



Education and Culture DG

'Youth in Action' Programme

EVS TRAINING AND EVALUATION CYCLE

GUIDELINES AND MINIMUM QUALITY STANDARDS

Youth in Action Programme

May 2011



1. Introduction

The Commission recognises that participation in the Youth in Action Programme is a non-formal learning experience which gives the people involved new experiences and skills. This is particularly true for the European Voluntary Service (EVS), which enhances the participants' professional skills and competences and thus makes them more attractive to potential employers. At the same time, it increases their sense of solidarity, develops their social skills and promotes active participation in society.

One of the key features of EVS is the training and evaluation it provides, guiding young volunteers through a non-formal learning process before, during and after their period of service abroad.

The training and evaluation dimension within EVS aims at providing young volunteers with continuous guidance and support throughout their voluntary service period. Such training and evaluation contributes to the education and development of each young person. It also helps resolve conflicts and prevent risks, and it provides a means of assessing the volunteer's EVS experience.

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

Quality is the main objective of preparation, training and evaluation. Given the diversity of countries, National Agencies, and volunteers, there is a large degree of flexibility in the training format, whereas the quality indicators should be common to all training sessions. At the same time, the National Agency (and the promoter) should as far as possible try to ensure that the training/evaluation opportunities offered to each volunteer are in line with his/her specific needs.

This document outlines the minimum that should be covered by a training/evaluation session. Trainers and organisers are, of course, free to add any country-specific or project-specific features they deem necessary or interesting for the people attending their training/evaluation event. The minimum quality standards clarify what can be expected to be achieved at a training/evaluation session, whether by the organisers of the next event, the project supervisors, the mentors or the volunteers themselves. Training providers can link the different training/evaluation stages while avoiding any overlaps in the content, and can thus help create a continuous learning process for the volunteers before, during and following their service period.

2. Training and Evaluation Cycle

To harmonise EVS volunteer training and evaluation, and to make it more professional, the Commission has designed a 'Training and Evaluation Cycle' for which the national agencies or regional SALTOs are responsible in programme countries and in neighbouring partner countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and South-East Europe.

This Training and Evaluation Cycle (TEC) also facilitates contact between volunteers, promoters and National Agencies/SALTOs. It complements other ongoing support offered by the Sending, Host and Coordinating organisations before and during the service period.

The Training and Evaluation Cycle consists of two sessions:

- on-arrival training;
- mid-term evaluation.

Volunteers have a right and an obligation to attend both sessions and the promoters must ensure that their volunteers take part in the TEC, which is considered an integral part of the voluntary service.

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

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

The Training and Evaluation Cycle and the minimum quality standards also apply to partner countries which do not have a National Agency or a SALTO organising the TEC. In these countries, the training and evaluation sessions are organised by EVS Host or Coordinating Organisations. Additional financial support is available for this if requested in the application form.

2.1 On-arrival training

Objectives of the training

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

At the same time, this training equips the volunteers with communication skills, including aspects of intercultural learning. It helps them become aware that cultural differences require different models of behaviour. The training is also a time for the volunteers to plan the coming months and to develop their own personal goals for their period of service, in line with the non-formal learning philosophy of EVS.

If volunteers have already spent time in their Host Organisation, they exchange their first experiences and clarify questions related to their project.

Framework of the training

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

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

For the training to be of maximum benefit it should take place shortly after the arrival of the volunteer.

For volunteers doing less than 2 months' service, the National Agency may offer shorter and tailor-made on-arrival training, or may exceptionally exempt volunteers from the National Agency/SALTO-organised on-arrival training. In the latter case, the Host or Coordinating Organisation is to organise the training in line with these minimum quality standards, although possibly with a shorter duration.

Expected achievements of the training

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

- is aware of and has the chance to discuss questions about visas, residence permits, her/his legal status as a volunteer, insurance, the EVS Agreement and 'What to expect from EVS';
- knows the insurance and crisis management systems (AXA/EBA documentation and procedures);
- knows what support is available from the National Agency, SALTO and the Youth Helpdesk of the Executive Agency;
- has received information on the host country's history, political and social situation, on key aspects of the host culture and on how to get involved in the local community;
- is aware of how to deal with cultural differences and with conflicts;
- is familiar with the role of each partner (SO, HO, CO, volunteer) in the project and knows her/his own rights and responsibilities;
- has the chance to meet and network with other EVS volunteers;
- receives basic information about the European Union and its policies and programmes in the field of youth;

- learns about the objectives and principles of EVS and the Youth in Action Programme;
- knows the meaning of being an EVS volunteer;
- has identified clear goals and ideas for his/her voluntary service (and future achievements which could be included in the Youthpass).

2.2 Mid-term evaluation

Objectives of the evaluation

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

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

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

Framework of the evaluation

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

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

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

The mid-term evaluation is only for volunteers doing a service of six months or more.

Expected achievements of the evaluation

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

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

3. Additional training and support to be provided

In addition to the EVS Training and Evaluation Cycle, volunteers receive continuous counselling and guidance before, during and after the service period, while training for project managers, mentors and trainers adds up to a complex set of measures, accompanying volunteers and promoters throughout the European Voluntary Service experience.

The Sending, Host and Coordinating Organisations are responsible for preparing the volunteers prior to departure and for providing language training and personal and task-related support during the service period¹.

In addition to the pre-departure preparation by the Sending Organisation, certain National Agencies may offer a one-day information session to volunteers prior to their departure.

National Agencies are also responsible for organising Annual EVS events for volunteers who have completed their service. These events may serve as evaluation meetings, alumni meetings and promotional events.

¹ A full description of the responsibilities of the promoters can be found in the Programme Guide at http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/doc443_en.htm.

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

Objectives of the training

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

This preparation should take place at least one month before departure and should be tailored to the individual needs of the volunteer and the specificities of the project, the service and the host country.

Pre-departure preparation provides the volunteers with information about EVS, the project life cycle and the different parties involved. It allows volunteers to discuss their expectations, their motivation and also any concerns they may have about their future project with their Sending Organisation.

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

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

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

Expected achievements of the preparation

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

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

3.2 Annual EVS Event (organised by a National Agency)

Objectives of the meeting

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

One of the objectives of the event is to ensure that the National Agency receives feedback about the projects, the promoters, the practical arrangements and the overall impression of EVS. A key question will be what learning effect the service period had for the volunteer.

Framework of the meeting

Conditions and practices again vary, but the following indicators outline the most appropriate operational framework for Annual EVS Events:

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

Expected achievements of the meeting

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

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

Moreover, the Annual EVS Event may be:

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