



#### 4. Collect information from multiple sources

If you think that the future tasks of the volunteer require someone with a sound and trustworthy background you should consider asking for personal referees that have had first-hand experience of the applicant's work with the client group in question. Ask them specific questions such as:

- Do you have any concerns about this person working with our client group?
- Would you recommend this person for the post and why?
- If we were to take this person what type of training would you suggest? or Do you think that this person would require a lot of supervision?

#### 5. Trial period

You may wish to introduce in certain cases of "high risk" clients a trial period for your volunteers. This will complement your initial screening process and will give you the chance to assess the suitability of the new volunteer before making a definite decision.

#### 6. Police checks

In certain countries (the United Kingdom for example) police checks may be routine or even compulsory for volunteers dealing with special client groups, for example children. In other countries there are declarations of "good behaviour" for these purposes, stating that you have no criminal record. You should make sure that your organisation fulfils the legal requirements in your country for recruiting and screening volunteers for certain posts with certain people, without of course scaring off the volunteers.

**Note! Respect the right to privacy.** The purpose of extra screening is not to delve into the private life of candidates but to know them well enough to make a judgment about their capacities and limitations. The personal information about the volunteer should only be communicated to the persons that need to know (for example the support person in the hosting organisation) and be kept confidential to others.

### 3.3 Preparing the actors:

IVS is about creating new perspectives by confronting different realities – realities of organisations and their people. The success of an IVS project depends to a large extent on the quality of the preparation of all actors involved. A lot of crisis and conflict situations can be prevented by a thorough preparation.

#### 3.3.1 Preparation of the volunteers

As pointed out in Chapter 2.1 The actors, the preparation of the volunteer for an IVS is largely the responsibility of the sending organisation, even though in the ideal case it should be the product of negotiations between the sending and hosting organisation. In this way the hosting organisation can complement the preparation and fill some gaps (see also Chapter 4.1 Induction and on-arrival orientation). Some of the elements described below are more appropriate for long-term stays than for short-term projects. Generally speaking the longer the period abroad and the more different the host culture, the more intense the preparation should be.

The preparation of the volunteer can be structured around three axes: motivations and expectations, the work and living conditions at the placement and the intercultural preparation.

#### Why does the volunteer want to do it? Motivation and expectations

Knowing the reasons for the volunteers wanting to participate in an IVS is essential to avoid misunderstandings from the very beginning. It is equally important to raise the volunteers' awareness of the motivation that the hosting organisation has in receiving volunteers from abroad. The expectations from both sides should be adjusted to each other (see also Chapter 1.4 Reasons for International Voluntary Service).

Next to these specific motivations, it can be an added value to provide the volunteers with an introduction to the voluntary service movement in order to place their own engagement



in a more socio-historical perspective (see also Chapter 1.3 Background of International Voluntary Service).

The following exercises can be used to discover and document the volunteers' and other people's reasons for being part of an IVS. When the volunteers realise that the

motivations of the host organisation are not 100% congruent with their own, they might be more willing to let go of some of their original ideas and prepare themselves for the needs of their hosts in order to satisfy the needs of both sides as much as possible. The same goes the other way around.

- **Motivation brainstorm**

Ask the volunteers to take some time to reflect on their reasons for going abroad. Let them write down the expectations and concerns they have related to their stay. In a second step ask them to think about the expectations and concerns the hosting organisation might have related to their stay. When they are finished ask them to get together in small groups and discuss the results. Ask them to give feedback in the plenary about the items they wish to share with the others.

- **A letter to myself**

Ask the volunteers to write a letter to themselves about the reasons for choosing a given project, the expectations and concerns connected to it. Provide a relaxing atmosphere (for instance music, comfortable room) which allows the participants to let their thoughts wander around. The letter will stay strictly confidential, it will be sealed and kept by the sending organisation until the evaluation meeting of the project. This method allows the participants to be very honest to themselves without having to expose the letter to anybody.

The debriefing of the exercise takes place at the evaluation session months later. It will allow the participants to remember the state of mind and the ideas they had before their departure and help them to see the development they have gone through.

- **Creative expression of fears and expectations**

Provide a few metres of white wallpaper and lay it on the ground, ask the participants to gather around it and to draw what comes into their mind when they think about their stay abroad. Calm instrumental music can provide the appropriate atmosphere for this exercise. Change or interrupt the music from time to time to ask them to move and start on a new drawing/element. They could also add things to the drawings of other volunteers.

