

Volunteer on Exchange Actions Toolkit

Guidelines for Bridging Exchange
Students and Local Communities

ECEM Enriching Communities
Through Engaged Mobilities



This Toolkit was developed in the framework of the Erasmus + Key Action 2 Cooperation Partnership project 'Enriching Communities through Engaged Mobilities' (ECEM) - 101090971

Brussels, November 2024 © ECEM Consortium. All rights reserved.
Published by: Erasmus Student Network AISBL

Authors:

Giuliana Kotkiewicz, Simone Lepore, Neli Kalinova-Schmieder

Editor:

Erasmus Student Network AISBL

Contact:

<https://www.ecem-project.org/>

Design:

Maria Uritu

This publication is the outcome of in-depth consultations undertaken by the ECEM consortium:

Erasmus Student Network AISBL
CitizensLab
Academic Cooperation Association
Institute for the Development in Education
SGroup Universities in Europe

Photos:

The images used are copyright-free under Canva's licensing agreements. Canva retains ownership of these images, and the rights are subject to Canva's licensing terms.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Table of contents

Introduction to the ECEM project and the Toolkit	4
Community Engagement during Mobility	5
Define the activity Framework	5
The SMART Model	8
Reflection Activity	9
Ladder of Participation	10
Logistical Aspects	11
Role definitions	12
Key Indicators	16
Partner Up	18
Engaging International Students	21
Learning outcomes	22
Communication	24
Pre-activity	24
During the activity	24
After the activity	25
Preparation Phase	26
Budget	26
Human Resources	26
Material	27
Activity Outlines	28
Implementation	29
Report and Evaluation	31
Debriefing	31
Report your activity	33
Inspiration for Activities	34
Volunteering at Community Kitchen	34
Community Cleaning	34
Volunteering With Homeless	35
References	36

Introduction to the ECEM project and the Toolkit

The [Enriching Communities through Engaged Mobilities \(ECEM\)](#) is an Erasmus+ project which strives to design measures to increase students' participation in civic engagement initiatives by building connections with Higher Education Institutions and Civil Society Organisations.

Therefore, the aim of the ECEM project is to:

- Increase the civic engagement component of mobilities in the field of internationalisation of Higher Education by making interaction with local communities the norm in mobilities.
- Ensure recognition of learning outcomes for participants that take part in civic engagement initiatives.
- Improve the collaboration frameworks between Higher Education Institutions and other societal actors to make mobilities contribute to societal change and common European values.

To advance the project's aims, this Toolkit has been prepared. It presents practical guidelines for organising impactful volunteer activities for students during their exchange. The Toolkit aims to support student representatives and activity organisers when designing community-engaged activities for international students, bridging the gap between academia and society through internationalisation.

Drawing from observed practice and experience within the Erasmus Student Network, the suggested methodology has been developed. Nonetheless, these methods and ideas should not be taken as strict instructions, but rather as examples to be used for guidance and inspiration for local student associations who wish to organise volunteering activities for international students, and who can tailor these methods to better fit their specific contexts.

Community Engagement during Mobility

One of the biggest motivations for students to participate in learning mobility is to get engaged with the local community, learn a new language and expand their network. However, when mobility actually takes place, students tend to stay in their international bubble and contact with the locals is limited, as they usually make more international than local friends. Furthermore, only a small number of students take part in volunteering activities during exchange (10%). All these factors contribute to feelings of isolation and social exclusion (23% of students) and reduced sense of belonging to the local community (28%).¹ This data clearly indicates that community engagement needs to be facilitated.

Community engagement in the context of higher education can be defined broadly as interactions between university staff, students, administration, and external communities, characterised by mutual benefit, where societal needs are addressed through various projects and collaboration activities. (Farnell, 2020)

Community engagement does not only contribute to the development of a personal sense of belonging to the local community, but it also enables students to learn through experience. Through community-engaged activities international students gain knowledge and a deeper level of understanding of the local community and the challenges it goes through. Furthermore, students have the opportunity to become agents of change, by taking part in activities or initiatives that address those challenges and create a positive change that could improve the situation of the community. Often this happens through volunteering activities.

In this toolkit student representatives and activity organisers will find detailed guidance and practical advice on how to set up and facilitate impactful volunteering activities for exchange students.

¹ ESNsurvey XV Preliminary Report, 2023

Define the activity Framework

Volunteering activities during student mobility provide a unique opportunity for young people to contribute to their host communities while gaining valuable intercultural experiences. In this context, student-led organisations are essential for promoting civic engagement among mobile students and encouraging their active participation in the community. However, a clear and structured framework is necessary to ensure these activities are impactful, sustainable, and aligned with the needs of local communities.

This chapter will guide local organisers and their volunteers through the process of defining an activity framework. By establishing clear objectives, goals, timelines, and outcomes, this framework will help ensure that volunteer efforts are both efficient and meaningful. It will also support organisers in adapting their activities to the specific cultural, social, and logistical contexts of their host communities.

