



ESC Strong Houses
Mastery Class



Masters of the
Learning Path

ESC Strong Houses

Mastery Class

Training design

Introduction. The context – from EVS to ESC

The EVS - European Voluntary Service was a long-term European program (placed since 2014 under the Erasmus+ program). For more than 20 years it provided practical learning opportunities for youth to self-develop and learn as well as bring concrete contributions to local communities.

At the end of 2016, a new program for youth engagement was announced – the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), which has its first call for project proposals in the autumn of 2018. The ESC aims to foster solidarity in the European society, engaging young people and organizations in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities. It offers young people opportunities to show solidarity, express their commitment to the benefit of communities and help resolve challenging situations across Europe. At the same time, these young people have the opportunity to develop their skills and get some invaluable human experience in the process. The European Solidarity Corps builds on the achievements of more than 25 years of European programmes in the fields of volunteering and youth, especially on the experience of the EVS.

The program has a larger volunteering strand (besides the occupational strand) offering 3 types of different opportunities for youth to volunteer in Europe and in their home-countries as well – individual volunteering and volunteering teams (very similar to previous projects under EVS) as well as solidarity projects.

In **EVS**, volunteering as a service was a learning mobility for youth, that allowed them to express their personal commitment through unpaid and full-time voluntary service for up to 12 months in another country within or outside the European Union. Young volunteers were given the opportunity to contribute to the daily work of organisations dealing with youth information and policies, young people's personal and socio-educational development, civic engagement, social care, inclusion of disadvantaged, environment, nonformal education programmes, ICTs and media literacy, culture and creativity, development cooperation, etc. Young people with fewer opportunities could receive additional support to enable their participation and were also allowed to go on EVS for a shorter duration of time (from 2 weeks and up).

ESC defines volunteering as a solidarity activity that takes the form of a voluntary unpaid activity for a period of up to twelve months, that provides

young people with the opportunity to contribute to the daily work of organizations in solidarity activities to the ultimate benefit of the communities within which the activities are carried out.

The activities of the European Solidarity Corps support the objectives of the current [EU Youth Strategy](#), that promotes volunteering across borders for young people as one of its fields of action and the Commission's proposal for a new [EU Youth Strategy for 2019-2027](#) which intends to encourage young people to become active citizens, agents of solidarity and positive change for communities across Europe, inspired by EU values and a European identity.

ESC aims to promote solidarity as a value, mainly through volunteering, to enhance the engagement of young people and organizations in accessible and high quality solidarity activities as a means to contribute to strengthening cohesion, solidarity, democracy and citizenship in Europe, while also responding to societal challenges and strengthening communities, with particular effort to promote social inclusion. It shall also contribute to European cooperation that is relevant to young people.

In this last description found in the ESC Programme Guide as the main program objective, we also find the approach we aimed for in creating this training, which is described further on.

The need - Why this training?

As the main mechanism for promoting solidarity as a value, volunteering helps to overcome important societal challenges and addresses the needs of local communities. It also enables young people to acquire useful experience, skills and competences for their personal, educational, social, civic and professional development, thereby improving their employability and active citizenship.

This phrase summarizes perfectly the approach partners in this project took when applying for funding within Youth Strategic Partnerships to support an investment in raising the quality of EVS projects. We started from many years of observation in practice of how volunteering projects are created, designed and implemented.

We noticed many faults that affected the quality of these projects, not necessarily because of the way they were implemented once approved, but primarily because of the flawed way in which they were envisioned.

The biggest fault of a volunteering project is to be artificially created, starting from the opportunity it offers to young people or an organization, and not from the real needs of the community it will serve. When they are created as such, volunteering projects will run a big risk of becoming unsatisfying for the volunteers, of not generating enough impact in the local community and thus not creating a powerful learning experience for the volunteers.

In fact, the impact studies of the EVS program have revealed some of its problems related to low quality or inadequate use of the program potential by organizations who were somehow taking advantage of a funding opportunity, seeking to create projects to get money and not to ask for money once the projects were defined on needs analyses and concrete issues to be tackled in the scope of the educational program financing them. In fact, it may well have been such issues in the way the EVS program was used, alongside other poorer aspects of it, that also drove the European Commission to seek for ways of redefining youth educational programs, that led in the end to the appearance of ESC.

EVS had turned into a complex experience because the world we live in has become more complex and it demands a different approach from organizations in designing meaningful volunteering projects and from volunteers in shaping their meaningful volunteering experiences. The quest for skills of many young people along with the search for meaning and passion in their future career path has made EVS a milestone experience that many youth across Europe decided to undertake before setting their professional career path. This raised and still raised many challenges for the quality of projects developed by organizations and requires additional tools and mechanisms to ensure quality and use the basic elements of the program design in the best way possible.

We, the 4 project partners, in our long-term involvement in EVS as hosting, sending and coordinating organizations, could see the need for proper and consolidated training not just on the technical terms of managing projects (which is in many cases also offered by NAs or other youth worker mobilities), but also for a deeper attention to the way a project is thought out and crafted as a future learning experience for all parts involved.

