, in relation to the finalisation of some other steps, only when they feel they need specific support and directly ask for it, etc.)



If different steps are not working the way you intended them; if the results are not there in the time frame that you had expected; if you feel powerless and are unsure if it all makes sense at all - remember that participation is about process! So whenever you feel uncertain, feel free to check in with the volunteer about how they feel and how the process is working for them. It helps to realistically define what would be a success with particular volunteers that you are supporting in leading and implementing their activity within the volunteering project. Also re-define it along the way in constant dialogue with the volunteer, as you both learn more and can assess better the scope and scale of the support needed. You can also consult the [Young people leading projects](#) module for more ideas!

Supporting volunteers in engaging beyond the volunteering project

If your volunteering project was developed in a participatory manner, or it was a participatory volunteering project ([🔗 How to involve young people](#) - in this module), this means that the volunteers have already had a meaningful experience of participation that would set a standard for future activities. This is a great basis for volunteers to start thinking about their further participation in the democratic life of their societies after the volunteering project.



Meeting with mentor

Meetings with the mentor can be used to support volunteers in reflecting about the time when the volunteering project is completed. Encourage volunteers to look at their volunteering and youth participation experience and ask them to think about the future. You could use the [🔗 Degrees of Participation](#) – present it to volunteers and support them in looking at:



How they see their experience with participation in the volunteering project?

Are there elements that they would also love to maintain after the volunteering project is completed?



How they connect the participation experience from the volunteering project with their “back home” reality?

Are there elements that they could transfer to their “back home” reality?





Meeting with mentor



Would they like to change something about their participation in general?

What kind of support might they need with that? Discuss here what realistically you and/or your partner organisation could offer, which might include:

- organising meetings with the volunteers to plan their further engagement;
- sharing information with the volunteers about campaigns and events in which they could participate;
- supporting volunteers in planning specific follow-up activities through which they could raise their VOICE or take an ACTION.

Furthermore, you can indicate following opportunities to volunteers:

- 🇪🇺 [Erasmus+](#) and opportunities for starting for instance a youth participation activity and/or youth exchange;
 - 🇪🇺 [European Solidarity Corps](#) and opportunities for implementation of solidarity projects;
- The opportunities offered by 🇪🇺 [Eurodesk](#) platform;
- 🇪🇺 [European Youth Portal](#) and the opportunities for the participation in the 🇪🇺 [EU youth dialogue](#).



Where are you at now?



Self-assessment for volunteering projects

You can use this self-assessment tool even before you start developing your volunteering project. It will help you to understand what you should pay attention to. Or after you have implemented the volunteering project and used some of the tools proposed in this module – to assess how it worked for you.



Are volunteers at the *beginning of the project* aware of their own participation needs and the possibilities offered through this volunteering project?

If yes, how? Could that be improved?

If no, why not? Could that be changed?

What could you do to inform them and support them in identifying own participation needs?



How are volunteers supported in participating in decision-making about the volunteering project?

Did you include a focus on:

- inclusion and diversity,
- digital transformation,
- sustainability, environmental and climate goals?

If yes, how did it go? Could it be improved?

If not, how could that be changed?

What could you do to support the participation of volunteers?



Self-assessment for volunteering projects



Are volunteers feeling competent to raise a VOICE and/or take ACTION during and/or after the volunteering project?

If yes, to what extent? Could that be improved?

If no, why not? Could that be changed?

What could you do to build their competences and/or confidence in this respect?



Are volunteers motivated to raise a VOICE and/or take ACTION during and/or after the volunteering project?

Have the volunteers indicated any interest in initiating their own project?

If yes, to what extent? Could that be improved?

If no, why not? Could that be changed?

What could you do to spark their motivation?





Self-assessment for volunteering projects



Are volunteers *at the end of the project* aware of their participation experience and learning about youth participation through this project?

If yes, to what extent? Could that be improved?

If no, why not? Could that be changed?

What could you do to support understanding among volunteers of their own experience and learning in regards to participation?



For volunteering teams specifically –

Did you notice the differences in the level or quality of participation of the volunteers in your volunteering project? Were some participants more active and some less active?

If yes, what were those differences? Why do you think those differences exist?

What would need to happen in the context of a volunteering project to change the level of participation of the less active participants?