Although this can be quite a lot, we want to ensure that you have the tools to define your framework. When starting to design your activity, have in mind to:

- **Set clear and realistic objectives for the activity:** This looks like assigning the goals that you expect to achieve through this activity, such as Social Engagement, Intercultural Awareness, or a positive attitude towards multicultural societies.
- **Plan timelines and key milestones:** This could look like planning a clear schedule with deadlines for important practical and logistical tasks to keep the activity on track and make sure you are able to accomplish these tasks. Said tasks could include the planning of the activity, contacting partners and participants, communicating the activity, the event itself and a post-event phase.
- **Ensure that the activity addresses the needs of the community and creates a lasting impact:** To do this, you must have an understanding of your community and stakeholders², what are their most pressing needs and what could be your role in helping them. This is something that you must do in all aspects of the activity and it will always be ongoing. Ask the community and your peers how you can help them to begin this process. It is possible that their needs are very large, in this case, make sure you are addressing the most pressing ones by prioritising the issues that have the greatest immediate impact and aligning your resources accordingly.

² Any person or groups who are impacted by a project, initiative, policy or organisation.

- **Establish metrics to assess the success and sustainability of the activity:**
This means to establish indicators that measure the immediate and long-term impact of the activity through KPIs³ (Key Performance Indicators). These could look like participant satisfaction, community feedback, number of beneficiaries or improvement in the overall needs of stakeholders. For the sustainability of the activity, you can establish metrics to track if this activity fostered continued engagement or if it set the stage for future initiatives.
- **Define the roles and responsibilities of all participants:** By doing this you can assign tasks and expectations to all the participants in an activity, ensuring that everyone understands their goals in the activity and ensure smooth collaboration between all.

³ They are targets that help you measure progress towards your objectives.

The SMART Model

One of the most useful models to set clear, actionable and measurable goals is the SMART Model, which offers a practical framework to guide you. The model stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART), it can help you create well-defined goals aligned with your mission.

- **Specific** - Here you should make sure that your goals are clear and specific. You can do so by answering the following questions and clearing any ambiguity: What do you want to achieve? Who is involved? Where will it take place? Why is this goal important?
- **Measurable** - To be able to track progress and determine the success of your goals, they must be measurable, this could be done by setting metrics such as “We will ensure through feedback that at least 80% of participants feel satisfied with the activity”.
- **Achievable** - An important part of setting goals is to make sure that you can actually achieve them, consider the resources you have available and the constraints you might face, and ask yourself if the goals you set are feasible and what could affect your ability to achieve them.
- **Relevant** - Your goals should align with your organisation’s, the participants’ and the local community’s objectives, mission and values. Name the values and align them with the goals you are setting to make sure it is relevant for all.
- **Time-bound** - Every goal you set should have a timeline, a starting and ending date that you track, this will help you define priorities and monitor progress.

Reflection Activity

To guide you through the process of defining your framework, there is a simple activity that can help you define values and objectives throughout your work. The activity consists of answering the following questions:

- What do you want International Students to **know**?
 - What key information or skills do you want International Students to obtain about the local community in your city?
- What do you want International Students to **feel**?
 - What feelings do you want International Students to experience during and after their mobility period?
- What do you want International Students to **do**?
 - What specific actions do you want International Students to take during and after their mobility period?

Here is an example of this reflection activity that could help you frame your work:

What do you want International Students to...

Know

- Cultural Background
- Regional Geography
- Do and dont's
- History
- Unique Places

Do

- Go out in the city
- Try new food
- Learn the language
- Make new friends
- Discover the country
- Engage with the community and volunteer

Feel

- Safe
- Welcomed
- Excited
- Free
- Vibes

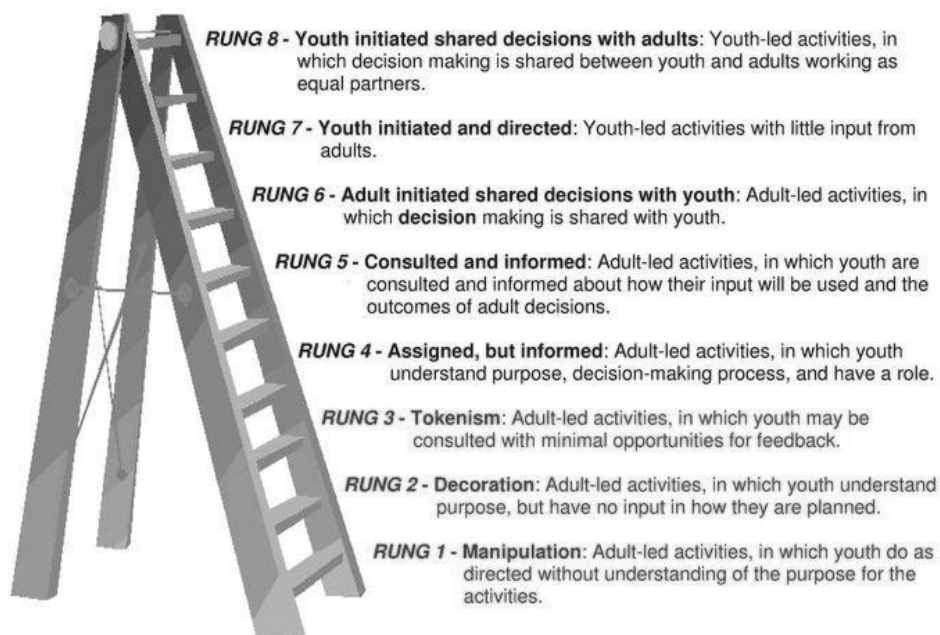
Ladder of Participation

An important concept to have in consideration when creating youth-engaged activities is Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation (Hart, 1992). By following his concept you can create activities that resonate and benefit all participants. When all parties are involved in the process of creating activities, you have a collaboration that promotes a sense of belonging, breaks down communication barriers, and creates environments where everyone feels empowered to contribute to the activity.