Therefore, in our project intervention approach we advocate for a balance that needs to be maintained between community needs (including organizational needs) and volunteer needs, when designing a volunteering project. Our project approach is different from others' in the fact that it aims at the various actors in EVS/ESC from the perspective of their complementary role in relation to project quality and volunteers' learning.

What we believe we bring new to such trainings and the general landscape of European volunteering project design is a systemic approach to quality increase in ESC, by linking competences of designing meaningful ESC projects (with a consistent learning dimen-

sion and a real community impact), which is the project coordinator's responsibility - with competences of supporting learning processes, which is the mentor's responsibility.

Volunteering and the community and service it brings along go hand in hand with the learning process of the volunteer and in fact of all others involved. Therefore, even if in ESC projects focus primarily on addressing real community needs and solidarity issues, the learning element is not left behind. The Guide clearly states: „Activities supported under volunteering must constitute a rich experience in a non-formal and informal learning context, which enhances young people's skills and competences.“

Moreover, the proper training of youth workers handling volunteering projects, from different roles and perspectives, is a quality element envisioned by us and also explicitly mentioned by the ESC Programme guide: „Quality is the main objective of preparation, training and evaluation“.

With the 2 trainings we created in the project EVS Realm: Masters of the Learning Path, we aim to reach an increased performance and efficiency in education and training, specifically those of youth workers directly involved in managing ESC projects and the ones directly involved in supporting the learning process of ESC volunteers – project coordinators and mentors. These actors often need guidance and support themselves, to be able to perform challenging tasks of creating suitable learning frameworks for very different volunteers with multiple and sometimes opposing needs, who come in an European volunteering project for a variety of reasons and expecting a lot of different results.

Project Coordinators need to know how to develop and structure qualitative projects, that answer both the needs of European volunteers to be involved, but also the larger needs of communities hosting them, the beneficiaries they interact with and the needs of hosting organizations.

Some project coordinators who have implemented many projects have these competences and can manage projects properly. But there are many new organizations getting involved in ESC yearly, beginner NGOs and institutions who are implementing ESC projects for the first time and they are the ones needing more support and training on how to create projects that benefit all parties, but also how to manage them properly, using tested management techniques. This is what we aim to offer them with the Training for Hosting Organizations - ESC Strong Houses Mastery Class.

Whom is the training for?

This is a **Mastery Class** for hosting organizations of ESC projects, who recently (in the last 2 years) received a Quality Label to allow them to get involved in projects, or who are now implementing their first hosting projects. **The training targets organizational leaders and/or project and program coordinators from such organizations.** It intends to offer applicable tools also for beginner NGOs/institutions based in communities where ESC would not be easily accessed, rural areas or smaller cities where the presence of European volunteers usually creates a much powerful impact but where the way ESC projects are shaped, designed and linked to community specifics and culture is crucial for their success.

The Way – our project approach on training organizations

The ESC Strong Houses Mastery Class focuses on **organizational development** from the point of view of its impact on the quality of ESC experience in general and the quality of learning in ESC in particular, highlighting the interdependence between the areas of organizational management and their impact on the activity of the volunteers.

The organizational development areas the training design focuses on are human resources, program and project development, sustainability and impact measurement. It includes sections on volunteer management and tools needed for quality management of volunteers, making constant connections with the organizational management areas. Project management principles and tools are also included in the training to support better quality in the management of the hosting projects.

We want to convey the need to pay special attention to the way an organization interested to work with volunteers in the context of a European project (both international and local volunteers) must derive these hosting volunteering projects from the overall strategy of the organization and be then able to connect the hosting project activities to the needs of the community where the organization exists and functions.

Through this approach towards organizational management, the training focuses on Quality in ESC project implementation, dealing with a variety of topics from how to identify community needs, to designing a qualitative project and then implementing it with a close attention to all the different roles of actors in ESC and how each of them is playing a part in a successful project and its outcomes.

For this reason, we believe it is possible for this training design to be transferred to other fields where project design is important, such as adult education, or even school education, if we refer to Service Learning projects, where community needs are just as im-

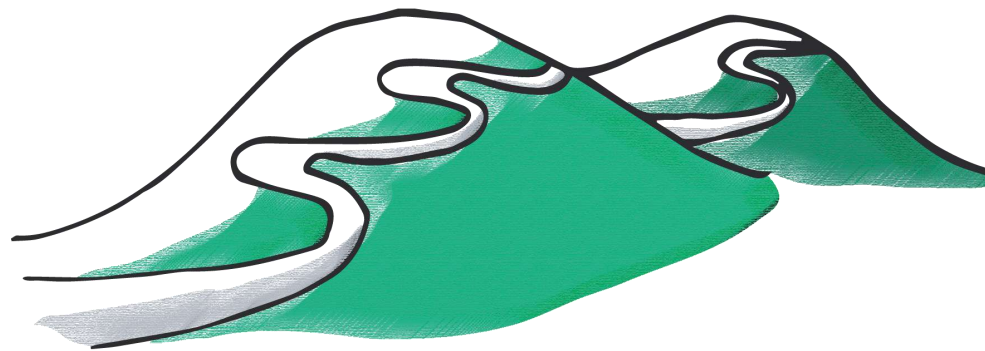
portant as student learning needs.

