

A guide for group leader

(for group leaders of youth exchanges in Erasmus+ projects)

Who is a group leader?

The role of group leader exists only in youth exchange projects (there is no group leader in training courses). Every participating country has one and he/she must be at least 18 years old. Group leader coordinates activities of the group and represents group's interests before youth exchange, during the youth exchange and after. If there are underage participants there should be at least two group leaders.

Why would I want to be a group leader?

Being a group leader gives a great experience on how to be a leader and an opportunity to gain new skills, knowledge and attitudes. You'll have the chance to test yourself, take responsibility and show that you can do it. This is a great chance to improve yourself, to contribute to the success of the project and make it a successful and a pleasant learning experience for everyone. If you've participated in the projects before, then it is expected that you take some more responsibility next time (for example applying for the group leader's role). Your sending organization will offer support, provide helpful documents (like this instruction here) and group leaders' trainings might be available, too.

What are the tasks of the group leader?

Keeping contact with the hosting organization

- Your task is to be your group's contact person for hosting organization, by forwarding questions participants might have and vice versa.
- First thing after you have been chosen as group leader is to let the organizers (host organization) know, that you are the group leader. Send them an email about it and ask all future information related to the project to be sent directly to you. Organizer's contact can be usually found in infopack; if not ask from your sending organization's contact person.
- You should make sure that organizers will get full participant list of your country's group (if all participants have confirmed their participation, ask for it from your sending organization's contact person). Sometimes you also need to fill form provided by organizer or submit data of each participant separately. Collect the data and send it to organizer with one email.

- Please make sure that if your participants have any special needs (e.g. health risks or food related preferences) to share this information with the organizers as soon as possible.
- Be available to organizers by phone, e-mail and facebook. Reply to messages as soon as possible and if there are delays or any other problems, let them know (e.g. you are missing a passport number of 1 participant, then send the rest of the group's data and add explanation, that last participant data is coming on Monday for example).

How to ensure good communication with host organization?

(material from group leader's training, Estonia)

- Examine the background of organizers and other participating organizations.
- Proper communication with organizers include:
 - Finding out what kind of communication channel is preferred
 - Informing the organizer of all relevant and important information
 - Communication is done only by group leader - group leader collects information from the group and forwards it to organizer as a whole - participants do not contact the organizer individually.
- Study the special needs of your group and inform organizer about them. Don't get irritated if the organizer doesn't understand some of them (e.g. doesn't know the difference between vegan and vegetarian), just calmly explain them again.
- Be polite and stay polite.
- Prepare early rather than late - don't leave things to the last minute.
- Help participants with purchasing tickets, doing check-in and other practical arrangements.
- Agree on set of rules in the beginning of the project - e.g. about drinking and smoking.
- Don't start a quarrel for nothing.
- Consider cultural differences
 - do the preliminary work
 - be patient in terms of communication methods and understanding of time
 - know which are the sensitive topics
 - know the stereotypes about your country - don't be offended and disprove them with your behavior
 - in southern countries the houses are not heated in winter and rooms might be chilly - have the right set of clothes with you.
 - don't expect everyone to speak English
- Remember that disagreements are normal, but they can be resolved.

Before the project:

- Introduce yourself to other participants of your country as a group leader. Let others know about it after confirming participation. Also we recommend that you have a Facebook chat for your group so that you can quickly interact with each other.
- Make sure that everything is running smoothly. Check that everybody has confirmed their participation. If problems occur, try to solve them yourself or ask for help from your organization's contact person.
- Find out what are the tasks for your country's group, what needs to be prepared. Forward all questions from participants, ask for information about logistics and practical arrangements. Find out what are the specifics of reimbursement process after the project (if it's not indicated in the infopack). Share the information with your group.
- Coordinate purchasing tickets. Choose the tickets together with your group, **confirm the tickets with organizer (that the price and dates are okay)** and buy them together (at the same time). Let all the participants send their tickets to your email and forward them to the organizer with one email. Make sure that all participants in your group have purchased tickets. Tickets should be dealt with immediately when the participation is confirmed and bought as soon as possible when organizers have given the green light.
- **Arrange preparatory meeting with your country's group.** This is mandatory and one of the most important tasks of the group leader. If somebody can't make it, then include them through Skype.
- Collect all project related documents, tickets, boarding passes. It is a good idea to do online check-in and save boarding passes as PDF file to avoid losing them. The group leader also needs to have the parental consent from the underage participants on paper.
- Remind participants that the travel document needs to be valid at least for 6 months after the trip. Passport is necessary when traveling outside of EU and also when flying through countries which require a passport (such as Russia, Turkey, Ukraine). Make sure that everybody knows that!

WHAT DO DISCUSS IN THE PREPARATION MEETING

- Get to know each other! Who is who? Where do you come from? Why are you participating in this project?
- Talk through practical things: travelling, tickets, what do bring, necessary documents and travel insurance.
- Prepare and discuss your country's workshops, come up with interesting energizers and think of different ways to make your national night memorable.

