



# Volunteers from School

## Mapping of local community needs by students

### Guidelines & Templates



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Mapping of local community needs by students at each participating school

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## Introduction

Volunteers from School (VoterS) is an Erasmus+ project (Project Number: 2022-1-ES01-KA220-SCH-000087095), implemented in Spain, Greece and Italy, aiming to develop a volunteering mind frame in teachers and students at secondary schools, and through the use of innovative digital tools to support them in participating to democratic life and service learning. As volunteering complements the idea that education is a tool for social improvement, aimed at forming complete persons, with both an intellectual and a moral dimension, having the appropriate tools to apply it, can truly make a change in European societies.

The VoterS project includes the following Work Packages:

- WP1 Project Management and Coordination
- WP2 Training of teachers “Volunteers from School” with respective Lesson Plans
- WP3 “Volunteers from School” Students Digital Diaries Platform
- WP4 “Volunteers from School” – School Exchanges (2)
- WP5 Dissemination, Sustainability and Impact

The present guidelines report is developed by Symplexis under WP3, Task 3.2: Mapping of local community needs by students at each participating school, addressing the implementing project partners to carry out the task.

## What is a community?

While we traditionally think of a community as the people in each geographical location, the word can really refer to any group sharing something in common. This may refer to smaller geographic areas, such as a neighborhood, a housing project or development, a rural area, or to several other possible communities within a larger, geographically defined community. These are often defined by race or ethnicity, professional or economic ties, religion, culture, or shared background or interest. For example, there is the Catholic community, the elderly community, and the business community. These various communities often overlap. An African American art teacher, for example, might see herself (or be seen by others) as a member of the African American, arts, and/or education communities, as well as of a particular faith community.

## What do we mean by needs?

Needs can be defined as the gap between what is and what should be. A need can be felt by an individual, a group, or an entire community. It can be as concrete as the need for food and water or as abstract as improved community cohesiveness. An obvious example might be the need for



public transportation in a community where older adults have no means of getting around town. More important to these same adults, however, might be a need to be valued for their knowledge and experience. Examining situations closely helps uncover what is truly needed and leads toward future improvement.

## How do we determine the local community needs?

Categorization of local community needs:

- **Absolute Needs** - These needs are deemed universal, including those for survival. Examples of absolute needs include food, shelter, clothing, safety, and accessibility.
- **Perceived Needs** - Perceived needs are gaps in services based on what individuals feel about their own needs or the needs of the community. They can learn about perceived needs by speaking directly to community members.
- **Expressed Needs** - A perceived need becomes an expressed need when several individuals take similar action. For example, a few community families are seeking affordable local daycare services because the current services are at capacity.
- **Normative Needs** - They are identified based on a set of agreed-upon criteria or standards. Let's say a state-wide authority establishes the current standards for public housing; a local community may identify a need for improved local public housing based on these criteria.
- **Relative Needs** - They are identified based on equity. A relative need exists when two groups or communities with similar characteristics do not receive similar services. E.g. Students from School A who receive free lunches reported being happier at school. The program determines that School B should also receive free lunches to improve student engagement and performance.

## Why do we develop a mapping for the local needs?

Mapping of local community needs allows you to **involve community members from the very beginning of the process**. This encourages both trust in the process and community buy-in and support, not only of the mapping, but of whatever actions are taken because of it. Full community participation in mapping also promotes leadership from within the community and **gives voice** to those who may feel they have none. A mapping process will give community members the opportunity to voice their opinions, hopes, and fears about the community. This task will help gain a **deeper understanding of the community**. Each community has its own needs and assets, as well as its own culture and social structure, a unique web of relationships, history, strengths, and conflicts that defines it. Moreover, identifying needs before starting a program or initiative means that you know from the beginning what you're dealing with, using all the tools at your disposal and



are less likely to be blindsided later by something you didn't expect. Planning and mapping ahead will **save time and effort** in carrying out the process. Finally, it will help **make decisions about priorities** for program or system improvement.

### Who will carry out the mapping of local needs?

The Mapping of local community needs will be done by the schools, by students at each participating school with the supervision and assistance of their teachers. This task will be done under the leadership of Symplexis with the active participation of all school partners. Teachers will guide and assist students to map their local community needs and decide which needs are more urgent and suitable for their class's volunteering offer. The Mapping of the local community needs by students will be done online and during school hours so that no field visits or transportation expenses occur. However, it is up to the teachers and their classes to decide -following their schools' policies- the most convenient and fruitful method for the mapping that could include, for example, except from online research, in-person visits, phone calls or online calls etc. The group should make sure everyone has a role that fits their skills, talents, and, to the extent possible, preferences. It should also make sure that all necessary tasks are covered. The schools **Bell-Iloc, Varvakeio and Liceo Scientifico S. Cannizzaro** will all select 5 organizations, each, offering volunteering opportunities, study their work and write an equivalent number of reports on the work that they do (15 reports on organizations in total). Based on these reports the three schools (teachers and students) will make their selection of preferred and most suitable volunteering opportunities, design their volunteering campaign, set goals, objectives, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and assessment tools.