What we aim for is to create EVS genuine Strong Houses, meaning empowered organizations that re-set their mind-frame when it comes to project writing and creation, from the usual perception of trying to fit an idea into the financing requirements to the more healthy approach of identifying genuine needs and wrapping them in viable projects.

By offering such a deep focus on the actors behind the young people, mentors and coordinators, we are promoting high-quality of youth work, as most times the success of an ESC project lies in the way these key actors know how to mix and match all different needs, interests and limitations within a project. It is the quality of their daily involvement and work that we actually target to contribute to increasing, by creating a set of trainings aimed both at project coordinators and mentors, meant to create and cement the most needed skills for a smooth implementation of an ESC project from beginning to end.

In the long run, by investing in a qualitative management process of the frameworks where young people develop both personally and professionally, by contributing to improvement of ESC as the setting where young people understand what volunteering and solidarity means and the wide range of benefits they can bring for their growth, we believe we will increase chances of other young people wanting to join this program, to benefit from its lessons and opportunities, to test the concept of active citizenship by getting involved in quality learning programs, where they can see the attention given to them, their integration and concrete development, the attention and care given by professional youth workers, so they can make the best of these experiences.

By increasing the quality of how projects are managed and by demonstrating young people that the learning they gain in ESC is valuable and recognized in their future life, by giving them the tools to formulate this learning and access this recognition, we believe we will together motivate young people to want to join this journey, to become more empowered learners, because they will see the effects these projects have on their colleagues and friends. On the long term, our project's effects will help promote empowerment, engagement and active citizenship of young people, by the power of example and by proof of worthy learning programs, where the volunteer is truly placed in the center of the non-formal learning experience, but not left there alone.



The Realm metaphor explained

We visualize EVS/ESC as a true kingdom – a realm of magical experiences and many inhabitants of many sorts, all bearing stories, life events and skills that make them special.

In this realm, filled with wonderful surroundings, (sometimes) mystical happenings and many times a lot of opportunities for soul-searching, there are many learning paths to walk on, leading to very different towns, castles and open lands.

There are also Masters of these learning paths, people with special powers who can safely guide the travellers on these paths and help them reach their destinations with their bags full of riches. It is these special powers of the Masters of learning we want to help refine with this project.

The Masters of learning are EVS Project Coordinators and Mentors, but in the end also the Volunteers.

We see EVS/ESC as an inspiring learning journey, where a lot of the responsibility for learning lies in the volunteer's hands, but mentors and coordinators have important keys to open up doors on this journey and they should know when and how to use these keys. They have to understand the volunteers' very diverse needs of support during their European volunteering experiences, in order to enhance their learning processes and to ensure an overall qualitative and satisfying project experience.



Training flow and methodology

The envision training flow follows 5 working days that resemble a learning journey through which the youth workers need to go themselves, similarly to the volunteers they are preparing to host. Each training day has 4 working sessions, totaling 6 working hours/day, so 30 training hours overall (excluding any breaks).

Day 1 – First steps on the path: introduction, teambuilding, organizations marketplace

Day 2 – Drawing the Realm map: entering the topic - ESC specifics, core values and vocabulary. Needs analysis and organizational capacity

Day 3 – Ready for the journey: ESC project management path

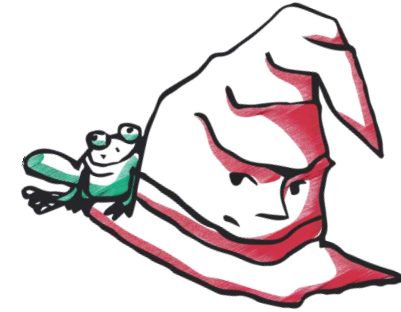
Day 4 – The Holy Grail: Learning Path of the Volunteer - personal development and the support roles

Day 5 – Becoming an ESC Strong House: Benefits and motivation for ESC projects. Impact of volunteering projects. Harvesting and evaluation

As illustrated below, the training is heavily relying on non-formal education methodology, to capture the participants' attention and increase their motivation for learning, as well as serve as an intense example of how activities for volunteers can be set up, to increase their chances for an enjoyable and efficient learning process.

Non-formal education is at the core of youth volunteering projects and has been so in all European educational programs prior to ESC, from Youth for Europe and Youth, all through Youth in Action and Erasmus+. The benefits of non-formal learning experiences have been proven over and over again and we strongly believe all youth workers need to be able to facilitate at least basic non-formal experiences with their volunteers.

