



# Guidelines

# HOW CAN MUNICIPALITIES SUPPORT VOLUNTEERING



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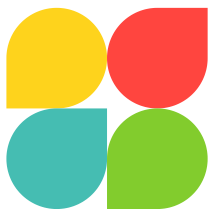


## Context and purpose

Covid-19 pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in healthcare capacities, markets, jobs, welfare systems, political agility, the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, community cooperations and more. It has also affected the functioning of our democracies and civic participation. Due to the need to prevent the spread of infection, it was necessary to impose strict restrictions on the freedom of individuals and society. The pandemic exposed the cracks in our system that our not limited to one single country that will now have to be rebuilt and we need to do this together.

The pandemic has shown that volunteering is the key element of strong, tightknit communities that are able to respond quickly and effectively to crisis situations such as Covid-19 pandemic and limitations of civic participation it has brought with it. During the pandemic it was shown that when those with local knowledge and insight take collective ownership of local problems, communities are uniquely mobilized around efforts.

The goal of the ERAS network is to improve the conditions for the development of volunteering in countries across Europe. ERAS network strives to inform, educate, and train organisations and individuals to design crisis resilient volunteer programs that provide possibilities and opportunities for people to practice and experience active citizenship by volunteering in such programs. Through workshops and discussions at international events among partners, volunteers, and representatives of NGOs we have extracted the existing practices of support from Municipalities available to volunteer organisations. Partners exchanged experience on how Covid-19 impacted volunteering and learned about what people in the field of volunteering feel is needed in terms of support from local authorities to be able to provide better crisis response in the future.



## Guidelines

In crisis, volunteers and volunteer organisations are among the first to act and respond. Citizens and local authorities alike are depending on them for help in the first moments.

Covid-19 presented unprecedented global challenges in 2020. Despite their global nature, the challenges were mostly faced with local responses in the first few days. Later the responses were coordinated on a national, regional, and global level but still implemented locally, greatly by the volunteers. Volunteers around the world continued to dedicate their time and expertise through a range of local organisations and assignments. In the first months of the pandemic volunteer organisations noticed an increase in the number of individuals wishing to participate, to help.

As the pandemic persisted, the initial desire to help diminished and NGOs reported difficulties in maintaining the number of volunteers and in recruiting new volunteers. A decline in motivation was noticeable when we got used to the new situation and accompanying epidemiological measures. Although volunteers and volunteer organisations usually cooperate with local authorities in a coordinated response to a crisis, the pandemic has shown that this cooperation needs to be present before a crisis arises to provide a fast and adequate response.

Pandemic has revealed that too often there is insufficient investment in volunteering infrastructure on a local, regional, and national level yet everyone is relying on voluntary organisations and volunteers to be amongst the first responders during a crisis and to provide help when and where local, regional and national authorities are not available. The importance of volunteer contributions to crisis response was also recognized by the UN in its recent document The UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to Covid-19 in which it states that “volunteer groups often play an indispensable leadership role in the response, notably in reaching out to vulnerable people and in getting to remote places. They can amplify responses.”

Through our work during the pandemic, partner organisations have recognized the need for a stronger support of towns (and local authorities) to development of volunteering that we will address with this project. The need for a greater support for the development of volunteering is also recognized by the UN that is through the re-imagining of volunteering for the 2030 Agenda trying to create a sense of urgency among governments and organizations to develop voluntarism infrastructure, fund initiatives and integrate volunteering into their action on development.

Through an overview of existing practices of support, we have extracted the following guidelines on how Municipalities can support NGOs in development of voluntarism for a better crisis response.



## 1. VOLUNTEER CENTRE

The volunteer centre can provide the municipality with a comprehensive support structure for volunteering. The volunteer centre should focus on the operation of the volunteer program, training and mentoring for volunteers, together with assistance to host organizations, ensuring a well-supported and coordinated network of volunteers. The centre should also be actively involved in the design of urban community programs, research and project generation. By promoting cooperation between civil organizations, government entities and institutions, the centre contributes to the municipality's cultural, environmental and social initiatives and provides a dynamic and responsive approach to community development. The establishment of the volunteer centre brings many benefits to the municipality, among others, the volunteer centre can serve as a hub that not only supports volunteers and organizations, but also contributes to the overall development, cohesion and resilience of the municipality through innovative programs and community building initiatives.

