

How to deal with individual mini-projects of EVS volunteers

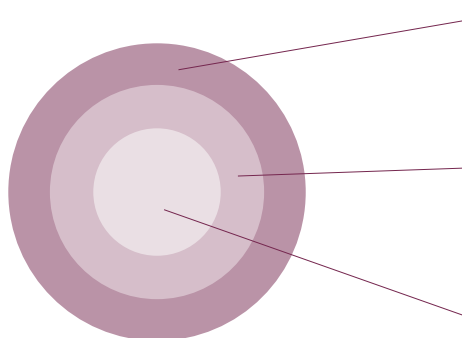
In natural cycle of EVS there is a time, when after adaptation to new place and situation, absorbing elements of new culture and mastering working tasks given by the organisation, volunteer feels orientated, successful... and after some time may be a bit bored by new routine and called to do something new, bigger, with own input and unique personal footprint. And as EVS is an educational programme, blessing and support for making this step should be provided by the superhero coordinator. Time for mini project is here.

For many volunteers, this time comes after 3–4 months, but it is, of course, very individual. Timing can be different and also the whole reality can be different – maybe the volunteer doesn't like the project activities or is not able to contribute/be useful in satisfying way, maybe he or she is bringing own ideas and being very independent already from the beginning, maybe he or she is happy in the routine... nevertheless, the opportunity of creating own mini project should be offered to every volunteer and is very often bringing great and unexpected results on many levels.

Mini project is an activity out of the usual volunteer's everyday tasks and out of the usual organisation's activities. It is a new idea integrating interests of volunteer, receiving organisation and local community. It is an important part of EVS learning cycle, stepping out of the comfort zone, initiation to „EVS adulthood“.

Tips for meaningful mini project management:

- The volunteer should be the main actor and mover of the activity, having full responsibility for it. Do it from own will and motivation – coordinator should offer this possibility and can accompany volunteer on the way, but should not push or demand it.
- It should happen in volunteer's challenge zone – place of learning. Situations from challenge zone will after some practise move to his or her comfort zone... which is becoming bigger and bigger. In this way volunteer is becoming stronger and more confident, ready to take new challenges:



Comfort zone – situations that are familiar to you, you feel safe and confident. It is kind of routine, it is comfortable.

Stretch/challenge zone – new challenging situations. They are difficult, can be even frustrating. But you are able to handle them and learn from them.

Panic zone – new situations, you feel unsafe, it is too much for you, you are in panic, paralysed to do whatever.

- There is no too small or too big project. Make a balance between „challenging“ and „realistic“. Don't stay in comfort zone, but don't go to the panic one as well.
- It is helpful when volunteer knows already from the beginning that time for the mini project will come, it is included in the long-term action plan.
- Usual project logics is useful – creating aim based on actual needs, SMART objectives, fighting actions and evaluation. And celebration with an element of recognition by the organisation and the community.
- The mini project should be developed or at least agreed in dialogue and ideally, should be beneficial for all actors involved – volunteer, organisation and local community.
- Reasonable support should be provided by receiving/coordinating organisation (time, people, know-how, material, space, money...)

Bonus tips

- The mini project can be done in cooperation with other EVS volunteers from the receiving organisation or/ and from other EVS projects.
- It can be a good opportunity for involving mentor to volunteer's activities. Also, involving of ex-EVS volunteers in the mini project can be useful, supportive and inspirational.
- Challenge of finding own financing/support in the community and managing the mini project in a sustainable way can also bring surprising results and useful experience.

Examples of personal mini projects: Juggling workshop for local children. A photo exhibition about the life of volunteers. Youth Exchange. Cooking own national dinner with/for seniors. Charitable football match. Research about the attitude towards different cultures. Presentation of own experience. Realisation of a new design for the youth club. Presentation of volunteer's culture for youth/ people from local community. Conversation club of the native language of volunteer for interested people from local community.

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