Sessions short descriptions



Day 1 – First steps on the path

Session 1

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Introduction	10'	Welcome, Introduction of the location and facilitators
Get to know each other	15'	Name games (depending on group size, a variety of games can be chosen) – before entering any discussion or topic, it is important for participants to be able to relate to one another, who they are and where they come from, to visualize the names, in order for them to address each other later on in the next phases of building the group. <i>Example: Story of my name</i>
	25'	Get to know each other – personally (a wide choice of activities is available to allow participants to find out basic things about each other, start to build trust and curiosity and spur more interest). It is not needed at this point to explore their professional experience, focus on personal elements, to create bonds on personal level and allow for personalities to start to be shown. <i>Example: Speed Dating</i>
Contracting the learning process	15'	Expectations, concerns and contribution – invite participants to think about and express (in different creative ways) what they expect to gain from the training, as well as what their major concerns are and what they personally bring to the training and the group. The results are openly analyzed, discussed and any clarifications needed are made, so as to properly manage expectations and give a clear picture of what is possible and what not. <i>Example: Silent Floor – with 3 main questions on 3 large posters</i> What would you like to take back home with you? Burning questions What you like not to happen?
	10'	Training objectives and agenda – presenting them in detail, discussing with participants and offering clarifications, as well as connecting with the expectations, concerns and contributions expressed before
	15'	Working principles – facilitators may either present their own working principles and agree on them with participants after explaining what they mean and how they are used OR they can invited participants to define their own set of principles that are presented to all partners and agreed upon. Either way, it is important to verbalize how everyone is expecting the others to work during the training, on several different element (cooperation, communication, content, time-management, use of space and resources, attitudes, results, atmosphere, etc)

Session 2

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Introduction to training framework	5'	Short presentation of the project or program supporting the implementation of the training – to offer participants a context and specific details to relate to, when planning the learning experience.
	10'	Introducing the project metaphor – needed for a common reference framework to the terms, names and visuals used, but also to spark interest and motivation within the participants to allow themselves to learn in this playful way.
	10'	Short input on the guiding principles – what we consider quality in ESC and how we plan to address it during the 5 days and beyond – once again, as an activity of setting a proper and clear framework of work, that adjusts expectations and also allows for participants to start planning more concretely their learning objectives.
Teambuilding	65'	<p>An additional name-game, if needed.</p> <p>Teambuilding – exercise 1 – a dynamic activity meant to involve the entire group and allow for cooperation to start, for the different personalities and roles in the team to be demonstrated and for group cohesion to build.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Mission Impossible adapted to the project metaphor - The entire group was challenged to work together and complete 15 specific tasks in a limited time - 20 minutes. Participants were also given 15 minutes for preparation and to complete a work strategy. At the end, participants presented all their outcomes to the facilitators, who validated complete tasks and gave points, celebrating success.</p>

Session 3

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Teambuilding	60'	<p>Teambuilding – exercise 2 – an activity requiring more cooperation, conflict and frustration management and a more complex strategy, to deepen the team-feeling partially developed in previous session and to allow for more interaction in the newly formed group and for new roles and tendencies to be shown.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The River of Dragons game - participants receive a number of 'magic carpets' to help them cross over an imagined river. As long as one of the participants touched a 'magic carpet', it supported them on the surface of the 'river' and its dragons. If a 'magic carpet' was untouched for even a second, shrewd dragons could steal it, and the group was left with fewer 'magic carpets'. If one of the participants walked outside the 'magic carpet', he was caught by the dragons and brought back to the shore and had to cross the river again. The purpose was for all participants to cross the river safely.</p>
	30'	When the experience was completed, facilitators started a debriefing process of both teambuilding activities, to allow participants to express feelings and emotions they experienced, but also for conclusions to be drawn.

Session 4

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Networking	65'	<p>Present each other's organizations and main achievements or important aspects – this allows participants to connect the person they have met and started to know, with the organization they represent and their professional role in the training, which will be very needed in the next days when they start to debate the content elements.</p> <p>The presentation can be done in a variety of ways and we encourage you to be creative about it, to avoid dry, monotonous presentations where one person speaks and all others listen.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Organizations MarketPlace</p> <p>After setting up the space and preparing any materials or key information to be shared, there was a starting round opening the Marketplace and each organization showed and spoke shortly about their secret special ingredient (which they brought from before, being informed in the Info Pack) This was meant as a teaser about each organization.</p> <p>Then rounds were set up in each corner of the market place and in turn participants were invited to visit one corner and find out about the organizations there – what they do (shortly), what are they most proud of, who are the people in the organization that have come to the training – a surface NGO introduction, exchanging ideas, taking some leaflets or asking questions.</p>
Reflection	25'	<p>Reflection process</p> <p>This is an ongoing feature of the training, at the end of each day, split between an individual reflection process and a group reflection. While the individual reflection is following the personal learning process of each participants (following a guideline question, to which everyone answers privately, in writing – which is related to competences of the Youthpass certificate), the group reflection is done in groups that remain the same all throughout the training and follow certain guidelines. Participants are asked to discuss in their small groups, inviting all members to express opinions and to then summarize all feedback on papers or drawings they give back to trainers, so they can incorporate this input into the next days' sessions.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Elements we invited our reflection groups to analyse: The flow of the day / The activities/methods / The session content / Suggestions (these elements were kept in all reflection groups as the purpose of the trainings was also to pilot and test the training design, but they can be adapted to the context)</p>