The Pécs Volunteer Centre, Hungary operates as a methodological 'base' and its professional activity is based on the following 4 pillars:

### 1. Operation of voluntary programs, trainings

- Services for volunteers: information and mediation of volunteers; preparation, training and, if necessary, mentoring of volunteers; assistance with labour market reintegration if needed and possible.
- Support of host organizations and institutions: provision of information on hosting volunteers; organization registration and administration assistance; preparation and training of organizations to receive volunteers; providing professional consultations.
- Designing a website and registration interface, building and operating a database.
- Community Office operation.
- Methodological publications.







2. Generation of urban community programs, domestic and international innovations, research and presentation of good practices, project generation, partnership building

- Development of thematic, mainly community volunteer programs with the involvement and cooperation of civil organizations, state, local government and church institutions along with the performance of mandatory local government tasks.
- Voluntary employment programs in the field of architectural and natural environment protection.
- Provision of cultural, scientific and artistic activities through the employment of volunteers.
- Provision/assistance of social and health activities through the employment of volunteers.
- Development of a neighbourhood volunteer program.
- Development and implementation of volunteer programs and action plans responding to unexpected emergencies (natural disaster, epidemic, etc.).
- Research of domestic and international (direct Brussels) sources, application monitoring, partnership building and project generation.

3. Community building, community organization, community development.

4. Promotion of the practice of social enterprises.





## 2. ONLINE VOLUNTEER PLATFORM

The Municipalities could help with the development of volunteering by helping to create and/or manage a general online platform where all local volunteer opportunities would be gathered. Cooperation between NGOs and Municipality in creating and managing the online platform would ensure the sustainability of the platform.

## 3. FINANCING THE ACTIVITIES OF NGOS

Volunteers are often the glue that holds a community together. Volunteering allows you to connect to your community and make it a better place. Even helping with the smallest tasks can make a real difference to the lives of people, animals, and organizations in need. However, volunteer organisations need some infrastructure for successful implementation of volunteer projects and actions. As seen in case of Kekava Municipality, Latvia; Lousada Municipality, Portugal; Pecs Municipality, Hungary and Litija Municipality, Slovenia, local authorities see the value of NGOs and their volunteers for the local community. All mentioned Municipalities allocate a part of their budget to be distributed among the NGOs in its territory. Kekava Municipality, Latvia has yearly calls for co-funding certain activities. They have specific calls for education and small-scale infrastructure projects. In Lousada, Municipality allocates monetary support upon presentation of a programme of activities of NGOs. Specific support may be requested for certain extra activities that are subject to approval by the Municipality. Municipality of Litija issues In Litija yearly calls for funding the activities of NGOs. Every year, the municipality announces calls for co-financing of the activities of associations. The tenders are divided according to the areas of work of the associations, so the municipality announces calls for co-financing of youth programs, social welfare programs, culture, sports and activities in the field of agriculture.





#### 4. STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF VOLUNTEERING

A municipality should have a strategy for the development of volunteering as it enables the direction of community efforts, optimization of collaboration with non-governmental organizations, and more effective attraction, management, and retention of volunteers, contributing to the strengthening of the local community and improvement of the quality of life. Additionally, the strategy allows for measuring the effectiveness of volunteer programs and adapting to societal changes, ensuring sustainable and adaptable support for volunteering in the long term.

Municipality of Pécs, Hungary has a strategy that is linked to the guidelines and recommendations of Pécs civil and other relevant sector strategies/concepts.

Civil Concept: strengthening cooperation between civil organizations; improving awareness of their work and making it attractive, in order to encourage the active and self-motivated involvement of the city's citizens; making civil organizations suitable for the joint performance of increasing burdens arising from social changes and undertaken by the local government on a mandatory and voluntary basis; encouraging projects supporting and popularizing voluntary activities; strengthening the cooperation of the business and civil sectors.