This concept outlines different levels of youth engagement, from tokenism to full collaboration and youth empowerment. At the lower level, young people may be informed or consulted, but their input has little influence on the decision-making process of activities, and as you move up the ladder, their participation increases, leading up to share decision making and youth involvement. If you strive for higher levels of participation you will make young people feel valued and have a meaningful impact in your community and activities, which will lead to more positive outcomes.

Implementing the concepts of the Ladder of Participation in your activities will encourage International Students to be active contributors of the local communities and their home communities as well. Involving them will develop their leadership skills and foster a deeper connection with the local community.

ROGER HART'S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, as cited in www.freechild.org/ladder.htm

Logistical Aspects

In regards to the practical and logistical aspects of these activities, it is a matter of importance to discuss and align expectations at the beginning of the planning process to ensure that you avoid misunderstandings, allocate resources effectively, and set achievable goals for all participants. For this step, you can reflect on the following topics:

- **Dates:** What are the possible and preferable dates for this activity to happen? Is it doable for all stakeholders? Are there conflicts expected on these dates? Were all participants informed of the dates and times for this activity?
- **Locations:** Where could the activity take place? What are the transportation means that you must take to reach the location? Is this location accessible for people with disabilities and other needs? Such as Noise, Crowds and Terrain.
- **Space:** What should be available in order for this activity to take place? Is there a room prerequisite? What equipment will be needed? What needs to be done before arriving at the location?
- **Target Audience:** How will the content be adjusted to the target audience? What are the needs and expectations of the target audience? How to engage the target audience?
- **Duration:** How long will each step of this activity take? How will you proceed in case you must cut the activity short? Are all participants informed about the time slots allocated to them? Will there be a mockup of the activity to guarantee that everyone is aware of the time they must take?
- **Regulations:** Are there any that are attached to this activity? In regards to the location or participants? Are all participants aware of the rules? Have the participants agreed to follow the rules?
- **Dynamics:** How should the dynamics of the participants be to reach the maximum results of the activity? Are all participants aware of the atmosphere that should be in place?

Role definitions

It's very important for all involved participants in the activity to have assigned roles and expectations. Having that in mind will help all to contribute smoothly to the activity. It is also important to discuss with stakeholders how involved they wish to be. There are many role definitions that you can define for your internal team, however, we would not recommend having more than five people on your team. Here you can find a few role definition examples from all stakeholders:

Head of the Team	
This is the person who will be in charge of the overall coordination of the planning of the activity, collaboration with stakeholders and managing practical and logistical needs.	
Required Skills and Competencies	Expected Learning Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural sensitivity Facilitation skills Communication skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptability Evaluation and reporting skills Leadership

Activity Coordinator	
This is a person within your local organisation, who will have an active role, ideally, the facilitator of the activity. They will be also in charge of the coordination of the volunteers and the International students.	
Required Skills and Competencies	Expected Learning Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural sensitivity Facilitation skills Adaptability Communication skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership Problem-Solving Networking and Relationship Building

Communications Coordinator	
<p>This role is responsible for managing the communication aspect of the activity. This person is responsible for the activity outreach and dissemination, keeping all parties informed and ensuring that the message of the activity is clear and consistent.</p>	
Required Skills and Competencies	Expected Learning Outcomes
<p>Strategic Communication skills Coordination skills</p>	<p>Multicultural Communication Brand Management Stakeholder Engagement</p>

Budget Coordinator	
<p>This role is responsible for overseeing the financial aspects of the activity in your organisation. They should manage the budget and the resources making sure all expenses are tracked and resources are well allocated.</p>	
Required Skills and Competencies	Expected Learning Outcomes
<p>Financial management skills Attention to detail Strategic decision-making</p>	<p>Resource Management Cost-Effective Decision-Making</p>

Partner Contact Point
<p>This is a person from the partner organisation who can have a passive or active role. However, it is important to involve them in the planning of the activity. This person is the liaison between your local organisation and the audience, and helps you understand the needs of the local community.</p>
Expected Learning Outcomes
<p>Cultural sensitivity Cooperation Internalisation Competencies Open-mindedness</p>

The International Student

This role is an active part of the educational experience, bringing diverse perspectives and cultural insights to the learning environment and it can also be active in the planning of the activity, by providing ideas and feedback to the team.

It is essential for the Activity Coordinator to ensure that the International Students are encouraged to be proactive and that they have the space to reflect on their experiences and integrate learning by experience into their mobility.

Expected Learning Outcomes

- Cross-cultural learning
- Hands-on experience
- Interpersonal Skills
- Civic and Cultural Awareness
- Global and Societal Awareness
- Networking and career opportunities
- Personal growth
- Open-mindedness

The Audience/Target Group

This group has an active role in the learning process, but is passive in the planning, and should engage fully in the session. Normally, the audience corresponds to members of the local community.