Day 2 – Drawing the Realm map

Session 1

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Intro	10'	Intro to the day – present agenda, short energizer, catching attention of the group and starting with a common energy
Organizational Development	80'	<p>Organizations Blueprint – an activity to explore in further detail the way the present organizations are structured and function and what are premises for implementing volunteering projects within them.</p> <p>Each organization creates their own blueprint – describing through a drawing how their organization functions – in what rooms (the central room, a library for inspiration, a workshop, a large terrace), explaining what they have in the present (organizational structure, workload of programs, where does ESC fit in the already existing structure). It is specified that participants are not to represent the floor plan of their organization's office, but a virtual structure of its departments. The living room may represent the training area or the info point. It might also represent a common meeting area for the local community. The kitchen can enact the place where they create their projects or put together visual materials. The stairs can be their organization's vision and mission or the connection with larger organizations. The attic may suggest future plans. Any other rooms of the house were meant to be assigned with a meaning as they can offer new ideas of representing the organisation.</p> <p>Afterwards, participants from different organizations get together in the same topic groups from the evening before (cultural, social/kids, inclusion, etc) and share their blueprints, getting to know each other better and find similarities.</p> <p>If there is enough time, they can also discuss a potential project idea they want to work on in the next days, starting from what they normally do with European volunteers, or a common need they identify and motivates them.</p>



Session 2

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
ESC specifics	90'	<p>ESC Realm – what is this land? We have met the Strong Houses. But where are they based and functioning? In the EVS Realm. What is this? How does it work? Who else is living here?</p> <p>Presentation on ESC Specifics – program aims, structures, core values, key actors, main elements needed to be known, vocabulary – it is crucial to have an activity to establish a common reference framework for the participants who may have different levels of knowledge and understanding of the program before they come to the training.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> ESC Vingo - a version of the well-known Bingo game, but with a shift on volunteering and ESC projects. Participants were divided into 3 teams. Taking turns, each team had the opportunity to choose a number between 1 and 32. Numbers were actually questions that related to ESC and volunteering. In the first stage of the game, all teams had to answer their own questions (numbers) extracted. In case that a team was unable to offer the answer, the opportunity to give an answer was given to the next team, and so on. Points were given for correct answers and everyone had the chance to answer the questions. The facilitators helped with formulating the complete and correct answers, when needed.</p>



Session 3

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Needs analysis	90'	<p>It's all about the needs.</p> <p>So we are the strong houses and this is our Realm. We know our playground. What comes next? Let's take a deeper look! Who do we work for? Our target groups, our communities – what are their needs? Once we list these, we can start to explore which needs we can address, us as organizations. We must analyze our own organizational capacity and this helps us SELECT the community needs we can address in volunteering projects.</p> <p>The aim of the session is to reach an understanding of the need for an equidistant approach to the community needs, volunteer needs and organization needs taken into account in ESC projects. The method chosen needs to allow for discussions between participants and facilitated inputs, to ensure a deeper analysis and the needed conclusions.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Debate – The Aquarium/Fish Bowl - participants were divided into 3 equal groups and discussed the needs of one of these categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">ESC volunteers needs – international volunteers on a long-term project in the organizationCommunity needs – members of the community council, members of the local community, housewives, citizens, etc.Organization needs – local NGO working with young people <p>Sets of needs were gathered in small groups and arguments were built to support them. The debate started by presenting the rules of the activity. A moderator from among the participants was chosen to guide the discussion in the sense of summarizing, stimulating ideas and maintaining equal time for group presentations. Participants began to discuss, according to the rules, the different needs and approaches for each category. Even if some of the discussions were more intense, towards the end of the exercise a consensus was reached. When arguing their case, each team presented the needs of the groups they were representing, which they had previously agreed upon in small group preparation phase.</p>

Session 4

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Organizational capacity	45'	<p>Debriefing experiential learning activity – this is a key element of any non-formal education activity that places participants in an experience and it is needed to allow for the learning to take place.</p> <p>Upon completion of the arguments within the Aquarium Debate, after de-roling, a debriefing process was facilitated, to allow participants to take out emotions felt during the activity and also to highlight the key aspects of the discussion, the importance of a professional approach in each category and the need to combine and take into account all 3 types of needs, but always considering the specific organizational capacity and the need to adjust the entire project structure on that, to ensure a qualitative project.</p>
Reflection	45'	Individual and group reflection process (as described above on Day 1)

Day 3 – Ready for the journey



Session 1

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Intro	10'	Intro to the day – present agenda, short energizer, catching attention of the group and starting with a common energy
ESC projects flow	80'	<p>The project path - what are the tasks of all the actors involved in ESC in all the phases of an ESC project – this is an exploratory phase of the main project management elements to be taken into account when implementing a project from the very beginning of the project idea towards the closure of a finalized project. It is needed for participants to have a space where they can bring their own knowledge and previous experience into the group, serve as resource people but also learn from each other. Facilitators then just fill in the gaps of information or correct any elements that may be erroneous.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Milestones on the path - Participants were split into 3 balanced groups reflecting their experience with volunteering programs (beginner, intermediate, advanced). Each group received a pre-drawn path on which they had to chronologically place the tasks of the HO - hosting organization in an EVS project, also thinking about what needs to be done in between the provided milestones:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Idea Application Deadline Approval of project Start of the Project Arrival of Volunteers (Beginning of the Activity) Departure of the volunteers (Ending of the Activity) Final report Closing the project <p>The working groups discussed all small tasks to populate the path, by thinking what needs to be done.</p>