### Who should be addressed in the needs' mapping process?

Much of your most interesting information may come from community members with no credentials except that they're part of the community. It's especially important to get the perspective of those who often don't have a voice in community decisions and politics, such as low-income people, immigrants, and others who are often kept out of the community discussion. More specifically, those **experiencing needs** that should be addressed should be involved in this task. It's both fair and logical to involve those who are most directly affected by adverse conditions. They know best what effects those conditions have on their lives and by including them in the planning process are more likely to produce a plan that speaks to their needs.

In addition, however, there are some specific people that it might be important to talk to. They're the individuals in key positions, or those who are trusted by a large part of the community or by a



particular population. The mapping process benefits greatly when there's full participation from community stakeholders. Among those who should be involved are:

- These **individuals and organizations, especially those that are community-based**, often have both a deep understanding of the community and a strong empathic connection with the populations they serve. They can be helpful both by sharing their knowledge and by recruiting people from marginalized populations to contribute to the assessment.
- **Elected officials** are often those who can help a community change in an effort. Engaging them in this task helps to ensure that they will take the effort seriously and work to make it successful.
- **Influential people**. These can include individuals who are identified as "**community leaders**" because of their positions, such as **college presidents, directors of hospitals** and other major organizations, **judges, and clergy**.
- **People whose jobs or lives could be affected** by the eventual actions taken because of the assessment. These include **school superintendents, teachers, chiefs of police, emergency room personnel, landlords**, and others who might have to react if new community policies or procedures are put in place.
- **Owners or CEOs of local businesses**, especially those **that employ people from populations of concern**. The livelihoods of local businesses could be affected by the results of the mapping, as could the lives of their employees.
- People who **care about the community** and have been involved in addressing policy or issues with the objective of social welfare, such as community activists.
- **Students' parents and family members** that might work in the area or have opinions about the issues of the community.

## How could we find the 5 organizations offering volunteering opportunities?

These organizations should cover the spectrum of community life and here are some good examples of key stakeholders that they could help us in this task:

- Offices of local, regional and national agencies, especially municipality offices
- Public libraries.
- Religious institutions. Churches, synagogues, mosques.
- Cultural institutions. Museums, theaters, concert halls, etc. and the companies they support. These may also encompass community theater and music companies run and staffed by community volunteer boards and performers.



- Community centers. Community centers may provide athletic, cultural, social, and other (yoga, support groups) activities for a variety of ages.
- Senior centers.
- Hospitals and public health services.
- Colleges and universities.
- Public and private schools.
- Public sports facilities. These might be both facilities for the direct use of the public community pools and athletic fields, for example, or stadiums and arenas where school, college, or professional teams play as entertainment.

**EXTRA TIP** for your online research: Gibbs, S. (2016). "How to use search like a pro: 10 tips and tricks for Google and beyond". The Guardian, 15 Jan.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/jan/15/how-to-use-search-like-a-pro-10-tips-and-tricks-for-google-and-beyond>

## How will data be collected to map local needs?

To find out about various aspects of the community and map local needs, you'll need several different methods of gathering information that could be online during school hours. Here, we will simply list them, with short explanations.

- **Using existing data.** This is the research you might do to unearth the information in census and other public records and archives or to find information that's been gathered by others. These include local, state, and federal government statistics and records, newspaper archives, and the records of other organizations that they're willing to share. Many of the public documents are available at public and/or university libraries and online at government websites. Most communities have their own websites, which often contain valuable information as well.
- **Listening sessions and public forums.** Listening sessions are forums you can use to learn about the community's perspectives on local issues and options. They are generally small, with specific questions asked of participants. They can help you get a sense of what community members know and feel about the issue, as well as resources, barriers, and possible solutions. Public forums tend to be both larger in number of participants and broader in scope than listening sessions. They are gatherings where citizens discuss important issues and give people of diverse backgrounds a chance to express their views





and are also a first step toward understanding the community's needs. A good public forum informs the group of where the community is and where the members would like to go.

- **Interviews and focus groups.** These are less formal than forums and are conducted with either individuals or small groups. They generally include specific questions, but allow room for moving in different directions, depending on what the interviewees want to discuss. Open-ended questions, follow-ups to interesting points, and a relaxed atmosphere that encourages people to open are all part of most assessment interviews. A focus group is a specialized group interview in which group members are not told exactly what the interviewer wants to know, so that they will be more likely to give answers that aren't influenced by what they think is wanted.
- **Surveys.** There are various types of surveys. They can be written or oral, conducted with a selected small group, usually a randomized sample that represents a larger population or with as many community members as possible. They can be sent by mail, administered over the phone or in person, or given to specific groups. They're often short and ask for answers that are either yes-no, or that rate the survey-taker's opinion of several possibilities (typically on a scale that represents "agree strongly" to "disagree strongly" or "very favorable" to "very unfavorable.") Surveys can, however, be much more comprehensive, with many questions, and can ask for more complex answers.
- **Direct and participant observation.** Often the best way to find out about the community is simply to observe. You can observe physical features, conditions in various areas, the interactions of people in different neighborhoods and circumstances, the amount of traffic, commercial activity, how people use various facilities and spaces, or the evidence of previous events or decisions. Participant observation means becoming part of the group or scene you're observing, so that you can see it from the inside. Do you want to know how people use the neighborhood park on weekends? Spend a few weekends there, watching and talking to people. If you regularly join a volleyball game or jog through the park with others, you're a participant observer, becoming part of the culture you want to learn about. Observation can take many forms and you might use other techniques - photovoice, video, audio, simple photographs, drawings, etc.