- **What is a volunteer?**

If the group of volunteers at your preparation is an international one, it can be interesting to explore with them the meaning of the word "volunteer" in different languages and countries in order to highlight the different notions (and implicit motivations) linked to the term in different cultural contexts.

### **Information about the working and living conditions**

The hosting organisation needs to be sure to provide the volunteers (through the sending organisation) with all the information necessary to have an idea of the working and living conditions during the IVS. The immediate comfort of the volunteer depends on the reduction of uncertainty linked to the jump into a new project and country. Having

appropriate information, having answers to question marks, having the feeling of being taken care of, having a nice place to sleep and eat and having a fairly clear idea of what to expect and what is expected will reduce the volunteers' anxiety and make them feel welcome in the project.

Here is a checklist with the things the volunteers (and the sending organisation) most likely want and need to know.



### Check list for an information session

#### About the project

- Detailed project description and job description (aims, tasks, benefits, time frame, etc.)
- Volunteer profile requested (age limits, skills, language skills, etc.)
- Support foreseen during the project (training, support person, language training, etc.)
- Description of the host organisation and the different people working there
- Safety rules and a code of conduct for volunteers (if necessary according to the cultural background or special requirements of the host project)
- ...?

#### About the living conditions

- Practical arrangements (insurance, financial, health and social security, emergency procedures, etc.)
- Food and housing arrangements, location of the work and living quarters
- Travel arrangements (visa, travel instructions, local transport, etc.)
- Financial arrangements (contributions, pocket money, etc.)
- General information about the host country (cultural, economic, social and political)
- ...?

Note! Only if communication between the two organisations is efficient before the project starts, can the sending organisation ensure a proper preparation. Especially in the case of long-term projects it is useful to put the volunteer in direct contact with the hosting project at an early stage to allow them to solve any additional questions directly and get to know each other from the distance.

The information should be transmitted through a variety of methods:

- Keep the session interactive, even if a lot of information just needs to be “given”, always open the floor for questions, suggestions and discussions;
- Invite former volunteers to give their testimony;
- Invite people from the host country to give presentations on the country;
- Use games and audiovisual material to introduce the country;
- Let the participants discover parts of the information themselves through literature or websites that you provide and ask them to present the results to the rest of the group in a creative way;
- Provide an information pack with the basic information and the contact details of the person to contact in the hosting organisation.

### Intercultural preparation

The third element of preparation training concerns the intercultural aspects of a voluntary service across borders. An intercultural pre-departure session should raise awareness about cultural concepts that exist and about the volunteers' own cultural background and the culture of the host community. It should strengthen the volunteers' sense of observation and prepare them for the difficulties they might encounter in this respect, though without providing the volunteers with behavioural recipes. Since there is a *T-kit on Intercultural Learning* (available to download at [www.training-youth.net](http://www.training-youth.net)) and an Education Pack on informal intercultural education (available at [www.ecri.coe.int](http://www.ecri.coe.int)) we will not go into extensive detail about intercultural preparation here.

When going to work and live abroad it is important to see the influence culture has on people, but also the diversity that exists within one country or culture depending on factors such as age, beliefs, sexuality etc. Culture gives people a sense of belonging even though they do not personally know all the other members of the group. This principle might also affect the volunteer who has to live without his original (cultural) group, but still needs to belong to some other group (age, music, sports) in the host country.

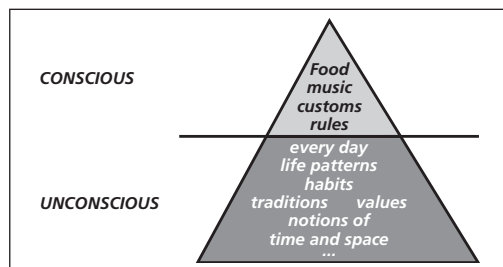
A number of exercises explore personal and cultural identity and train the volunteer to deal with complexity instead of using stereotypes. An exercise of this kind is the “onion exercise”, which is based on the idea that any person



is shaped by many different “layers”, not only culture but also family, friends, education etc. (see *T-kit on Intercultural Learning*: “the onion of diversity” p. 43).