Session 2

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
ESC projects management	90'	<p>The project path - a common view – after the group work, all participants come back in a plenary and discuss in the larger group, comparing results, debating the differences and why they appeared, connecting to their national or organizational contexts, enriching the learning process. On a larger path flipchart paper the facilitators merge all tasks and build together with all the groups a common path that takes into account chronologically all the tasks needed to be taken into consideration.</p> <p>Then a detailed discussion can follow, based on questions coming from the participants and input and clarification from the trainers. The initial group discussions may raise doubts or concerns in the minds of participants, depending on how much they interacted beforehand with the concrete project realities and daily implementation challenges. They may ask about a variety of topics, such as: selection issues, agreements, the interactions with the mentor, practical arrangements regarding residence permits or travel, linguistic support, volunteer management, training cycle for the volunteers, financial management of the projects, relationship with the NA, reporting tools, recognition of learning through Youthpass.</p> <p>The exercise is very intense and opens up many threads of discussion and analysis, so a second session is very much needed for clarifications and to allow people to explore more and understand in depth how ESC work in practice, to get all kinds of practical topics in place and share thoughts.</p>

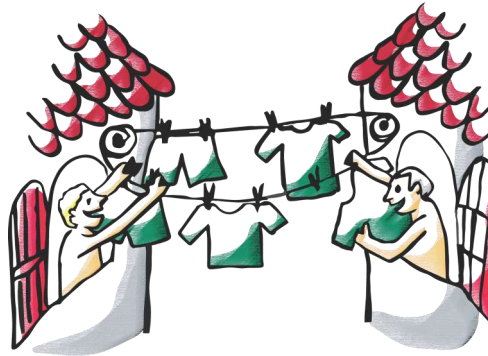
Session 3+4

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Exploring local community	180'	<p>Discovering elements of the training within the local community where it is hosted – all these international learning mobilities are placed within local communities where participants could get a taste of local interactions, meeting the local people, understanding their reality and cultural aspects and how these influence their lifestyle and potentially their involvement in such projects, either as actors or as beneficiaries. It is very important to allow participants a chance to get out of the training room or venue and explore hands-on the external reality, having a learning task that places them in a position of interacting, asking questions, digging into the local needs, opportunities and difficulties and then applying all their recent discoveries and learning results and reflecting on how they can be transferred in concrete project activities either in the hosting country or in their home community. Moreover, during this self-exploration phase, participants unwind, enjoy the learning surroundings and communicate more meaningfully with their colleagues, strengthening their bonds.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Local crafts in the Realm – since our training location was a remote picturesque mansion in the green hills of a very traditional village in northern Romania, with a rich intercultural background and long-lasting craftsmanship, we set up a possibility for participants to participate in one or more of 5 different practical workshops, where they could learn a concrete craft: Grass Cutting, Wood Carving, Basket Weaving, Sowing, Donut Baking. The activity had a clear learning objective, to allow participants to go through an experiential learning experience, but this was not disclosed to them until the next day, when the process was analyzed from a meta-level.</p>

Day 4 – The Holy Grail

Session 1

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Intro	10'	Intro to the day – present agenda, short energizer, catching attention of the group and starting with a common energy
Intermediary Evaluation	30'	<p>Intermediary group evaluation process – in longer term training activities, the daily evaluation is not enough and so an intermediary evaluation can be organized, to allow participants to give feedback to the organizers and for those to make any needed adjustments for a qualitative learning process. The methods can vary, but it is important to allow participants to express their views and later on to take into account the suggestions that can be implemented.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Numeric scales – participants were asked to evaluate each of 6 criteria, reflecting their view on the first 3 training days, by positioning themselves on stairs associated with marks from 1 to 10, where 1 meant not at all satisfied and 10 – extremely satisfied. The criteria that was assessed was: Food, Accommodation, Atmosphere, Group Dynamics, Training process & the Trainers, Fulfillment of your expectations so far, Free time.</p> <p>After each criteria was announced, participants positioned themselves on a stair, facilitators counted the people on each stair, to be able to calculate the average evaluation and then participants were invited to explain their choices and add comments.</p>
Challenges in ESC projects	50'	<p>The dragons on our paths – challenges in ESC – it is very relevant for participants to work with concrete cases based on real-project experiences and situations where the Masters of the Learning Path (in this case, the project coordinators) were faced with difficult choices and decisions or had to mediate tense situations among volunteers and/or other stakeholders.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Role plays – we selected 5 case studies, based on real problems occurring in EVS and split the group in 5 in small teams, with mixed participants (country and gender), who received a description of their case, had 30 minutes to prepare the case, discussing it in their group, suggesting solutions and a different way of doing things to avoid the difficult situations or to resolve them. They also had to prepare a 5 min role play/drama scene, presenting their case study and the solution they had come up with. Each group took turns to perform their role play</p>