## Who will analyze the data and how they will do it?

Once you've collected the information, you must analyze it to see what it means. That means identifying the main themes from interviews and forums, sorting out the concerns of the many from those of the insistent few, understanding what your indicators seem to show, comparing community members' concerns with the statistics, and perhaps several other analytical operations as well. Some of these might involve a knowledge of statistics, while others may require only



common sense and the ability to group information in logical ways. Students can do this in collaboration with their teachers or even professionals from local organizations, with consulting academic researchers, or professional consultants etc.

## How should we record and present the results of the mapping of the local needs?

Depending on what's likely to come out of the mapping, the schools will be able to explain clearly what the mapping of local needs found, and perhaps to engage people in strategizing about how to deal with it. That means you'll want to set out the results clearly, in simple, everyday language accompanied by easy-to-understand charts, pictures, and/or graphs. In fact, the more you can use the words of the community members who contributed their concerns and experiences, the more powerful your report will be. After that, the three schools will write an equivalent number of reports on the work that the organizations are doing regarding the volunteering and based on these reports the schools (teachers and students) will make their selection of preferred and most suitable volunteering opportunities, design their volunteering campaign, set goals, objectives, KPIs and assessment tools.

## By when the mapping of local needs should be done?

For this task it is important to **create a timeline**. How long will you spend preparing for the mapping, contacting people, conducting interviews and/or group facilitators, preparing surveys? How long will you take to gather information? How long will you take to analyze the data and write up a report? Each phase of the mapping should have a deadline. That creates benchmarks, checkpoints along the way that tell you you're moving in the right direction and have gotten far enough along so that you'll finish the assessment on time with the information you need.

## What will the mapping of local needs offer?

- Foster a **civic spirit** and **solidarity** to teachers, students and schools promoting their participation to social causes that will lead to common good.
- Promote **networking** between schools and local NGOs and organizations offering volunteering opportunities.
- Enhance students' **social and communication skills** through the expansion of their social network.
- Expose students to **positive role models** of dedicated people and improve their connections to their local communities.



- Inspire a sense of **altruism**, **giving** and **social cohesion** in all participants.
- Offer students the motivation and inspiration for a lifelong commitment to **social service**.
- Give students the opportunity to practice **work skills** such as teamwork, problem solving, planning and work management.

## Conclusion

To get a comprehensive view of your community, it is important to look at what you have and what you need. By combing through existing data, observing, and learning from community members, you can gain an overview of the community that will serve you well. Recording your findings and your analysis of them in a community description that you can refer to and update as needed will help others with whom you collaborate. With these things in mind, you can have a positive impact on the problem you wish to address.

## Sources

- Community Tool Box (n.d.), “Developing a Plan for Assessing Local Needs and Resources”, University of Kansas, <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/develop-a-plan/main>
- Community Tool Box (n.d.), “Understanding and Describing the Community”, University of Kansas, <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/describe-the-community/main>
- Community Asset Mapping and Needs Assessment (n.d.), Lafayette Landis – Center for Community Engagement, <https://landiscenter.lafayette.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/69/2020/06/Community-Asset-Mapping-and-Needs-Assessment.pdf>



## Annex

Template for presenting the 5 organizations offering volunteering opportunities in your region  
(please copy-paste the table 5 times in your report – please use approximately 500 words per table):

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Legal name of organization</b>  |  |
| <b>Website of the organization</b>   |  |
| <b>Social media of the organization<br/>(if applicable)</b>  |  |
| <b>Contact person of the<br/>organization (name, telephone,<br/>email)</b>   |  |
| <b>Type of organization</b>  |  |
| <b>Location/geographical coverage</b>  |  |
| <b>Main sector of activity</b>   |  |
| <b>Target group(s)/beneficiaries</b>   |  |
| <b>Brief description of the<br/>organization</b>   |  |
| <b>What are the relevant activities<br/>of the organization with<br/>volunteering?</b>   |  |
| <b>What local community needs<br/>does the organization address<br/>and solve?</b>   |  |
| <b>How can our school contribute<br/>to the volunteering actions of<br/>the organization?</b>  |  |
| <b>How will the results of the<br/>project be disseminated in the<br/>local community and the wider<br/>public via the organization?</b> |  |
| <b>Any other extra relevant info</b>   |  |