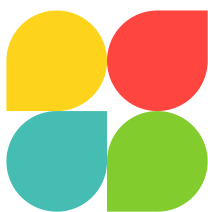
Local Community Development Strategy: creating the infrastructural background for community development; community development based on cooperation; local economic development relying on local resources and civil organizations.

Local Equal Opportunity Program: development and promotion of volunteerism that strengthens social cohesion and solidarity; the possibilities of expressing local community solidarity; development of a donation approach; the role of volunteers in social services; university volunteering.

Integrated Urban Development Strategy: HR exploration, development and utilization; sustainably improving quality of life; integrated local society; increasing the cultural capital of the local society; development of communities; representation of common causes; "social monitoring".

Local Social Services Development Concept: Coordinated operation of the actors of the local social care system (municipal, church and civil), elimination of parallels, implementation of services provided through service contracts concluded with civil organizations.

Example of a strategy for the development of volunteering in the municipality of Pécs, Hungary.



## **5. FREE OFFICE SPACES & EQUIPMENT FOR NGOS**

Funds for office space and the purchase of necessary equipment represent the majority of NGO costs. NGOs are often understaffed, therefore providing funds for rent and equipment often takes away attention and time from the implementation of the NGO's program and volunteer activities. Public spaces or premises owned by municipalities, especially older buildings, are often empty or they are not fully occupied. By giving them to NGOs to use, the municipalities ensure that the premises are fully occupied, prevent or slow down the deterioration of older buildings and often contributes to the revival of forgotten parts of the city. The Municipality of Lousada, Portugal has protocols for the use of real estate, furniture, and vehicles by the NGOs. Most of them are old schools that are given over by protocol free of charge for their activities, and some spaces are available for a symbolic rent. The municipality of Pecs in Hungary also has a practice of providing infrastructure for NGOs. The Municipality of Litija, Slovenia rents available premises free of charge to NGOs operating in its area, provided that the premises are owned by the municipality and are not already in use. To be eligible for the rent-free spaces, the interested NGO must have the status of an NGO in the public interest. Status of an NGO in the public interest can be determined by a special law, or it can be decided by the ministry in charge on the basis of the Act on Non-Governmental Organizations (ZNorg) and any additional criteria. NGOs that are granted the rent-free use of spaces only ensure regular payment of running costs (electricity, water, utilities, etc.). In this way, NGOs can focus on the realization of their mission and devote much-needed resources to the implementation of activities.

## **6. FREE SPACES FOR EVENTS & OTHER ACTIVITIES**

NGOs oftentimes operate in small spaces which don't allow for accommodation of larger events. To implement workshops, educational or promotional events as well as larger volunteer programs and actions NGOs need to find other, larger spaces. For promotional activities a public space is often needed. Under certain conditions some municipalities support volunteer organisations by providing the space they need free of charge. For example, in Thessaloniki Greece, NGOs can petition the Municipality for a free use of public spaces for their events. If the Municipality agrees that the event is beneficial to local community and is aligned with municipal goals the space can be allocated free of charge. In Kekava, Latvia NGOs can use spaces free of charge under a condition that the NGO has a specific status of common good. In Lousada, Portugal and Litija, Slovenia free spaces are available for cultural programs. Municipality of Lousada provides public buildings for events that are essentially cultural, organised by NGOs. In Litija, on the basis of the Decision on the determination of public infrastructure in the field of culture in the municipality of Litija, public infrastructure managed by a