Session 2

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Challenges in ESC projects	70'	<p>Discussion on challenges and ways of tackling them – following the creative part of the activity, with the role plays, it is important to discuss in detail the situations presented, how participants understood them, what were the real issues and the causes of these behaviours and ways of preventing or dealing with them in ESC projects.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Role plays debriefing and continued discussion – after each group performed their mini-theatre scene, discussions in the plenary followed, so the other groups can offer their views on the situation and resembling it to their own projects and experiences with hosting volunteers, as well as offering sometimes alternative approaches. Participants asked the facilitators about other difficult or strenuous situations they faced when hosting European volunteers and what else can become challenging, from a genuine need of preparing for the future projects they will be implementing.</p>
Community of ESC practitioners	20'	<p>Building up a community – if you plan to continue to communicate and cooperate with the participants you are training, and intending to set up a professional community with them, after the training is concluded - it is important to plan for specific activities that start to build the community sense. It can be playful, fun activities or serious discussions and setting collaboration procedures.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Masters' TShirts - Having finalized the complex discussions of the challenges, we decided to create a symbolic graduation ceremony of the participants – who finally became Masters of the Learning Path, following the project metaphor, being ready and even able to not only design quality European volunteering projects, but also to face challenging moments, respecting the main principles and core values the program stands for. Therefore, we gave all participants T-shirts bearing the visual image of the project and we set up a short photo session, as a first step in establishing a sense of belongingness to the community of Masters.</p>

Session 3

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Good practice exchange	90'	<p>Meeting local successful EVS/ESC organizations – for a variety of experiences and perspectives on the training topics, it is useful to invite experts, local practitioners and/or representatives of local organizations who are involved in the program and can share concrete examples and stories of working with volunteers. This will make the learning process more applicable and participants can ask questions and hear specific examples of activities and situations.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Meet the local Masters – we invited the Team4Youth Association, based in Baia Mare, Romania, who sent a coordinator and an EVS volunteers currently hosted, to share with our participants EVS stories and their experience in managing EVS projects. They were also asked to touch on our other topics – how they assess needs of community and volunteers (they also work in the rural areas, have many projects, deal with large numbers of volunteers), but also project management procedures and ways in which they succeed to deal with very different volunteers and all their different expectations.</p> <p>At the same time, the volunteer from Lithuania who was currently in her EVS project could present a personal view on how she was selected and involved in the project, what are her main activities and what benefits she takes out of the entire experience. She was also invited to share advice for beginner organizations, what to think about when creating a volunteering project.</p>

Session 4

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
ESC Project management	60'	<p>Project management burning questions – based on the expressed needs of participants to further the questions, you can continue to offer answers, in an interactive and participatory manner.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> We set up a forum where we took the remaining unanswered questions started during the Vingo game on day 2/session 2, as well as other Burning Questions collected on a large board all throughout the training.</p> <p>We then followed with the Hot chair activity – where facilitators and the guest project manager from Baia Mare Team4Youth Association were sitting in front of the group on chairs, being available to answer any project management questions participants still had – proving their status of Masters of the Learning Path and sharing their valuable experience in flash sessions of questions and answers.</p>
Reflection	30'	Individual and group reflection process (as described above on Day 1) – referring to days 3 and 4 together

Day 5 – Becoming an ESC Strong House

Session 1

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Intro	10'	Intro to the day – present agenda, short energizer, catching attention of the group and starting with a common energy
ESC Learning Process	55'	<p>The Learning Process in a volunteering project – starting from an exploration of the individual learning process participants went through during the training, you can extrapolate towards the similar experience volunteers go through during their volunteering placement. It is important to pinpoint the main characteristics of the learning process and the aspects to consider as project coordinators when supporting this learning process with its ups and downs, all the way towards the final recognition of learning achievements, throughout the Youthpass certificate.</p> <p><i>Example: Aerostato Method (described in detail in the Mentors Treasure Box)</i></p> <p>We started to lay on the floor cards with quotes about learning (Learning Out of the Box cards created by SALTO/Youthpass) and invited participants to choose one they like or relate to more and explain why they chose it, what they connect to it in terms of learning process. A plenary discussion was generated, with all participants wanting to share their view on learning, by linking to the chosen quote cards.</p> <p>We then introduced a visual metaphor of “Aerostato” – The Hot Air Balloon, which we linked to the individual learning process. We gave different meanings to the different elements of the balloon.</p> <p>Hot air – what supports my learning? How do I learn best?</p> <p>Basket - what I already carry and know?</p> <p>Bags/Weights - what stops my learning?</p> <p>Participants were invited to design and fill in their own Aerostato (in their language), reflecting on their own learning style and process and then to share their findings with another person.</p> <p>Facilitators then made a reference to the personal reflection questions given at the end of each working day and they linked them with the Youthpass and the relevant Key competences, explaining a very practical manner of understanding and de-codifying the heavy concept of the key competences.</p> <p>The activity followed with an open group discussion on ways to transform an experience into a learning experience, referring back to the local community exploring activity in day 3/sessions 3 & 4, but also to the concrete experiences of participants and their volunteers, how they gradually started the learning journey and what were the main ups and downs on these paths.</p>

