



## **WORKSHOP 4: Volunteer training**

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**Training as an identity element. Carles Gil**

There is abundant literature on the link between training and volunteering. Today, there is consensus over the link between the quality of volunteer actions and volunteers' degree of training and empowerment. Despite this fact, training and volunteering are sometimes interpreted from a restrictive approach, which is excessively focused on the development of technical skills (hard skills). The incorporation of general skills (soft skills) has contributed to a more holistic description of volunteer assignments. The more defined positions, relationships and skills are, the more mistakes will be avoided. Also, this will allow the inclusion of assessment criteria. A third kind of skills that have gained notorious importance over the last years need to be taken into account; institutional skills. In a sector in which all programmes are meant to align to a core mission, it is key for all workers to share the same intangible values.

Literature on volunteers' cycle management advocates for training in the area of institutional skills.

This presentation aims at carrying out an in-depth analysis of institutional skills. In other words, our objective is to analyse the link between training and the mission of individual organizations.

A particular focus will be given to the advantages resulting from this kind of skills. Third sector organizations' mandates are often inspired by the will to change the world for the better. This driving force at the origin of many organizations should go hand in hand with volunteers' enthusiasm, the basis of the very DNA of volunteering on which volunteers build their first commitment. This matching should take place within the framework of the synergies premise according to which the whole which is the result of the sum, is greater than the sum of its parts. To the witty expression win-win (on the one hand the organization and, supposedly its beneficiaries too and, on the other hand, volunteers), we should add a third beneficiary, a sort of externality that is positive for society.

Training should be understood in a broad sense. Volunteers' follow-up process during the first stages should be more proactive. Instead of follow-up we should say accompaniment process.

Training is not only about communicating or explaining but also about transmitting. Lessons can reach an audience of 10, 100 or 1000 people if there is enough room in the classroom. On the contrary, a more reduced audience is essential when it comes to transmitting. The maximum audience would be of about 5 to 6 people.

Both organizations' staff and volunteers can carry out an accompaniment process. An accompaniment process is not ruled by a contractual relationship but by an institutional rapport.



Through a process of this nature volunteers' feelings can be easily identified, which enables them to be aware of the scope of their actions. At this respect, two key points need to be highlighted.

On the one hand, a more in-depth reflection on the features of the environment in which we operate is necessary. On the other hand, the immense value of staff contributions and the importance of the project's genesis need to be acknowledged.

Volunteers should be able to clearly identify not only what they have committed to (immediate factor) but also why have they done so (the motivation of their commitment) and how (transformation potential).

These points are key if a real social impact is to be reached. The role of the accompanying volunteer enjoys special legitimacy since he or she is a peer to the trainee volunteer and this enables empathy. It is known that it takes a certain time to assimilate new experiences. The pace is not the same as in the case of theoretical trainings. This maturation time depends on the person and particular attention should be brought to it.

What have been said until now responds to the ultimate sense of volunteering: volunteers are change agents. The work of third sector organizations can have a very wide scope at a regional level but not at a global level.

A broad picture points out that systemic changes will only happen if a glocal approach is adopted: actors working in different areas and regions share common values and principals (like minded). For change to be real and irreversible, an agents' ecosystem is required.

Wagensberg said scientific minds operate on the basis of "mind on, heart on, hands on". This also applies to volunteers' minds. Volunteer training in its broader sense needs to include technical skills, provide volunteers with a long-term perspective (as a means for them to understand the objectives of volunteer actions and allow real transformation) and boost their passion. Only passion will allow a strong link between volunteers and their commitment that enables the development of social change agents' distinctive Cosmo vision.

Despite the fact that volunteers' commitment with an organization can go beyond the time they spend in it, the inherent objective of any change agent is to be independent, to be able to implement an individual project aiming at changing the environment.

In summary, it is not so much about empowering volunteers or triggering their awareness, but rather about providing them with the tools (relating to the mind, heart and hands that Wagensberg mentions) so they are the true protagonists of this change during their life, in their everyday lives.