GREAT

Guidelines for Recognition:

How to **make your volunteer experience count** in the eyes of your future employers?

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INTRODUCTION

Volunteering and youth organisations offer young people the platform for **alternative methods of learning**, complementing their experiences with formal education and helping to bridge the gap between education and employment. With the challenges nowadays world is facing, most of the sectors in the society are in need of **new approaches and adaptations**. Within that learning clearly has to reflect the needs and necessities of society for better employment opportunities and the needs of the learner for **enhanced personal growth**.

Education in the 21st century (E21) is facing a revolutionary (and evolutionary) challenge, and needs to meet the three dimensions in the following Venn diagram:

Employers' needs

Best of Formal
Education practices

E21

NFIL in volunteer
practices

This publication is for you…

If your organisation has a network of long-term volunteers - and you want to support the internal recognition of their skills;

If you want to develop a learning path for your volunteers that meets the needs of the job market;

If you want to provide your members with a quality learning experience and by that open up a new dimension for self-development and growth.

GUIDELINES FOR RECOGNITION:
EUROPEAN ADVANCED TOOL

The **Guidelines for Recognition: European Advanced Tool - GR-EAT** - project came into existence to help many young volunteers' pressing problem: how to make the volunteer learning experience count in the eyes of employers and professors?

Finding a method that not only offers a **universal solution** but also a **tailored answer to the different learning systems of the organisations** proves to be the real challenge. This publication is meant to provide you with the guidelines in order to overcome this challenge!

The GR-EAT guidelines support youth organisations who would like to **start an internal recognition process for their members** of the skills and competences gained via long-term volunteering.

They will also offer you a glimpse of:

The role of youth organisations empowering their volunteers' learning.
Employment and competences: what does your future employer want?
Learning to learn: how can you combine NFIL with formal learning?

THE ROLE OF YOUTH ORGANISATIONS EMPOWERING THEIR VOLUNTEER'S LEARNING

Youth organisations have been playing a quintessential role in the self-development of millions of young people by shaping:

ATTITUDES	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGE
willing participation in learning and learning by doing because they want to gain new >	that follow their intrinsic motivation to develop various potentials as the foundation of >	which is gained via practical implementation, and concrete outcomes of their learning path.

Youth organisations are not only offering a **unique learning path** for volunteers; they also play a key role in understanding the diversity of cultures and shaping a shared identity. What is more, they help young people to acquire **essential skills and competences** which improve their employment prospects.

EMPLOYMENT AND COMPETENCES
WHAT DOES YOUR FUTURE EMPLOYER WANT?

Trying to think with the mindset of a company representative hiring for an opening, think about the **factors they are measuring you with** as a candidate for the position. Your experience as a volunteer has been a life-transforming one, giving you dedication and friendships; but the happy anecdotes might not be convincing enough to stand out among other candidates on the applicants list.

Why? Our research has shown there are 4 fundamental elements your employer wants your volunteer experience to demonstrate:

CREDIBILITY because trusted sources are everything in the world of profit. If the assessment of your volunteering' work is not an already established credible system (e.g. YouthPass as a well-known example), the assessment should make a name for itself for being reliable.

ACCURACY because the level of your knowledge of a certain field is something your employer wants to know precisely. If the assessment is supervised by an external entity that is not the volunteer themselves, the results will be assessed with more precision and objectivity.

«Today and in the future, young persons will need a balanced set of cognitive, social and emotional skills in order to succeed in their life. Their capacity to achieve goals, work effectively with others and manage emotions will be essential to meet the challenges of the 21st century»

(From the First Study Report «Expectations from external stakeholders regarding competences and recognition processes of Non Formal and Informal learning (NFIL)», page 22)

LIFELONG LEARNING CAPACITY is the third and most elusive element. When employers are talking about proactive mindset and taking initiative and ownership of your actions, they inherently want to see a dedicated and passionate employee who is on an endless quest of willingly improving themselves.

SELF-AWARENESS is the fourth element. Volunteers have to be aware of the skills they have developed during a volunteering experience and to connect them with the skills expected by employers. The survey on employers' expectations shows that applicants often struggle to explain the competences and skills they have gained during a volunteering period and thus it is hard for employers to take them into account.