Expected Learning Outcomes

- Cross-cultural learning
- Enhanced educational opportunities
- Global Citizenship
- Open-mindedness



A few things the **organising team** should consider are to introduce the aim and topic of the activity, to be a liaison between the international students and the audience, communicate things more effectively to the audience (in case it's needed) and to help in case of difficulties.

For that purpose, **organising a briefing session** at the beginning when all roles and volunteers are recruited is essential. It is important to make sure all participants are aware of their roles and responsibilities beforehand, that way they are able to understand the expectations of their roles and provide better services. Also consider involving the participants wherever possible, to make sure that everyone contributes and can feel a sense of belonging and responsibility.

Key Indicators

One of the most important steps **to ensure an activity has a lasting impact is to set clear indicators** that keep track of your progress, with standards that help show the success of the events. These metrics should be planned ahead of the activity so that you can ensure its applicability during the whole process.

The first step is to decide on both practical and meaningful indicators that align with the goals of the project. For example, if you are focusing on community outreach and engagement, **consider setting goals around the number of local participants (quantitative KPIs), their satisfaction and feedback (qualitative KPIs)**. This will provide valuable insights into how well the activity meets its objectives and the degree to which it resonates with those involved.

Next, it is helpful to plan using **simple tools to measure these indicators**. For quick feedback, you might use surveys, group discussions, or casual check-ins with volunteers and participants right after the event. For a broader look at the activity's impact, a follow-up assessment, like a short survey or a feedback form, can help show if the activity really met the community's needs and created positive change. **Listening to feedback from volunteers and participants is essential**, as it shows whether the activity tackled key challenges and made a real difference to those involved.

Good indicators also look at **what happens after the event** – whether connections are formed, or if people stay engaged with the cause. **Tracking follow-up interactions**, such as partnerships or additional volunteer interest, can show if the event sparked ongoing community involvement, building a stronger foundation for future efforts.

While it can be tricky to measure the impact of a single activity because each event is just one part of a larger effort, keeping track of these key results can provide valuable insights into how well it is working and help guide future activities. You can check a few examples of KPIs that you can establish for your activity:

Category	Indicators	Description	Measurement method
Immediate results	Participation satisfaction	Assess how well the activity met participants' expectations and created a positive experience.	Feedback forms
	Feedback quality	Gather constructive input from participants for insights on strengths and areas for improvement.	Debriefing sessions
	International Student Engagement	Measure the involvement and satisfaction of international students in both planning and execution.	Self-reflection sessions
Tangible outcomes	Audience reached	Track the number of local students and other community members who participated in the activity.	Attendance records, social media engagement
	Learning impact on audience	Evaluate if the audience gained meaningful insights on international topics.	Post-session quizzes
	Volunteer and role clarity	Confirm that each team member understood and effectively executed their role.	Team debriefs
Long-term impact	Continued international engagement	Measure ongoing involvement from participants in ESN or similar international initiatives.	Follow-up surveys
	Partnership strengthening	Evaluate if partnerships with participating or other organisations were established or enhanced.	Partnership reviews, follow-up interactions
	Skills Development for Participants and Volunteers	Measure if participants and volunteers gained new skills or knowledge from the activity.	Skills self-assessment surveys
Sustainability	Resource Efficiency	Ensure the budget and resources were managed effectively and appropriately allocated.	Financial report
	Foundation for Future Collaboration	Assess if the activity laid groundwork for future events or collaborations.	Partnership discussions

Partner Up

This Toolkit has been elaborated for activities that involve multiple stakeholders, such as International Students and the Local Community (Schools, local organisations, universities, youth organisations or local municipalities), which means that **cooperation is a key aspect** of the activities. This chapter will guide you through many aspects of cooperation that can help you to implement the activity with the utmost impact and sustainability.

To achieve the objectives you set in your framework, you must identify the best partners who will be able to assist you in reaching your goals and target audiences. Here are a few key concepts to have in mind while creating these lasting cooperation ties:

1. **Identify potential partners based on their expertise** and how they align with the goals of your activity, and look for those NGOs and/or institutions whose strengths complement your goals.
2. **Assess mutual benefits**, consider why collaboration with each partner would be beneficial, what contributions could they bring that would maximise success for both parties.
3. **Define the role you wish the partner to play**. Outline if the partner is expected to co-lead the activity, or support dissemination and outreach.
4. **Sign a partnership agreement**. After the definition of the duties and responsibilities of each organisation it is important to write everything down.
5. **Explore how the partner could be involved in the design stage of the activity**. Perhaps, their expertise and insights could improve the effectiveness of the initiative.
6. **Design a communication strategy to approach them**, and be sure to approach them in a way that will keep them engaged and keep their interest.



When starting new cooperation ties, it might be difficult to find organisations that are interested and able to participate in the activity. Some of the first places you can start looking for are connections through other **volunteers**. They might be able to personally get in touch with contacts in the area. You can look for them at **cultural events** and you might find **organisations that organise similar activities**. You can also check online databases of registered organisations in your country.