- Prepare and think through how to introduce your organisation (there's often a separate activity planned for this in the project).
- The group leader should give an overview of what is Erasmus+, what is a non-formal learning and what is youth exchange about.
- Think about how you can make the project visible and seen. Who will be responsible for the Instagram Story? Who will blog about the project? Or maybe you can make a video or a Facebook live?
- Think about the cultural aspects. What should you know before, what to expect, how to prepare? How to be respectful of the local culture?

Underaged participants - special conditions

Parent's consent

- The group leader needs to give the minor a [parent's consent form](#), where the group leader adds his/hers contacts and the information of the project.
- Every minor needs to have the original of the parent's consent (signed by hand by parent/legal guardian).
- The group leader needs to have the copy of the parent's consent (printed out), for this the group leader asks the participant to send the scanned copy of it via email before the project.

Travelling

- Underaged participants need to travel with the group leader. In special cases there are exceptions that the minor can travel with another adult (this needs to be coordinated with your sending organisation).
- Although the airlines usually let 16-year-old or older travel alone, it is not acceptable in Erasmus+ projects and also because of different organisations' rules and the responsibility fallen to the group leader (it would cause major problems).
- If the participant is 15 or younger he/she can't usually buy the ticket so this has to be done by the group leader in cooperation with the minor. Sometimes there is a possibility to get a discount for the minor (check before buying the ticket).

Insurance

- All minors and adult participants need to have European health insurance card.
- Travel insurance is mandatory for all the participants (minors and the adults). Doesn't matter, whether it is a youth exchange, training or a seminar. This is requirement of Erasmus+ rules. The insurance has to include a medical insurance, trip protection insurance (if you get sick before the trip), a baggage

insurance (if you're travelling with a check-in luggage) and an extra protection (if you are travelling to an unstable region).

- **In case there are minors in the group, the insurance needs to be done for the whole group together.** This way the risks that might come with the minor are minimal. The group leader sends a list with the participants' names to an insurance company (with personal data) and brings out the project's duration, region and other important information. The company makes an offer and every participant pays on their own. Group insurance helps to avoid a situation where, for example, a minor is hospitalized and the group leader misses his/her flight because of it.
- Ask for insurance offers from your local insurance company.

What is the role of group leader during the youth exchange activities? How to support youngsters?

- Be active, include participants to different activities, discussions, be a good example (e.g. don't use phone during the activities, be in the right place at the right time, be positive even in difficult situations).
- Don't criticize, instead, try to find ways to be helpful and supportive.
- Be inclusive and try to notice, when somebody needs a timeout. Excessive activity is not always good.
- Share responsibilities with other group members. The group leader might not have the time to get everything done on his/her own and notice everything. It is a good idea to have somebody helping as a supportive group leader who also tries to support, include and advise less active group members. You can share roles within other group members so everybody can really feel like a part of the group (e.g. group's musician).
- It is important to arrange reflection meetings with your group and with the rest of the project people to analyze project and achievements of learning goals. What have you learned? What can I (and every participant) do so that the project would evolve towards a direction we desire and our expectations would be fulfilled? It's important to notice if somebody needs more support or individual approach. Problems don't need to be discussed in front of the whole group.
- It is necessary to have constant communication with the members of your group, to give feedback and create a trustful atmosphere.
- Make agreements in beginning of the project which are followed during the project.
- It's a good practice to set individual goals - encouragement from group leader is expected to fulfill these goals.
- To include less active group members it's a good idea to give them some roles for a day or two which helps them to meet other participants from the project.
- Stand for your group's rights, but stay calm and polite when doing that.
- Notice and acknowledge achievements of your group members.
- Support youngsters with learning reflection and filling their Youthpasses.
- If there is an introduction of the sending organization in the program, make sure your organization gets represented professionally. That might help organization gain new partnerships where youngsters can participate!

Final check before traveling - do you have them?

- All the documents of your group - invoices, boarding passes (if somebody loses theirs)
- List of all the participants (your sending organization always sends it to the group leader) with emergency contacts
- Knowledge about health problems, allergies and special needs
- Phone numbers, addresses and other contacts of the organizers (electronically and on paper)
- Information on how to reach to destination (tip: download google offline map - in case you can't connect to the Internet abroad)
- Insurance contact / emergency contact
- Your country's emergency (consulate) contacts

The follow up and the visibility of the project

For every project it is important to ensure its visibility. It's funded by The European Union = with everyone's money, so it would be good for the public to know how it was spent. Furthermore, visibility is important because it helps other youngsters to gain knowledge about possibilities of Erasmus+. This way they may have the opportunity to take part of some fine projects in the future!

Project's follow-up activities help to gain visibility and spread the results - whether it is a material, an idea or something else. Every group's task is to make sure that project's results would have wider audience than just project's participants.