«Employers place a lot of emphasis on finding candidates with the right competences and soft skills, for example 'a problem-solving attitude and resilience', 'a sense of initiative and pro-active attitude' and 'social and civic competences' are particularly

(Results of the survey on the recognition of volunteers' competences by employers, page 2)

LEARNING TO LEARN:
HOW YOU CAN COMBINE NFIL WITH FORMAL LEARNING?

Volunteering and NFIL is usually portrayed as something that gives you **"extra" knowledge** adding to formal learning. The different ways of learning have to adapt more to each other and focus on the **most important factors** when it comes to the personal development of any student or any volunteer:

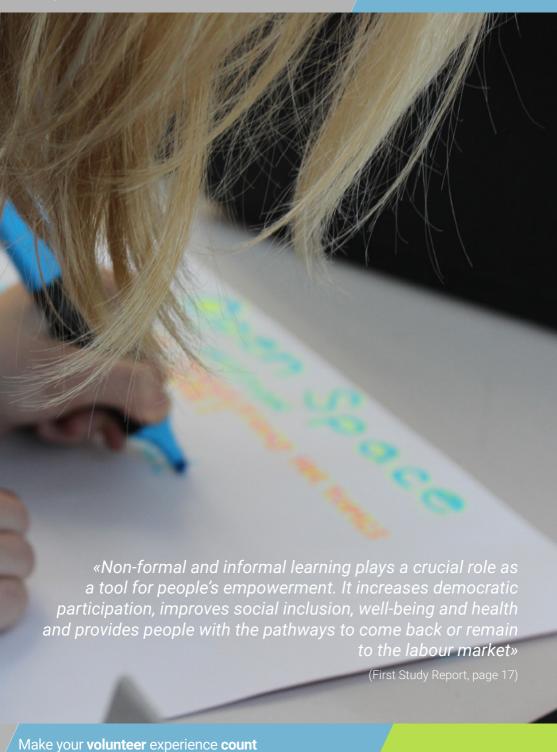| IN NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING:	IN FORMAL LEARNING:
Soft-skills development is an essential part of volunteering and usually stands firm as the practical knowledge NFIL offers to gain on various fields…	…implementing the theoretical knowledge your university provides you with.
Making learning accessible to various target groups regardless of age or social background. Education should be a universal right for all citizens in modern societies…	…and while universities are more and more open to students from various backgrounds, NFIL can include all marginalised groups.
Knowledge should be transferable which widens the variety of learning perspectives. NFIL volunteers often become trainers of others themselves…	…similarly to their university professors, they are encouraged to provide knowledge to others and have an open and critical mind.
Language has an unimaginable impact on the learning experience and being exposed to and learning from different cultural realities…	…and while learning foreign languages is included in most curricula, volunteering and mobility are the practical implementation of this gained knowledge.

«Non-formal and informal learning plays a crucial role as a tool for people's empowerment. It increases democratic participation, improves social inclusion, well-being and health and provides people with the pathways to come back or remain to the labour market»

(First Study Report, page 17)

COMMUNICATION AND CLARITY ARE KEY
RECOGNITION IS CLOSER

In today's fast-paced society and the information and communication technology widening the range of obtainable knowledge, it is more important than ever that we choose an **effective communication channel** when talking about NFIL practices, skills gained through volunteering, and the impact we want to achieve by showcasing concrete and easily understandable information.

The website of the GR-EAT project serves as the online display of the project where:

- you can read about NFIL and its relevance;
- you can follow the 10 steps towards the internal recognition tool;
- you can read the study research on the different expectations from university and employer towards volunteering experiences.

Make sure to **communicate clearly to your volunteers** why it is important for their own benefit to get a better understanding of NFIL and its relation to the volunteer practices.

«Communication is vital to ensure that education providers are aligning the curriculum with employers' needs, and to connect students to the job market»

(First Study Report, page 21)

The road to social and political recognition of volunteering is:

a) a clear learning path and clear outcomes of the NFIL practices and
b) reaching the right people: decision-makers

Decision-makers in high level positions want to support young people in providing them with opportunities for a better future. They can only support us, however, if they know exactly what we have done and where we want to go.

BUILD YOUR OWN TOOL!
THE GR-EAT GUIDELINES

Now that we understand the **theoretical part,** which includes lot of important elements that can help us on the way, it is time to move on to the **practical** part, and take it one step further towards recognition!