Another option is to approach your **City Youth Council, Local Education Department and School Groups or Teacher Organisations, your local municipality and local Universities**. Those are all organisations that can help you find contacts in the sector and facilitate connections between universities and civil society organisations.

It is important to be clear, appropriate, approachable and professional when contacting these organisations. Remember to explain what your organisation does, how impactful is your work, why they should cooperate with you and what are the aims of this activity. This approach helps prevent misunderstandings, fosters stronger partnerships, and allows for more effective collaboration in achieving common goals. Being strategic when **relationship-building** will help you maximise the engagement and impact of your activity.



Be aware of the **power and knowledge imbalance**. Some institutions may categorise local organisations, however, all relationships are a two-way street and there is always room for cooperation. Institutions may hold a higher power than local organisations. However, the organisations hold a better knowledge and understanding of the issues and opportunities of International Students, meaning that these power dynamics can be interesting for both sides. Don't feel hesitant to ask for the things you need or feel disadvantaged.

You can use the example below for inspiration for your initial partner communication.

To	Person Person Person
Cc	Person
Bcc	Person
Subject	Collaboration Opportunity: Advancing Civic Engagement in Student Mobility

Dear [Ms./Mr./Mx. Last Name] or [Institution/Partner Name],

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is [Name and Surname], and I am reaching out on behalf of [Your Organization's Name], where I am responsible for organising [Event Name]. Our

initiative aims to strengthen the impact of student mobility on local communities, with a focus on civic engagement.

We would be honoured to collaborate with you in shaping this event, and we believe your involvement would be invaluable, given your expertise on the topic/experience in working with [Target Group]. Together, we can create meaningful opportunities that benefit both students and the broader community.

The event is tentatively scheduled to take place at [Location/Date, if confirmed]. Please let us know if you're interested in exploring ways to work together on this impactful initiative.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out by phone at [Your Phone Number] or via email at [Your Email Address].

Thank you very much for considering this collaboration. We look forward to your response with great anticipation.

Kind regards,

Engaging International Students

This toolkit is designed to help activity organisers plan and implement **volunteering activities for international students during exchange**. The International Students therefore are the main actors in these activities, which are designed specifically to provide them with the opportunity to learn more about the needs and challenges of the local community, and to empower them to become agents of change, by involving them in volunteering that would benefit the local community, and at the same time it would enrich the learning experience of the international students.

If you are not in contact with International Students, **you might need to contact organisations and associations** who are in contact with them, such as the International Relations Office and Erasmus Student Network local sections. This process can start at the beginning of the planning, however, it is important to already have a few things established to promote the activity more effectively, such as date, location and time. Make sure you are **being informative and communicating the activity in an engaging way** for the International Students.

For the community engaged activity to be successful, it needs to bring benefits to all parties involved. Showcase how their participation can have a big impact on the lives of others and that they can get valuable experiences that enhance their own **growth, making their time abroad more meaningful and rewarding**.

Coordinate and communicate with the International Students, showing them **respect and support**. **Co-design** the activity with them to create **an environment that encourages shared responsibility** and better implementation, which ultimately contributes to the **sustainability and success of the activity**.

Making this activity interesting and engaging for International students might pose as a challenge, however, there are few tricks that can help you achieve your goal:

- **Communication Plan:** It is important to plan ahead how you wish to communicate the activity to the International Students to ensure they have all the necessary information. Clear communication helps set expectations, fosters engagement and encourages meaningful participation from the start.
- **Raise awareness:** Communicate well how the activity can impact International Students and the local community, and show how this is an opportunity for meaningful exchange and collaboration. Emphasise that their participation not only contributes to personal growth and intercultural understanding but also helps bridge gaps between different cultures.

- **Create a welcoming environment:** By creating a welcoming environment you can foster cooperation and make sure International Students are comfortable to participate in the activity. Remember to be inclusive and to promote cultural sensitivity and mutual respect.
- **Speak their language:** Of course, you can take this literally, but in this case, speaking their language means using a comprehensive speech personalised for the target audience. Make sure all your communication can speak to International students, try to put yourself in their shoes and listen to what they find engaging.

Let's keep in mind that one of the core priorities of the Erasmus+ programme is to champion inclusion and diversity. As we plan this event, let's make accessibility our mission by breaking down all kinds of barriers to ensure everyone can be part of this experience. Connecting with students who have fewer opportunities may require extra effort, but we have the power to overcome these challenges and create inspiring connections that truly make a difference. Let's make this event a space where everyone feels welcome and empowered!

Learning outcomes

Exchange students become active participants in their host communities by connecting with peers, engaging in local activities, and building meaningful relationships. This involvement enables them to reflect on and understand cultural differences, encouraging a broader worldview that values diverse perspectives and fosters a sense of civic responsibility.

However, immersion in a new culture alone may not fully develop intercultural understanding. This is why the toolkit includes targeted activities where local students serve as facilitators, helping international students connect with various community stakeholders meaningfully and actively contribute to local initiatives. By engaging with the community, students build both an appreciation for civic involvement and a deeper connection to the host culture.

Through repeated and structured engagement, exchange students can achieve a set of learning outcomes:

- **Personal Growth:** Personal development occurs as students reflect on their values, assumptions, and beliefs. This self-reflection fosters adaptability, open-mindedness, and a greater understanding of their role

within diverse communities, encouraging a sense of shared responsibility in civic initiatives.