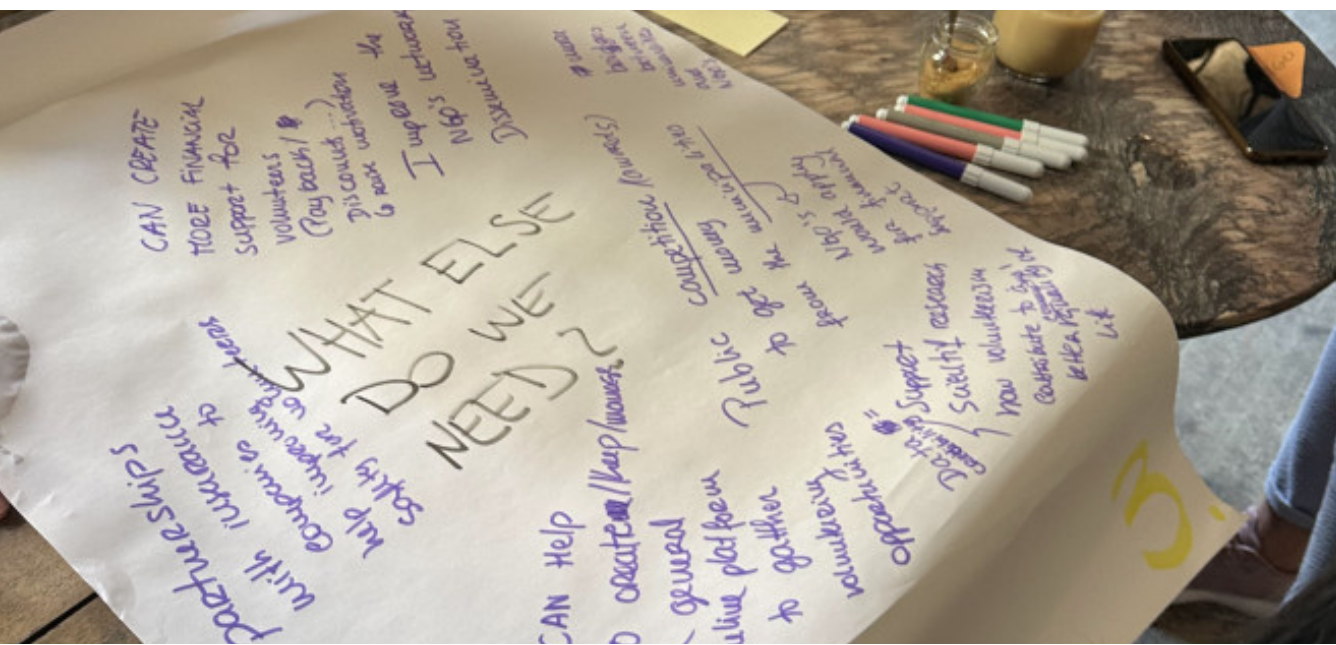


public institution must be fully utilized and free capacities rented free of charge to those cultural providers who implement public cultural programs. Cultural associations that implement public cultural programs therefore do not pay rent for the facilities within the framework of public cultural infrastructure (and the premises of elementary schools).

## 7. PROMOTION OF VOLUNTEERING

At the dedicated workshop we have identified the importance of promotion of volunteering by local authorities for further development of volunteering and a better crisis response in the future. The local authorities could promote volunteering by establishing a department dedicated to volunteering. Through the Volunteer department Municipalities could provide funds, branding and organise promotional events such as city volunteer day. Another way of promoting volunteering by Municipalities is to raise awareness about available volunteer services and the benefits of active volunteer engagement. Similar to city volunteer day, Municipalities could organise NGOs forum which would give the local community the opportunity to meet local NGOs and their work and volunteer actions and programs. Another way to provide support in promotion of volunteering is to help NGOs building their network for dissemination and with dissemination of outcomes of volunteer programs and actions. The Municipality of Lousada, Portugal celebrates Volunteers' Day on 5 December with a walk for volunteers. In Slovenia Regional hub for NGOs, in cooperation with municipalities of the Zasavska region Municipality of Litija, Zagorje ob Savi, Trbovlje and Hrastnik, awards the titles of Volunteer of the Year, where awards are given the most deserving volunteers, volunteer organizations and volunteer projects from the region.

Find out about good practices of municipalities to support volunteering:  
[Volunteer of the Year, Kekava, Latvia](#)





## **8. MUNICIPALITY SUPPORTS NGOS VOLUNTEER PROJECTS**

A partnership between the local authorities and NGOs is an essential element for successful public administration and provision of public service as it helps improve local public involvement in creating solutions beneficial to the local community. Both Municipality of Lousada, Portugal and Municipality of Litija, Slovenia have created a partnership with NGOs to implement projects dedicated to volunteering and its promotion.