10 STEPS TO BUILD YOUR STRATEGY FOR LEARNING!

Understanding and improving the non-formal and informal learning practices in your organisation are going to be the key to supporting your volunteers in getting better recognition for their **skills and competences**. The guidelines below aim to take you on the step-by-step reflection and creation of your tool that can serve both as assessment of the present learning practices and also give you the future direction.

The guidelines will take you through 3 phases:

Your organisation as a NFIL provider;
Getting to know the competences your volunteers are gaining through Non-formal Education and Informal Learning;
Creating a strategy that will guide your future NFIL practices;

The importance of quality standards is an often overlooked factor when discussing NFIL practices and their ideal vs, present state. The GR-EAT Guidelines will not only provide you with the overview of your current state - but it will link every step to a quality indicator that points in the direction of improvement!

Results of the survey on the recognition of volunteers' competences by employers:
«Approximately 40% of employers state that young applicants struggle to explain the competences they have gained during their volunteering period»

HOW TO FOLLOW THE GUIDELINES?

Firstly, follow steps to answer questions about your organisation and asses the present state of your NFIL practices and secondly it will give an overview of the **quality indicators,** which will help you with taking your work on NFIL to the next level!

When you have reached the end and followed all the steps, you will have **a clear overview of the status quo of the NFIL of your organisation** and also an understanding about the learning path your volunteers usually undertake.

So take a notebook, gather a group of people who actively work on the NFIL practices of your organisation and **let's begin the journey towards recognition of NFIL!**

STEP 1 | KNOW YOUR ORGANISATION!

Every organisation is different and thus needs a different strategy for learning. Depending on the background of the members, different internal structures they are participating in, to different learning opportunities the organisation has.
What are the main fields of studies in your members pool and how does this shape the main field of interest in your organisation?

***Quality Tip!** Your NFIL practices need to meet the needs of your members' base. With your members' education ranging from psychology to engineering, your NFIL practices need to offer them something challenging and engaging at the same time.*

STEP 2 | KNOW YOUR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT!

Most organisations have an existing pool of trainers of educators and some do not. Volunteer trainers are trusted members of your internal functioning and are role models to your members. What does your pool/structure look like? How many NFIL educators do you have and what are their fields of expertise?

***Quality Tip!** Your educators need to have both the technical knowledge and the experience in transferring this knowledge to your members. Knowing it, knowing how, showing it and showing how to do it are all part of their role as a NFIL provider!*

STEP 3 | KNOW YOUR RESOURCES!

Volunteer practices usually imply a low amount of financial coverage but when it comes to NFIL practices there are some essentials to be provided for, both in human and in financial resources. Do you have a certain budget allocated to NFIL practices separately? And how many people does your organisation have to manage these practices on a constant and/or occasional basis?

Quality Tip! The careful planning with resources is going to increase your volunteers' learning experience especially on the long-term. Imagine several stages of development you can offer them - all with the careful planning of your financial and human resources!

STEP 4 | KNOW YOUR MEMBERS' FUTURE COMPETENCES!

Just like the different profile of each organisation, the competences developed via various activities are united in diversity. What are the skills your members mention most often as the "most important skill" they have gained by being active in your organisation?

Quality Tip! To identify the key skills and competences your volunteers acquire will need more in-depth research than asking only a few of them. Try conducting a complete impact measurement survey to get as clear a picture as possible about these key skills.

STEP 5 | KNOW YOUR MEMBERS' LEARNING POTENTIALS!

The skills they believe are the most important, will be ones they want to develop themselves in. However, there are several stages of this development, starting from a learning potential to mastering a skill. Identify a few key skills from the previous step, in which your members can develop themselves potentially much further than they do at the moment.

Quality Tip! Not talking about "mastering a skill" via NFIL is important here. Imagine given the diversity of NFIL practices, it is hard to think the members of one organisation gain the same level of knowledge with completely different educators with varying expertise!

STEP 6 | KNOW YOUR MEMBERS' LEVEL OF COMPETENCE BY THEIR RESULTS!

The most tangible outcome of the development of your members' learning potential is the **clear outcome of their volunteer work.** How do you measure the outcomes of the projects implemented by your volunteers? How exactly can they showcase gaining the skills they said were the "most important" ones your organisation has given them?