It is also useful to convey certain notions of culture, as it makes people understand how it functions and what influence it has on us. One way to visualise the complexity of culture is the “iceberg model”, which describes culture as being defined only to a small extent through its visible elements: fine arts, music, food and dress etc. but that the great majority of cultural elements are invisible and also unconscious (different attitudes and role models, notions of time and space etc.). Other models allow a gradual classification of countries according to certain values, which could be interesting for the volunteer to help them see what in general will be different from the own culture. The *T-kit on Intercultural Learning* goes into more detail under the heading of “concepts of intercultural learning” (p. 17-35).

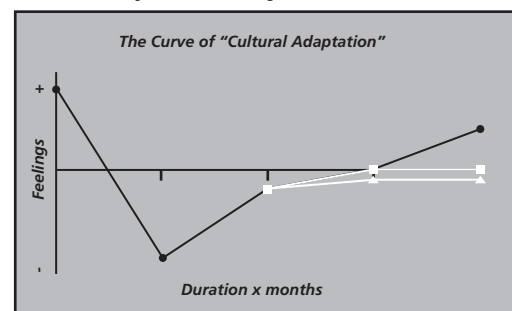
### The triangle of culture



Adapted from Training Course on Project Management and Transnational Voluntary Service: final report (7-14 March 1999) Council of Europe, Youth Directorate DJ/TC VOL(99)2, p. 29.

Finally it is helpful especially for long-term stays to discuss the “typical” development of a stay abroad through the “adjustment cycle”. It tries to visualise the various phases one might go through during a stay abroad, highlighting the possibility of living through a period of “cultural shock” which can develop into a phase of adaptation and stability of different degrees, depending on the way the person digests the negative feelings and moves on from there. It is useful to introduce the idea of a development that the participants will live through at the preparation meeting and come back to it for the evaluation, asking the participants to draw the actual line of what they have experienced.

### The adjustment cycle



Adapted from Grove and Torbiörn “A new conceptualization of intercultural adjustment and the goals of training” in Paige, Michael, *Education for the intercultural experience*, Intercultural Press, Yarmouth, 1993.

The following is a list of tips to overcome cultural shock that can be introduced to the participants as a tool they can refer to in case of necessity.

### Culture shock?

If you feel bad during your stay abroad, take some time to reflect on the reasons behind these feelings before you confront everybody else around you with your anger

- Of course you will find hundreds of little concrete things that justify your miserable feelings, but try to distance yourself a little bit from all the small things to get the whole picture of what might be happening to you.
- Explain to the people around you how you feel. Try first to solve your problems on the spot with the people concerned. Avoid emergency phone calls or letters to your close ones at home. You will unnecessarily worry them and by the time they answer, the situation might already have completely changed. Writing a diary can be very helpful to clarify your thoughts. If the problems persist you should of course inform your hosting and sending organisation so that a solution can be sought.
- Try to share some elements of your culture with the people around you: cook for them, organise an evening about something that you find interesting about your country (for example cultural traditions, the situation of young people, the educational, political or economic system, etc.)
- Try not to judge. Even if it sounds trivial, try to tell yourself it is not better, it is not worse, it is just different!
- It can be helpful to change air for a few days in order to look at everything from a distance in a more relaxed way. However, do not run away from your problems. If you want your host country to become your second home, you should think of investing more time in building human relations in this place.



### 3.3.2 Preparation of sending and hosting organisations

But not only the volunteers should be prepared, the sending and hosting organisation should also get ready for their tasks. The following suggestions for preparation are perhaps more valid for the hosting organisation than for the sending organisation, but it is the responsibility of both that these preparatory measures are taken irrespective of where they are taking place. Here are some issues to consider.

#### Why are you embarking on an International Voluntary Service?

As we mentioned in Chapter 2.2 The project cycle, the first step in your project is to define the aims and to determine whether there is a need for an IVS. Not only the project coordinator, but the whole organisation (board, colleague, volunteers, etc.) should know and preferably be convinced of the aims and benefits of this enterprise. Having volunteers for the first time can have a significant impact on your organisational culture and is often a source of anxiety. Therefore it is vital to involve colleagues who will be working with the volunteers in the development of the whole project in order to have their backing (see also Chapter 4.2.2 Staff motivation – the forgotten dimension).

Potential reasons for organisations entering into IVS:

- Strengthening international relations
- Enriching work
- Positive impact on clients
- Creating opportunities for young people (or people with special needs)
- Promotion of the idea of volunteering in the local community
- More prestige for the organisation as regards funders, clients, partner organisations etc.
- Improves the working atmosphere in the organisation
- Enhances co-operation with the partner organisation
- Being able to realise an idea which you would not have the resources for otherwise

For a practical example see the story of ELKA in Chapter 2.2 The project cycle.