In Lousada, the Municipality contributes an amount to support the activities of NGOs, provided that the NGO fills in a form presenting its activity plan.

In Litija, Municipality cooperates with the NGOs whenever possible and supports them in the implementation of their volunteer activities by providing staff, equipment for implementation of events or promotional opportunities. For example: 1. the representative of the municipality is part of the commission for the Volunteer of the Zasavska region competition, where awards are given every year to the most deserving volunteers, volunteer organizations and volunteer projects from the region. 2. The municipality also participates in the Intergenerational Cooperation Council, which pays a lot of attention to volunteering and connecting generations in this way. 3. The municipality enables free promotion of events/activities implemented by NGOs by publishing news and events on its website and social networks, provides free use of poster spaces, free publications in the local newspaper and on the LED billboard in the city centre.

The Municipality of Pécs, Hungary has entered into a supply contract for the role of civil coordinator with the 'House of Mentors Association', which tasks include volunteering and its promotion and coordination. It also provides meagre financial resources for this. This also positions the Pécs Volunteer Centre. In addition, the municipality provides the association with the property free of charge within the framework of a long-term lease agreement. Additional partnership agreements: provides an interface for community and civil affairs in the local government newspaper; provides space and opportunities for volunteering in local government institutions; supports the operation of working groups morally and professionally; channels volunteering into various professional strategic documents and action plans; recognizes and rewards community work.



## 9. PROMOTING VOLUNTEERING AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Encouraging volunteerism among young people is important. Municipalities can encourage cooperation between NGOs and educational institutions such as schools and colleges to actively involve young individuals in voluntary activities.

In Hungary, 50 hours of community service is a condition for issuing a high school graduation certificate. A socially beneficial activity is a social, environmental, individual or group activity for the benefit of the student's local community, which is carried out in an organized framework, independent of financial interest, and its pedagogical processing. In the Municipality Pecs, Hungary, young people during the school community service can learn about the work of local civic organizations and get an idea of the local social situation and problems. They can be not only participants, but also active shapers of events and programs at the city level.

Find out about good practices of municipalities to support volunteering:

[School Community Service, Pecs, Hungary](#)

## 10. VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENT IN MUNICIPALITY

The volunteer department in municipality should play a key role in implementing the strategy for the development of volunteering, connecting organizations, promoting and supporting volunteer initiatives. That would include developing and updating policies and procedures related to volunteering in the municipality; implementing strategies to recognize and appreciate the contributions of volunteers; organizing events or awards ceremonies to honor outstanding volunteers and their achievements; collaborating with various stakeholders to identify areas where volunteers can make a meaningful impact; developing and updating policies and procedures related to volunteering in the municipality; ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards governing volunteer engagement; engaging with the community to raise awareness about volunteer opportunities and the impact of volunteerism; building partnerships with local organizations and businesses to expand volunteer outreach; analyzing volunteer data to measure the effectiveness of volunteer programs and developing plans and protocols for mobilizing volunteers in response to crises, such as natural disasters or public health emergencies.



## 11. CREATE A HOSPITABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR VOLUNTEERS

To help keep volunteers motivated NGOs need to create an environment in which volunteers feel safe and comfortable. While working volunteers can get hurt and depending on the health system of the country the cost of medical care can be steep. Municipalities could help NGOs design an agreement with the insurance companies to help improve the safety of volunteers (by providing legal support or help making contacts etc.). Another way of creating a hospitable environment for volunteers is to show them their work and contribution is cherished, such as create a reward system for volunteers where stores or craftsmen would provide special discounts or payback systems for volunteers. This would help motivate people that are hesitant to participate due to their own financial struggles (maybe they can't afford to buy a bus ticket to come to the location of the volunteer work etc.).

Find out about good practices of municipalities to support volunteering:

[Work Activity Allowance for Volunteers, Slovenia](#)

## 12. MUNICIPALITY IMPLEMENTS ITS OWN VOLUNTEER PROJECTS

Local authorities benefit in a number of ways when they make volunteering a part of their culture. Citizens provide a variety of important services that range from administrative support to emergency response to community beautification. When citizens take ownership in their communities, it creates a better image for the city, people understand their local authorities better and a greater sense of advocacy is created that leads to further citizen involvement. In Greece, Municipality of Thessaloniki implements its own volunteer projects such as organising voluntary blood donations and providing information to the community. Another volunteer project they implement is a municipal homeless shelter.