The project can be reflected on following channels:

- **Instagram.** The group leader can ask his/her contact of the sending organisation for the access to its Instagram account, where photos, videos and stories can be added during the project.
- **Facebook live.** You could make Facebook live on your sending organizations' page (again, the group leader gets the access from his/her sending organisation). The FB live should include the main information of the project, what kind of project it is, where it is taking place, what's being done etc.
- **Project blog.** You can write your own project blog or if your sending organization has a specific visibility tool, to use this.
- **Youtube.** If your sending organisation has its own channel, be prepared to post videos, what you have done during the project. Send the videos to your sending organization and they will publish it for sure!
- **#.** Make sure you hashtag your sending organization in public social media post and also #ErasmusPlus. Your friends will also learn of the opportunities offered by Erasmus+ program.

Back at home - what's next?

- Arrange a meeting with your group to analyze the experiences from the project and make plans for the future. In addition, it is great to see people from the project again!
- Group leaders' task is to make sure that everybody (including the group leader) fills a feedback form about the experience of the project. Group leaders should share it right after the project with participants. Considering the feedback the sending organization will decide whether to continue cooperation with hosting organization and also will take into account the feedback given about the group leader when selecting group leaders into new projects.
- The country groups often make agreements during the project about follow-up activities in their country (e.g. workshop, photo exhibition). Group leader should find out what kind follow-up activities are expected from their group during the project. After the project it is the group leader's task to coordinate follow-up activity. If you need help or support, let other participants know about it! Be sure to notify your sending organization, so they can help you and advertise the event.
- Mobility tool report - the group leader must fill a form provided by EU within 7 days after the project. Questions should be answered from the position of the group leader rather than from a personal stand - think before answering. The form is forwarded directly to the organizer, sending organisation and national agency.
- When back in home country, group leader collects all the tickets and boarding passes (which you couldn't give away in project) and sends them to the organizer with registered mail. Online tickets and online check-ins are recommended - it will be much easier and faster!

How to make sure that the money gets transferred in time and why does it sometimes takes longer?

How to make sure that the money gets transferred faster?

- Before purchasing the tickets ask the coordinating organization, when the travelling expenses will be compensated and how it will be done (cash, transfer etc). Share received information with other participants.
- Ask which extra documents are necessary. The tickets, bills and boarding passes are definitely mandatory to get the compensation. Sometimes the bank statements and passport's copies are also needed.

- Before purchasing the tickets confirm them with the coordinating organization by email. This way there will be no problems afterwards and you will not be responsible, if there was a mistake.
- Make sure that everyone (yourself included) makes an online check-in on both directions (not mobile check-in). Gather the boarding passes and group them together into one PDF file and send it to the coordinators via email. Documents written on paper are not only uncomfortable for the coordinators (usually), but are also hostile to environment and wallet, since sending documents by post costs and less paper you use, the better for nature.
- Make a conclusive table with your group, where all the tickets and their costs are mentioned. Send it to the coordinators so it is easier for them (and for you) to follow the expenses accounting.
- Make a mobility tool report, do conclusions and everything else you're asked to do fast, so that the coordinators don't have to ask twice. This will speed up the process! :)
- Be friendly and compassionate with the coordinators. Gathering and checking the tickets for 40 people is a very tedious and long process. It is difficult to imagine and understand something if you haven't done it yourself.
- Sign digitally the Group leader's travelling expenses form and send it to your sending organisation's email. Right after the project you need to send the coordinators your bank account data: name, address, IBAN, bank's name, bank's address, BIC/Swift code. The transfer is usually made to the group leader's bank account, who will then transfer it to the participants. Through your sending organisation the process is longer, more complicated and takes more time.

Why reimbursements sometimes take a long time? (example)

- Before the project the organizer will get 80% of the total budget
- For example, the project's budget is 10000€, of which 7000€ being organizing costs and 3000€ travel expenses.
- Organizer will get 80% before the activities of the project - 8000€
- 7000€ is paid for accommodation and catering
- Now the organizer has only 1000€ out of 3000€ meant for travel expenses.
- 2 options: if the organizer has other financial resources then everybody can be reimbursed, but if not participants need to wait until the final report is approved.

When will the final statement be approved and when will the expenses be compensated?

For example:

- The duration of the project is 1st of May – 31st of October 2018.
- The youth exchange activities take place in 1st –10th of August 2018.
- Legally the final report can be submitted on 31st of October – 30th of December 2018. The date when it will be submitted depends on whether all the partners have sent all the follow-up information, whether all the tickets have arrived to the coordinators in time and whether the report can be written in time. The national agency will have 60 days to check the project report.
- 17th of February 2019 the national agency will send query to ask for the participant X's missing documents. The period of report control is automatically prolonged until missing documents are provided.
- The coordinator doesn't have participant X's ticket and it takes about a month to get it. The additions will be sent to the national agency on 13th of March 2019.
- 28th of March 2019 the national agency accepts the report.
- The money will be transferred within a month to the coordinators, who will then transfer it to the country missing the money.

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