- **Interpersonal Skills:** By regularly interacting with others and engaging in community activities, students develop essential interpersonal skills, including effective communication, empathy, and adaptability. These experiences strengthen their ability to collaborate across cultural and social differences, reinforcing their commitment to civic participation.
- **Civic and Cultural Awareness:** As students engage with the local community, they gain an understanding of civic involvement in their host country and develop a respect for its cultural and social dynamics. This engagement builds curiosity, appreciation for diversity, and a sense of belonging, encouraging them to become active participants in civic life both locally and beyond.
- **Global and Societal Awareness:** Through active participation in community-based projects, students become more aware of global challenges and societal issues, fostering a commitment to responsible citizenship. This awareness encourages them to make informed personal choices that positively impact both their local communities and contribute to broader global efforts.

Each student may reach these outcomes in unique ways and to varying degrees, depending on their level of engagement and personal experience. This toolkit provides a foundation for student-led associations to foster these learning outcomes, equipping international students to become engaged, responsible, and culturally aware citizens who actively contribute to their communities.

Communication

Effective communication is essential in engaging international students as well as the other stakeholders involved in the initiative and ensuring they feel welcomed, informed and supported throughout each stage of the activity.

Pre-activity

- At this stage, it is important to set up a clear, targeted **communication plan** to build interest and ensure all participants are well-informed. Start by defining the main messages for the event, focusing on its purpose, expected impact, and the benefits for international students, local community members, and partners. Clearly state the time, date, and location in all communications, as these logistical details are essential for everyone's planning. Double-check these details to avoid last-minute confusion and ensure they're highlighted in each message.
- **Create tailored outreach materials for each audience:** international students, community members, volunteers, and partners. For international students, messages should focus on the opportunities for cultural connection and learning, while community-facing messages can emphasise the event's benefits for local engagement and intercultural awareness. Consider creating bilingual content—such as graphics, registration forms, and emails in both English and the local language—to make information accessible to all participants, ensuring that language is not a barrier to participation.
- To increase visibility, **design simple, engaging graphics** that capture attention on social media, newsletters, or posters. An easy-to-use registration form can help you manage attendance, track participants, and send reminders. Encourage participants to register early, as this will enable you to follow up effectively. In the week leading up to the event, send a reminder email with essential information, such as the exact location, start time, and any materials they should bring.

During the activity

- Communication should support smooth operations, active engagement, and documentation. Designate a main responsible, such as a **communication coordinator**, who will be in charge of all communication aspects during the event.

- **Capturing the event in real time** is valuable for both future communication and celebrating participants' involvement. Take photos, record short videos, or collect quotes from attendees (with consent) to document the experience. This documentation not only showcases the event's impact but also provides lasting memories for participants. Be mindful to represent everyone respectfully and inclusively, especially when sharing images of diverse participants, to ensure that they feel comfortable.

After the activity

- At this stage, communication should focus on **acknowledging contributions, sharing outcomes, and encouraging continued engagement**. The communication lead should start by sending personalised thank-you messages or emails to all participants, expressing gratitude for their involvement and highlighting the positive outcomes of the event. Tailoring these messages to each audience – whether international students, community members, or partners – helps show appreciation for their unique contributions.
- To share the event's success, the communication coordinator can **create a brief recap** (posts, stories etc.) or article that includes key highlights, outcomes, and quotes from participants. This recap can be posted on social media, shared through newsletters, or added to the organisation's website.
- To continue with the engagement, the communication coordinator can **invite participants to stay involved in future activities** or join a mailing list. Keeping participants engaged through regular updates and invitations to future events fosters an ongoing relationship with the organisation and encourages international students and community members to continue building connections.



To ensure GDPR compliance and protection of participants' privacy, organisations should carefully manage personal data. In the preparation phase, collect only essential information, obtain explicit consent for data use and media capture, and provide a clear privacy notice outlining how data will be handled. During the event, respect each participant's media preferences by marking those who do not wish to be photographed. After the event, limit data retention to only what is necessary for follow-up and delete information securely once it is no longer needed.

Preparation Phase

Now let's dive into the practical aspects of the preparation phase. When talking of preparation, this toolkit has already mentioned establishing a framework, the logistical aspects, role definitions, assigning key indicators, partnering up and to communication strategies.

Here is another set of things to consider in the preparation phase:

Budget

Put together a cost assessment that lists things such as materials and transportation costs, you should also look into any available grants or funding. This will help you create a solid budget for the activity.

Revenues				Expenditure			
Description	Cost	Units	Total cost	Description	Cost	Units	Total cost
Material Costs			€	Material Costs			€
Travel Costs			€	Travel Costs			€
Accommodation and food costs			€	Accommodation and food costs			€
Other costs			€	Other costs			€
Total revenues			€	Total expenditure			€
Net gain/loss							€

Human Resources

When going over the human resources preparation, think about how many volunteers you will need for the logistical preparation of the activity, how many international students you want to involve in the activity and who you will cooperate with. It is also important to think about the roles and responsibilities of

each participant, if the volunteers will need any training or orientation, and how you will communicate expectations and provide support throughout the activity.

