

Good Practice in EVS Projects

Outcomes of participant's workshops "Service and Care", TC "EVS in Our Hands", 28. 9.–3. 10.2015, Prague, CZ

The aim of this chapter is to collect good practice, tips, ideas and experience with preparing, running and evaluating of EVS projects of participants of the training course – EVS coordinators. This experience we would like to share with others involved in EVS projects (accredited sending, receiving and coordination organisations, mentors, volunteers...), for giving them ideas and inspiration for their real and further work within EVS and to help them to improve their EVS projects.

Participants were divided into smaller groups (about 4–5 people) and their task was to think about and to write their tips, ideas, good practice as well as potential risks for following topics (they had about 45 min. – 1 hour for discussion and summarization). At the same time, the group, solving concrete topics, was responsible for receiving also the feedback, tips and ideas from other participants from other groups during the day. The idea behind, was to collect good practice as well as to identify potential risks of each important step in the EVS project, in the chronological way (preparation-realisation-evaluation-follow-up activities of an EVS project):

1. Preparation phase

I. Selection of an EVS volunteer (by CO or RO)

Good practice

- Look for motivation/ interested volunteers
- Send a questionnaire to applicants – e.g. *Why do you want an EVS volunteer? What do you want to learn?*
- Use simple/ understandable language
- Speak on Skype or on the phone
- Keep in touch with volunteers during selection and give precise information about the project to EVS volunteers/ get precise info from volunteers about their motivation/ needs/ expectations from the EVS.
- To have good a sending partner organisations
- Use on-line databases of EVS opportunities/ youth networks
- Share as many information as possible about the receiving organisation/ country/ culture (it helps self-selection)
- Exchange wanted detail of former/ present/ future EVS volunteers (first-hand information)

Potential Risks

- Different expectations
- Too little communication before start or during selection of volunteers
- Cultural differences

II. Communication between partners (RO-SO, SO-EVS volunteers, RO-EVS volunteers, RO-CO-SO) before the arrival of EVS volunteer in the receiving organisation and support of EVS volunteer before EVS (SO-RO-CO, others...)

Good practice

- Get a detailed description of tasks/ activities/ conditions for EVS volunteers from RO/ CO and explain it to the volunteer if it is necessary
- Keep in touch (at least one email a month)
- Meet with all participants personally if possible, intensive communication
- Work on common standards with partners (preparation, support during EVS activity-supervisions with EVS volunteers and task-related support)
- Be open, honest, clear – everyone benefits

Potential risks

- Saying YES to a new partnership without knowing details and duality of the project and without making sure that the volunteer is well informed
- No communication between receiving organisation and the EVS volunteer, because of the receiving organisation (not because of an EVS volunteer)!

2. During EVS activity I. – after arrival EVS volunteer to the receiving organisation

I. Adaptation process within EVS projects – How to plan activities for EVS volunteers in relation to needs of the receiving organisation, EVS volunteers and local community?

Good practice

- Before and during EVS: in-depth information sparring (characteristics of the RO and activities)
- Prepare INFOPACK (free time activities, emergency numbers, practicalities...)
- The first month: smooth introduction, a lot of observation (and translation) then ask the volunteer how he/ she can contribute
- The monthly report used for joint evaluation and adaptation of the activities
- Define tasks and timing clearly
- Inform about the possibility to implement own ideas in the project
- Good preparation of the mentor

Potential risks

- Staff is not (and does not get) involved
- Different expectations of the receiving organisation and an EVS volunteer
- Isolation in small communities
- „EVS bubble“ or „Erasmus bubble“ and no interaction with locals

II. Support of EVS volunteers during the EVS (personal, intercultural, others...):

Good practice

- Organise a WELCOME Party for the new EVS (invite local community, staff, former EVS volunteers, local youth...)
- Facilitate integration to the local community according to the volunteer's interests: sport, animal shelter, theatre, community centre...)
- Get in touch with other EVS volunteers in the same city

- Organise regular meetings of receiving organisation and EVS volunteer
- Find suitable mentors and trained/ supervise mentors
- Let the volunteer organise the presentation of his/ her culture (music, dance, food...cooking classes)
- Organise a goodbye party
- Be aware of the cultural shock
- Don't get into the routine: every volunteer has his/ her own story

Potential risks

- The language barrier
- The cultural gap: different habits, different needs, different ways of giving meanings to actions (physical distance can be interpreted like „dislike“) – different communication styles
- Not clicking between volunteer-volunteer and/ or receiving organisation-volunteer
- Lack of motivation/ dis-motivation

3. During the EVS activity II.

I. Support of learning process in EVS project (to EVS volunteer, EVS coordinator, receiving and sending organisation):

Good practice

- Explaining the Youthpass at the very beginning of EVS activity and then repeatedly thought the project
- Regular feedback sessions analysing learning process and framing towards Youthpass competencies /other soft skills (helping volunteers to realise the utility of their new skills/ competencies)
- Recognising learning styles and adapting activities and support of it
- Training courses, networking, forums (for EVS support start)
- Group evaluation with volunteers from different receiving organisations (2–5 times during the EVS project)

Potential risks

- Unexpected volunteers unable to recognise their learning process
- Incompatibility of learning styles (formal, non-formal, informal)
- Cultural differences/ obstacles to learning

II. How do you support EVS volunteers within their „Individual Action Plan (mini-project)“?

Good practice

- „Footprint“
- Motivation
- Work with concept from the very begin
- Project management (NAOMIE)
- Open for new ideas
- Limits – time, money, resources
- Simple, clear, fair
- Even small project can be a big step for a volunteer
- To learn from EVS volunteers
- Accurate support (example: music project- music teacher...)

Potential risks

- Lack of motivation
- Losing the structure

- Too high expectations of a volunteer
- Bad feedback from the community
- Competition between volunteers (in the case more EVS volunteers in the receiving organisation)

4. Before departure from the receiving organisation/ after return back to the home country

I. Support of EVS volunteer with evaluation before departure from EVS home (from receiving organisation, sending organisation,...):

Good practice

- Session/ seminar/ meeting of the receiving organisation and the EVS volunteer (eventually involving also coordinating organisation if there is involved in the project), possible to involve mentor who gives feedback
- Using non-formal tools/ methods to evaluation and tests from psychology/ language/ etc.
- Evaluation of logistics by coordinating organisation and learning and activities by receiving organisation – both according to the reality of the organisation
- Clarify the goals of evaluation for individual participants
- Clarify who will get the outcomes of the evaluation (receiving, sending, coordinating organisation, volunteer, mentor, national agency,...)
- Minutes from the evaluation to use in the project final report
- Erasmus plus final report of participants in print-filling out (original to you, copy to them)

Potential risks

- Not getting the final report from EVS volunteers
- Clarifying who will get outcomes of evaluation – less sharing and openness
- Balance in evaluation – can get too negative
- Not measurable outcomes

II. Support of EVS volunteer after return from EVS at home (from receiving organisation, sending organisation, mentor..) and follow-up activities:

Good practice

- From the receiving organisation and the coordination organisation (depends on the context) include them in ongoing projects
- Suggest partnership or cooperation (CO/RO)
- RO/CO connection with previous EVS volunteers to the new ones (supporting network)
- Sending organisation: help with (inner) evaluation – how to continue
 - share local/ internal possibilities to continue
 - Selection with alumni
 - A network of former EVS volunteers (possible to involve them in mentoring, buddies...)

Potential risks

- Just taking, not giving any outcome to local/ regional community – more participation than supporting community
- Contact between current and previous volunteers can be discouraging
- Come back to the previous community and come back to old habits (no development and change).