***Quality Tip!** Whether it is a successfully implemented project or a flawless teamwork, the level of knowledge gained via your NFIL practices will show itself by concrete outcomes among your volunteers. These outcomes will help you get a better idea about the levels of their skills!*

STEP 7 | KNOW THE METHOD YOUR VOLUNTEERS ARE ASSESSING THEIR OWN WORK WITH!

Self-assessment is an important element of all NFIL practices. While results are important, NFIL does not define itself by the learning outcomes but by the learning experience - "the journey is what counts". You have to understand how your volunteers are assessing their own skills? Have they developed their own learning track or the development was more unforeseen by them?

***Quality Tip!** Self-assessment of any kind of needs at least a basic learning path and objectives the volunteers set for themselves. It would only take them the simple explanation of "how to get from point A to point B" - so they are aware of their learning process and keep track of their learning!*

STEP 8 | KNOW THE METHOD YOUR VOLUNTEERS CAN ASSESS EACH OTHER WITH!

Peer-assessment can provide the reliable step between keeping the conventional NFIL methodology and at the same time ensuring objectivity. Your educators play an important role here: do you have an already established mentorship or coaching system? How would it be possible for you to implement one?

***Quality Tip!** Peer-assessment, similar to self-assessment, needs to rely on a clear path for learning: the planned one compared to the achieved one. A trusted mentor can guide the mentee through the process by offering advice tailored to individual needs.*

STEP 9 | KNOW YOUR ORGANISATION'S PRESENT AND THE DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE!

The **internal education structure** of any organisation is not something that can establish itself or evolve overnight. Do you already have an internal education strategy in place? Do you have experienced members focusing on NFIL who could design this strategy based on the previous 8 steps for your organisation?

***Quality Tip!** Depending on the size of your organisation, understanding and improving your NFIL practices take time and commitment. Everything from resources through skills-development to skill-assessment are all important elements that need to be kept in mind to give you a clear picture: are your NFIL practices ready for recognition on the social and political field?*

STEP 10 | KNOWING IF THE THEORY WORKS!

We have arrived to a fairly clear picture on the current state of your organisation's NFIL practices and even more: we have looked into ways of improving it by a strategy. And making it perfect will still take an extra step: **testing your strategy!** Can you compose a group of volunteers from your organisation mixing more and less experienced members and ask them for feedback for your strategy for learning?

***Quality Tip!** The measure of any good strategy is how understandable it is for volunteers with different levels of knowledge. The newbie's eyes could offer you just as many good tips as the wisdom of someone more experienced in NFIL practices! Ask them and be open to their feedback - this is the way to perfect your tool and make sure it is as clear for everyone as it is for you.*

USEFUL CHECKLIST
PERFECTION IS CLOSE!

In case you were wondering how exactly can you ask feedback from your volunteers - or how you can take a new look at your work with fresh eyes the next day: the GREAT guidelines are also providing you with a useful checklist that our research has indicated will further build the credibility of your internal recognition tool:

- Contains reliable self-assessment
- Key competences are not too rigid
- Inclusive: useful for a diverse group of volunteers/learners
- Flexible - universal structure tailored to your needs
- Credible towards the external world
- Sets a clear structure on the learning environment (ASK model)
- Provides a clear learning path - empowering
- Usage of the tool is incentivised in your organisation
- Allows room for growth and adaptation based on cultural/geographical needs

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

We know that you have put several hours now into work - well invested! Your work has been more crucial than you could measure it now or in the next couple of months, but soon enough your volunteers will understand why they have been experiencing some changes in your organisation's NFIL practices. And they will be grateful for you when they learn, these changes serve their best interest and get them closer to the well-desired achievement of their hard work: their work and outcomes will be on the rise of interest both for employers and for their university professors as well

All thanks to you!

Yet, in order to make sure this developmental scale upholds, there are a few things you and your successor should keep in mind:

1. **A strategy for recognition needs time.** Take your time to explain the long-term vision to those around you and the people that will follow you. At first they might not see the vision you have for this recognition system, but there are some elements to be put on the horizon - below.

2. **There is help around.** The GR-EAT Guidelines are targeting youth organisations similar to yours - why not get in touch with them and share your experience in using the Guidelines? Visit the website and find the full list of organisations who have signed up and implemented a similarly tailored internal recognition system!