Tips and tricks	25'	<p>What makes us worthy of the magical Realm? – exploring the key elements needed to become Strong Houses – i.e. prepared organizations to design and implement quality volunteering projects, following the project approach and core principles.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Tips and trick to become a Strong House – we have been listing all throughout the training on a flipchart paper different practical tips and things to be paying attention to in preparing to host ESC volunteers (as most organizations present were beginners in such projects). At this point we returned to this collection and we added to it other ideas on the spot, creating a recap of main issues discussed during the previous 4 days, but also a critical look into what do each of the present organizations still need to be real Strong House – ready, able and committed to welcome European volunteers.</p>
-----------------	-----	--

Session 2

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Impact of ESC projects	60'	<p>The waves we make – a discussion on impact – any such project is not complete without a deep and honest analysis of the impact it plans to generate and the actual impact it creates on several different stakeholders: the beneficiaries and the local community, the volunteers, the partner organizations in the project as well as the staff.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Facilitated discussion – we open a free discussion in the plenary, with all participants, debating on the potential and actual impact and ways to maximize it, taking notes of the main ideas and inviting all participants to contribute.</p>
Motivation for ESC projects	30'	<p>Benefits of ESC projects and the motivation to get involved in them – it is a moment of collecting all the thoughts, impressions, discoveries, learning achievements and unanswered questions or doubts and processing them towards an honest evaluation of the benefits such projects bring and the personal and organizational motivation participants can feel in getting involved in ESC projects, with the knowledge, skills and attitudes developed during the training.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Creative reflection – we introduced some graphic visual tools and games that participants were invited to use to capture their insights into the benefits of ESC projects, from a personal perspective and then to share their findings and creative works in small groups or peer trios. The tools we offered were: the Learning out of the Box cards, Getting acquainted cards (with photos and questions), Personal Development Cards (with skills), Story cubes.</p>

Session 3

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Next steps	30'	<p>What happens when we go home? – the next steps in the project – depending on the setting of the training, if it is done within a larger project or not, this can be a moment to present further steps and expectations or commitments needed following the training, empowering participants to take action and implement what they have learned, to put it in practice and make a change in the way they work.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Next Steps Poster – we presented a detailed poster of the next phases of the project, what activities will follow, what involvement we expect and ask of the participants and their organizations, in terms of testing the intellectual outputs produced in the project, implementing the tools and learning outcomes in real EVS/ESC projects, applying new projects for the coming Erasmus+/ESC deadlines.</p>
	30'	<p>Setting up a community of EVS Masters – consolidating the feeling of belongingness to a professional community that can offer support, guidance, resources and peer learning and exchanges, which are usually very appreciated in such international contexts.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Masters of the EVS Realm – we announced the group they are the first ones in this community, which will have a FB group and a space to continue communicating and supporting each other, as well as starting new cooperations and projects together, asking each other for advice or resources and generally being there for one another. We asked them what else they need as support for their work from us as a project team, what other people we should/could invite in the community and what support features it should have.</p>
Harvesting	30'	<p>Collecting feedback and first thoughts in the entire learning experience – a first layer of evaluation, focusing on some of the learning achievements</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Silent floor – we took down from the walls the 3 posters we started with in the first day – regarding expectations, concerns and contributions, as well as principles of working. We invited participants to go back to all the elements written on them, and circle the ones that in fact took place, either positive or negative. During the silent floor, all other participants could walk around and see the encircled elements of colleagues and their comments, joining in a silent evaluation and reflection process.</p>



Session 4

Topic	Duration	Description (step by step process for the facilitator, including debriefing question proposals)
Evaluation	60'	<p>Learning process evaluation – usually following a simpler evaluation method comes a more detailed one, which allows all participants to openly express their feelings and achievements at the end of the training, but also to point out things that could be improved or elements that were not so successful. Whatever method is used, it is important to create a trustful and comfortable atmosphere, where participants are willing to share honest feedback and also to express emotions concerning the other participants and the general learning environment.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Dixit cards – the cards with very vivid and imaginative drawings are used to inspire participants in a training to talk about their experience. They are all invited to choose 1 card expressing how they came to the training and a second card reflecting how they are now, 5 days later. Then in turns, everyone explains the chosen cards, the symbols they reacted to and how they link to their learning experience.</p>
Closing	30'	<p>Closing the group – in the end of every such intense training experience, the closure process is very important, alongside the celebration of the achievements together.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Realm Celebrations – we gathered the group and after a short emotional speech as a testimony to the great joy we experienced in uncovering the learning path together, we offered a surprise gift to everyone, from a magic box – a symbolic key to the EVS Realm to all the Masters having taken part in the training, now rules of ESC Strong Houses. We then finalized the ceremony by offering the set of Youthpass certificates testifying their participation, which they picked up randomly and offered one another with kind words and positive feedback. It was all closed with a group hug, several group photos and a lot of good energy.</p>

Erasmus+ Programme Guide - http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/files/resources/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf

ESC Programme Guide - <https://ec.europa.eu/youth/sites/youth/files/library/documents/2018-european-solidarity-corps-guide.pdf>



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