**Note!** It goes without saying that you need to know beforehand what you want to achieve, in order to be able to measure whether you were successful in your IVS. Evaluation should be

an integral part of any project from the very beginning. Think about the tools you want to use for evaluation (for example a diary, interviews, questionnaires) to be able to plan accordingly (see also Chapter 5.1 Evaluation).

#### What needs to be provided for the volunteers?

Studies have shown that one of the major reasons for early returns of long-term volunteers are unrealistic placements in which basically there was no real need for a volunteer, so also no adequate work for them. Organisations should therefore have a clear idea about the tasks for the volunteers and ensure the technical needs or tools necessary for these tasks, naturally before the volunteers arrive.

Without the feeling of being able to contribute to the work of the organisation (because of lack of work or tools) volunteers will have severe difficulties to integrate.

The following questions concerning the work are at the basis of volunteer care.

#### Volunteer care

- What needs doing? Where is a real need for help in the organisation?
- Based on the needs assessment, what is one project, job, assignment or task in which you could involve volunteers?
- What is the job? What will the volunteers do?
- Is the job meaningful to the volunteers and to the organisation?
- Are there any opportunities for the volunteers to grow and to learn in this job?
- Will the job give the volunteers a sense of ownership and responsibility?
- What are the qualities the volunteers should have for this job?

#### Suggestion for training

##### Devil's advocate

Divide the group into two camps. One camp has to come up with as many arguments as possible in favour of having the volunteer and the IVS. The other camp (or the facilitator) should find as many arguments as possible indicating that the placement would not be suitable for the volunteer. After fifteen to twenty minutes of brainstorm one representative of each camp is given five minutes time to defend their extreme points of view. After this a discussion can take place about the validity of different arguments, both in favour and against.



Even more essential than the content of the work, is the whole framework of the project securing the satisfaction of the basic human needs of the volunteer. If the board and lodging provided, for example, does not meet the desired standards of the volunteer, there is little hope for success. It is absolutely vital to arrange appropriate living conditions for the volunteers, depending on their needs. Social and leisure needs also need to be satisfied before you can expect fruitful work. The information for the volunteer on the placement therefore should include details on board and lodging and options for leisure-time activities (sports, bars, music, disco, etc.) in the vicinity.

### Some ideas for board and lodging

#### Lodging:

- in a student house
- in a host family
- in a shared flat with other volunteers
- in a dormitory
- ...?

The living situation of the volunteer is very important for the success of the project. Therefore it could be a good idea (in a long-term voluntary service at least) to find out the needs and preferences of the volunteer before making final arrangements. Accommodation in an individual room in a student hostel is probably great for volunteers with social skills, but a host family would probably be better for more insecure dependent volunteers. Generally, the longer the project, the more need for private space, so it is an absolute must that volunteers in long-term projects have a room for their own private use! For a short period, like for a work camp, dormitory accommodation is mostly OK.

#### Food:

- daily lunch allowance
- deal with a local restaurant or cafeteria which provides meals
- weekly or monthly food allowance
- meals in the host family
- ...?

In group projects with international volunteers it is nice to take turns in cooking a meal for the rest of the group.

Generally the start of any IVS should be devoted to making the volunteer feel welcome and at ease. The first day of the volunteer in the new environment sets the tone for the rest of the stay. It can be detrimental to the whole project if the volunteers arrive and nothing has been organised. The importance of little gestures on the first day such as picking the volunteers up at the airport or station, a tour through the organisation meeting all the colleagues, explanations of the board and lodging facilities and a welcome drink is often underestimated (see also Chapter 4.1 Induction and on-arrival orientation).

### Who is involved in the implementation of the project?

The success of the project is to a large extent based on whether it is a team effort or not. To guarantee the co-operation of other staff members a project manager should inform and prepare them. Everybody involved should understand the role of the volunteers in the organisation and the distribution of responsibilities regarding the volunteer. Last but not least there should be an understanding on the specific intercultural situation the volunteer is in – as a newcomer not only to the organisation but also to the whole living environment.