3. **Moving social and political recognition of NFIL forward.** Offering and receiving help from other organisations is one thing. Moving things on the social recognition scale to then move the same topic forward on the political level takes joint commitment. It is possible - and it will `not only take volunteering and NFIL to the next level, it will earn them their well-deserved place as the future of education, a long awaited paradigm shifts when it comes to education in the 21st century.

All you have to do is...

contact us at: **projects@aegee.org**

We are looking very much forward to hearing from you.

PARTNERS

AEGEE / European Students' Forum | *One of Europe's biggest interdisciplinary student organisations, striving for a democratic, diverse and borderless Europe. As a non-governmental, politically independent, and non-profit organisation AEGEE through its activities, empowers students and young people in Europe to take an active role in society.*

La Ligue de l'enseignement | *Is one of France's largest organisations in non-formal education. It gathers 25,000 associations with the common aims of fighting against all inequalities. It aims to guarantee access to education for everyone and further promotes a secular society, solidarity among citizens and active citizenship.*

Lifelong Learning Platform | *The umbrella organisation of 39 organisations working on the field of education, training and youth being connected to an extensive network of external stakeholders, as well as institutional and corporate representatives .*

Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) | *The Research Unit IDEA (Innovation, Diversity and Educational Approaches) at the VUB is a collaboration of academics and aims at gathering knowledge and understanding of levels for change situated on micro, meso and macro level to adjust (learning) environments to the needs of youth and adult learners.*

World Organisation of the Scout Movement | *The mission of Scouting is to empower young people through non-formal educational to build a world where they will be self-fulfilled as individuals and play a constructive role in their community at local, national and international level.*

Youth for Exchange and Understanding | *Youth for Exchange and Understanding is an international non-governmental youth organisation. YEU's vision is to promote peace, understanding and co-operation between young people, by using primarily non-formal education. YEU is run by young people, for young people, by means of a democratic structure.*

GLOSSARY

Formal education is purposive learning that takes place in a distinct and institutionalised environment specifically designed for teaching/training and learning, which is staffed by learning facilitators who are specifically qualified for the sector, level and subject concerned and which usually serves a specified category of learners (defined by age, level and specialism). Learning aims are almost always externally set, learning progress is usually monitored and assessed, and learning outcomes are usually recognised by certificates or diplomas. Much formal education provision is compulsory (school education).

Non-formal education is purposive but voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. These environments and situations may be intermittent or transitory, and the activities or courses that take place may be staffed by professional learning facilitators (such as youth trainers) or by volunteers (such as youth leaders). The activities and courses are planned, but are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects. They usually address specific target groups, but rarely document or assess learning outcomes or achievements in conventionally visible ways.

Informal learning is non-purposive learning which takes place in everyday life contexts in the family, at work, during leisure and in the community. It does have outcomes, but these are seldom recorded, virtually never certified and are typically neither immediately visible for the learner nor do they count in themselves for education, training or employment purposes. APEL systems are one way in which the outcomes of such learning can be made more visible and hence open to greater recognition.

Recognition is the validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education, non-formal or informal learning, acquired before requesting validation.

Validation is a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the four following distinct phases:
1. Identification through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual;
2. Documentation to make visible the individual's experiences;
3. A formal assessment of these experiences;
4. Certification of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification.

Skill means having the knowledge and experience needed to perform a specific task or job – someone who has learned what to do (possesses the knowledge) and how to do it (can transfer the knowledge into real practice), which also means that someone else can observe the skill in action.

Competence means the ability to apply knowledge, know-how and skills in a stable/recurring or changing situation. Two elements are crucial: applying what one knows and can do to a specific task or problem, and being able to transfer this ability between different situations.

Eight key competences as identified in the framework of lifelong learning are the following: communication in the mother tongue as well as in a foreign language, mathematical and scientific competence, digital competence, social and civic competences, learning to learn, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression.

Learning providers are organisations or a set of institutionalised arrangements that deliver learning, that is, that manage and monitor the provision of courses of some kind, whether formal or non-formal. Learning providers may also design and/or execute the courses they offer, and they may operate in either the public or the private sector. They may or may not be subject to some form of state or professional regulation to assure quality and standards.

Lifelong Learning is all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective (European Commission)

Volunteering is an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives.

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