Material

Think of any physical, electronic or online tools you might need for this activity. Such could include Presentations, Posters, Post-its, Food and Beverages, Costumes, projectors, Games or virtual engagement tools.

Category	Material	Purpose	Note
Presentation tools	Slide decks	For showing key information	Google slides,
	Projector	Display slides or videos	Check availability or rental options
	Laptop	To access digital content	Remember to bring the charger
Workshop material	Posters	To provide information or guidance	Print them
	Post-it	To brainstorm on the interactive sessions	Coloured for different activity types
	Pens	To use during the workshop	Check how many pens are still available

By considering the budget, human resources, materials, and discussion topics, you will lay a solid foundation for a well-organised and impactful activity. Establishing a clear framework, defining roles, and planning effective communication will ensure that all participants feel ready to collaborate and engage. In the end, good preparation not only enhances the overall experience for international students and volunteers but also fosters a collaborative environment that promotes learning and community connection.

Activity Outlines

When preparing for your session, you might want to create a Session Outline (SO) which can help you provide clear instructions for facilitators of this activity and future ones. Here is an example of a SO:

Title of Activity				
Prepared by	The Head of the Team		Feedback by	The activity coordinator
Facilitators	The activity coordinator		The communication coordinator	The financial coordinator
Number of pax	40		Time allocation	90 min
Session Objectives	The aims of this activity are to present the International Student's experiences and to promote internationalisation to highschool students.			
Introduction	10 min	Here the facilitator will introduce the activity and the International Students participating.		
First presentation	30 min	The international students will present their experience.		
Interactive Moment	30 min	Based on a game, highschool students will learn more about the culture and traditions of the international students' countries.		
Debriefing	20 min	Here we will create a "fishbowl" moment to gather feedback.		

Implementation

After thoughtful planning and coordination, it comes the time to implement the activity. This is the most active phase and the one that requires the most cooperation between participants. Here are a few quick tips to keep in mind:

- Confirm** with all participants a few days before the activity to make sure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities.
- Brief** the activity, take some time to explain and introduce the activity.
- Make sure the Partner Contact Point is present** at all times since this is the role that connects the local organisation to the participants.
- Be on time**, arrive a few minutes early and keep things going smoothly by following the planned time slots.
- Step in**, if the activity isn't going well, actively support the International Student.
- Circle the room**, make sure everyone is being mindful and can comprehend the activity.
- Help the communication**, you might need to help translate things or with the interpretation in case there are linguistic barriers.
- Take photos or videos**, however, make sure it's agreed beforehand with the participants and all stakeholders and ask for written consent to publish them.
- Carry a checklist**, it's always easier to make sure you have everything you need when you can easily check during the activity!

If your planning phase is well done and well-constructed, you shouldn't have any foreseeable issues during the implementation phase. However, in case anything goes wrong, keep calm and make thoughtful decisions. In summary, these are a few considerations you should have while implementing this activity. Be sure that these are applicable and tailor-made for your specific activity and context, there is always room for improvement.

For the facilitation of the activity, there are a few things you could be mindful of:


- **Create a welcoming atmosphere:** Start with a warm introduction and a brief outline of the session's goals. Share your role and encourage everyone to participate openly.
- **Know your audience:** Research the background and expectations of participants, this helps to tailor content to their needs and makes everyone feel included.


- **Plan for the unexpected:** Be prepared for unexpected questions, changes in timing, or adjustments based on participant reactions.
- **Body language and eye contact:** Use open body language, smile, and make eye contact to build a connection and make participants feel seen and valued.
- **Use names:** Whenever possible, use participants' names to foster connection and make them feel acknowledged.
- **Encourage participation:** Ask open-ended questions to spark discussion, and use group activities to create opportunities for everyone to contribute. Remind everyone that all ideas are valuable, creating a judgement-free zone.
- **Balance participation:** Pay attention to both outspoken and quieter participants. Use tactics like paired discussions or small groups to ensure everyone has a chance to speak.
- **Simplifying language:** Use clear, accessible language, especially for non-native speakers, and avoid jargon. Use visuals and examples to illustrate complex points.
- **Check for understanding:** Ask questions after explaining a key point, such as "Does that make sense?" or "Any questions so far?"
- **Time management:** Keep track of time during activities and gently move the group forward if discussions run long.
- **Managing energy levels:** If participants seem tired or disengaged, use energizers or quick breaks to reset focus.
- **Summarise key points:** Before closing, recap the main takeaways from the session, emphasising the objectives achieved and what participants can take away from the experience.
- **Thank participants:** End by thanking everyone for their time and contributions, fostering a sense of appreciation and community.


Report and Evaluation


As we have defined in the activity framework, reporting and evaluation are an essential part of any activity to ensure the sustainability of the event, its effects and outcomes for the local community and to identify areas of improvement.


When it comes to questionnaire feedback evaluation, here are some tips to help you improve:

 Dissatisfied participants are more likely to give feedback compared to those satisfied, so don't be discouraged.

 Keep it short, not everyone is a fan of forms, so try to keep it as short as possible, without compromising the evaluation.

 Balance between quantitative and qualitative feedback, create open questions and closed questions.

 End the questionnaire with an overall comments section, that way participants can evaluate anything that you might have missed and they feel the need to comment on.