As part of the preparation process the roles of supporting the volunteer have to be clarified. There are several needs for support but not all tasks have to be done by one person. Generally you divide between three main supporting functions:

- Dealing with the broader aspects of living in another country and a different culture. It is important to help the volunteers to acclimatise, to deal with their emotional problems and come to terms with their situation so that they can contribute effectively and learn and develop from the experience;
- Giving the volunteers support in their daily tasks, agreeing a plan of work, ensuring they have the necessary skills and sorting out problems related to the job;
- Being a resource person who helps the volunteer to integrate into the local social



life of the community in which the project is situated (this obviously is more valid for long-term projects).

(See also Chapter 4.3 Ongoing support of volunteers)

### **Training of people supporting volunteers**

It is advisable that the people who are in direct contact with the volunteer and fulfil one of these roles for the first time attend some training. Becoming competent in supporting international volunteers requires quite a lot of knowledge (trends impacting volunteering, rights and duties of volunteers, roles and responsibility of supervising staff, legal issues), skills (delegating tasks, interviewing, conflict resolution, communication skills, motivation, performance reviews, etc.) and

also attitudes (valuing volunteers, intercultural awareness, willingness to share). It is up to the support person and situation in question to decide on the training needs.

Training for people supporting volunteers is offered through various channels. In countries where volunteering has a long tradition, training courses are often offered by volunteer centres or even by private companies. Possible providers of such training on an international level are, for example, the Council of Europe ([www.coe.int/youth](http://www.coe.int/youth)) and the European Voluntary Service programme (check with the responsible National Agency for the YOUTH programme in your country. you find the addresses at:

<http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/youth.html>). A training session for support persons could look like the following.

## ***One-day training for volunteer support person in the hosting organisation***

### **Background**

A hosting organisation co-operating with several local organisations providing the placements for their international long-term volunteers offers a one-day training session for the support people of the volunteers.

### **Objectives**

- Participants should be able to create a job description for volunteers
- To raise awareness of participants regarding their role vis-à-vis the volunteer
- To clarify their expectations towards the volunteers
- To develop a common understanding concerning rights and duties of volunteers
- Initiation of a support network between the participants
- Clarification of co-operation between the hosting organisation and local hosting projects

### **Methods used**

As a preparation participants are asked to discuss the following questions in their organisation: What would a volunteer do in their organisation? What tasks do they envisage for the persons supporting the volunteer? What do they expect from the volunteer?

.../



.../ Programme			
Programme elements	Time needed (approx.)	Objective	Brief description of method
Introduction of the programme and the objectives for the day	15 min.	Participants should have a clear indication of what is happening during the day	Visual presentation (flipchart which remains visible on the wall all day)
Getting to know exercise, icebreakers	15 min.	Participants should feel comfortable in the group and get to know the names of the others	Any kind of interactive lively exercise (focus on people not their organisations)
Presentation of all placement descriptions for the volunteers	45 min.	Participants should get to know the other organisations present; and they should learn what information is needed for a volunteer to make a choice	Participants are asked to produce a "marketing" poster for an fictitious upcoming volunteers' fair, where volunteers can choose a hosting place (they can be as creative as they want); once all posters are on the wall, the participants should imagine they are volunteers about to chose a project and look at all the posters and make a decision for one.
Discussion on the needs of volunteers versus expectations of the hosting projects	1 hour	Participants should learn about accommodating the needs of volunteers in the light of the expectations of the organisations	In small groups (4-6 people) participants should share which choice they made and explain why. They should discuss how much information they as volunteers would want before making a choice for a project and how does that effect the preparation needed in the organisation
Summarising input	30 min.	Participants should get a better idea on how to prepare for receiving a volunteer	In the plenary participants should say how they would change their description now and why. What follows should be a summarising input on preparation for hosting long-term volunteers in the hosting organisation.
Lunch Break			
Roles of support people	1.5 hours	Participants should get a better understanding of their role <i>vis-à-vis</i> the volunteer	Participants should first individually reflect on what they think are the five most important tasks of a support person and the qualities needed for it. Then exchange in small groups and try to come up with one sheet of five most important tasks. Groups should report back in the plenary and then close the session with a summarising input on supervising volunteers.
Discussion on rights and duties	30 min.	Reaching a common understanding of rights and duties of volunteers	Explain the legal administrative requirements, legal framework and then discuss with the group rights and duties (working time, free time, board and lodging, training, etc.); try to come up with an agreement.
Discussion on future co-operation	45 min.	Participants should discover that they can use the contacts in this group to support each other	Explain how you see future co-operation in terms of sharing work concerning the volunteers' stay and then do some brainstorming regarding other ways of co-operating