Municipality of Litija, Slovenia implements two projects where volunteering is in the forefront: Sopotniki (Co-travellers) and Točka za starejše (Point for Seniors).

- Project Sopotniki is implemented in partnership with Zavod Sopotniki. Municipality of Litija provides a coordinator of volunteers for the program, vehicles for the free transports and all the equipment and support volunteers may need to do their work. The coordinator of volunteers is employed by the Municipality.
- Točka za starejše is an advisory office for the citizens of Litija and Šmartno pri Litiji, which provides help and support to the elderly and coordinates the work of volunteers. The aim is to connect all support institutions, establish support services for the elderly and cooperate for the benefit of elderly citizens. The Municipality provides office space and equipment for operating the Point for Seniors.





Municipality of Lousada, Portugal implements three volunteer projects:

- Since 2016, the Municipality of Lousada, in partnership with Aprisof - Associação de Proteção dos Rios Sousa e Ferreira and the BioLiving Association, has been promoting an International Work Camp (CTI), with the support of IPDJ - Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude.
- The Illuminate Lousada project, developed by the Municipality, aims to involve the Lousadense community around a solidarity objective – raising funds for an institution in the municipality. The aim of the action is to sell 10.000 candles, valued at 1€. All proceeds from the sale of the Solidarity candles goes to a chosen association.
- One of the main concerns of Lousada Town Council is the isolation of the elderly population, and it has developed “Movimento Sénior” project. The aim of this project is to promote active ageing by offering a range of education/training activities that encourage an active lifestyle, promote well-being and intergenerational socialising.

Find out about good practices of municipalities to support volunteering:

[Multidisciplinary health support team of Lousada](#)

[Municipal Voluntary Formation “Georgi Izmirliiev-Makedoncheto” – Blagoevgrad](#)

### **13. VOLUNTEER WORK MATTERS WHEN APPLYING FOR FUNDING**

In the case of civil tenders announced in the Municipality of Pécs, Hungary a criterion for evaluation is if a program is implemented with a broad public cooperation/mobilization. In many cases, it was already included in the announcement, e.g. also the "Be the Future of Pécs" call for tenders with the requirement that they ‘facilitate the spread and popularization of voluntary work in their program’.

### **14. SUPPORTING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**

As a professional field, volunteer program management is a new field. While volunteers have been around for centuries, formal volunteer programs with trained leadership are a recent development. Volunteers themselves have largely been taken for granted. NGOs wishing to use scientific data to develop and adjust their volunteer programs struggle to find appropriate data beyond why people volunteer. The available research all come to the same conclusion as to why people decide for volunteering, but it is important to know why they stop or how to keep them as active volunteers. Municipalities providing support to researchers interested in this topic would help NGOs acquire relevant data and design volunteer programs according to it.



## 15. MUNICIPAL REGISTRY OF VOLUNTEERS/VOLUNTEER BANK

Municipal registry of volunteers or a volunteer bank is a centralised registry of volunteers that can be used to mobilise people when help is required. This is specifically helpful in times of crisis when people are more inclined to help. The desire to help in crisis can hinder the response as people create self-organised groups of volunteers that are inexperienced in crisis conditions. Coordinated response is the most important element of any volunteer action but especially an action aimed at alleviating crisis conditions. The volunteer registry or a volunteer bank does not need to be a complicated solution, those usually require additional funds. We learned about a volunteer bank in Lousada, Portugal. There, the Municipality has a document called a volunteer bank that contains contact information of all volunteers that have participated in the volunteer actions implemented by the Municipality. As seen in Municipality of Lousada, Portugal a volunteer registry or a volunteer bank can be a simple excel document with contact information. Whenever there is a need for volunteers the Municipality shares the news with everyone on the list together with all necessary information regarding the volunteer work and its implementation.





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