 Questionnaires are most times completed if shared right away after the activity.

Although questionnaires are the most known evaluation method, there are more effective qualitative methods that you can apply to these activities. You can host a debriefing session involving all key participants to gather immediate feedback on what went well and what could be improved. This session provides a space for reflection and helps capture insights while the experience is still fresh.

Debriefing

It is important to create space for international students to actively reflect on their experiences. Facilitate the reflection process by organising a **debriefing session**, for example. By doing this, you will help the students have a more cautious experience during their exchange and understand the learning outcomes they have gained.

Here are a few debriefing session methods:

1. **The ORID Method** (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decisional) This method encourages participants to think critically through the four stages:
 - **Objective:** Focus on facts—what happened during the activity.

- **Reflective:** Allow participants to share personal reactions and feelings.
 - **Interpretive:** Discuss the meanings and lessons learned.
 - **Decisional:** Identify action points or recommendations for future activities.
2. **World Café** is an interactive method that allows participants to rotate in small groups to discuss specific questions or themes, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and diverse perspectives. It's ideal for international activities because it encourages sharing experiences in a relaxed, conversational setting. Here are a few questions groups can discuss:
 - What did you learn from other cultures?
 - What challenges did you face?
 - What have you learned from this experience?
 - How did the activity make you feel?
 3. **Appreciative Inquiry** is a positive-focused debriefing method that centres on what worked well, emphasising the strengths and successes of the activity. In this method, you should use open questions such as "What was the most memorable part of this experience?" or "How did this activity help you grow?". This method can be encouraging and can be effective with groups of varied backgrounds, promoting a constructive atmosphere.
 4. **The SWOT Analysis** (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is suitable for evaluating activities from multiple angles, helping participants analyse what was beneficial, what could be improved, and what external factors influenced the activity.
 5. **The Open Fishbowl Discussion** consists of a small group that sits in an inner circle (the "fishbowl") to discuss the activity while others listen. People can swap in and out to share different perspectives. This method encourages deep listening and a range of perspectives, which is useful for groups with diverse cultural backgrounds.

After the session and the questionnaire, you must compile your findings and align them with the KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) you have established at the beginning of planning. Structure your evaluation using relevant tools and methods to collect data, you can explore the participant satisfaction, skill development, and perceived impact and assess the immediate outcomes of the activity, helping you determine whether it met its goals.

It is important to compile your findings into a clear and actionable report, that way you are ensuring the activity's sustainability as well as the overall impact in the local community, you can summarise the feedback, highlight areas of success, and outline recommendations for future activities. The final report should not only

document the activity's impact but also serve as a valuable resource for planning and improving similar initiatives in the future.

Report your activity

You should also upload your report to the [Erasmus Student Network's Activities Website](#), using our platform can help you gain visibility and impact in your community. ESN's platform provides best practices and inspiration for activities and displays the causes, the objectives, the types of the activities reported, as well as the project to which they are connected. It also serves as a valuable tool for tracking activities and categorising them according to the United Nations [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), which helps measure and communicate their impact. By linking activities to specific SDGs, organisers can better understand and demonstrate the broader positive effects of their work on global challenges.

The ECEM consortium encourages the organisers of activities to report them in the ESN Activities platform to foster visibility and inspire other student organisations. The platform is powered by the Erasmus Student Network, but any organisation can register and use it. The platform is accessible by any user and allows getting a better understanding of the incredible diversity and impact of the activities implemented by the Erasmus Generation.

Inspiration for Activities

You can draw inspiration for volunteering activities for international students from the examples below, or simply visit www.activities.esn.org.

Volunteering at Community Kitchen

Goal of the activity	The goal of this activity is to make International Students aware of the volunteering opportunity to help at a community kitchen. The students can help with the preparation and distribution of the meal cooked.
Description	This activity invites International Students to engage in the preparation and distribution of meals, providing essential support to your community while fostering connections with fellow volunteers and locals. This experience promotes teamwork, cultural exchange, and personal growth as they navigate various tasks and interact with diverse participants.
Partner	Local Community Kitchen

Community Cleaning

Goal of the activity	By coming together to clean up public spaces in the city, students and volunteers can demonstrate their commitment to preserving natural resources and protecting ecosystems.
Description	This activity invites local students and International Students to work collaboratively, fostering teamwork and a sense of shared responsibility for the environment. As they participate in this hands-on effort, students will have the opportunity to connect with fellow volunteers and local community members, promoting cultural exchange and awareness of environmental issues.
Partner	Local ENGO

Volunteering With Homeless

<p>Goal of the activity</p>	<p>The goal of this activity is to raise awareness among International Students about the opportunity to support a local initiative dedicated to helping individuals experiencing homelessness, that way minimising discrimination and stereotypes against homeless people.</p>
<p>Description</p>	<p>Participants will engage in various tasks during an open day event designed to provide essential services and resources to those in need. Through hands-on involvement, students will promote empathy and understanding while learning about the challenges faced by marginalised population</p>
<p>Partner</p>	<p>Local Shelter Center</p>

ECEM-Guidelines for Bridging Exchange
Students and Local Communities

ECEM Enriching Communities
Through Engaged Mobilities



Co-funded by
the European Union

