

VolontEurope Strategy 2021 – 2023

Introduction

This document sets out the strategy for the VolontEurope network over the next three years, 2021-2023. It was adopted unanimously by the VolontEurope Extraordinary General Assembly (which met virtually) on 3 December 2020.

As the milestones set out are being achieved, this will continue to be a dynamic document, to be reviewed and updated based on the discussions and decisions emerging from every Annual General Meeting and Extraordinary General Assembly.

Communications

We now have an excellent new website and with the support of Alex Duffy, have strengthened our social media presence too. We must look towards developing a communications strategy that goes together with our overall strategy.

Outputs

- Communications strategy developed.
- Companies support our communications strategy through skills-based volunteering.

Outcomes

- Visibility of VolontEurope is increased.
- Members feel more in touch with each other.
- Members have more information through the website and social media.

Membership development

This is without doubt one of the biggest parts of our new communications strategy, along with funding.

Our current membership stands at nearly 40 organisations, of which three-quarters are full members. Of all the members, around nine do not engage at all and have not paid their membership fees in 2019; further three engage sporadically but have paid their membership fees in 2019; and two organisations joined in 2020 and have not yet engaged, nor paid their 2020 fees.

We should put in place with immediate effect a membership development strategy. Leading by example, Board Directors should each try to recruit at least one other organisation to the network. We could then ask individual members to do the same thing in their countries. We also need to decide what happens to members who do not pay their membership dues and do not communicate the reasons for doing so, even after repeated attempts to contact them.

However, we need to be clear what are the benefits offered to members through the network (see below Services for Members). If finances and time permit, and the COVID-19 pandemic situation and the accompanying restrictions on travel and face-to-face meetings change, Board Directors could hold country-based meetings to try to recruit new members to the network. We will need a well-designed virtual flyer which sits on our website which states the members' benefits.

We also reaffirm our commitment to continue supporting our UK members after the end of the EU Membership transition period, from 1 January 2021. We should consult with them in the very near future to have their views on how they can continue to participate in Volonteuropa and what specific support they require, especially if funding opportunities via EU programmes will continue to be available to UK beneficiaries. It is worth remembering that the UK is still part of the Council of Europe and Volonteuropa holds a full membership status in the INGO Conference of the Council of Europe. Furthermore, as a network, we are members of IAVE and Volontare, which are not linked politically nor geographically to the EU, thus we commit to continue securing opportunities for our UK members through those two networks. Finally, we will consider ways in which we can include UK organisations in the work of Volonteuropa, ensuring that they have access to information, webinars, projects (if possible, as set out above), and conferences.

Outputs

- Development of a membership development strategy
- Board of Directors each recruit one new member
- Individual members in each country also try to recruit one new member
- (if possible) Country-based meetings to recruit new members (post Covid)
- Develop a flyer which details membership benefits
- Continue to support UK members post-Brexit

Outcomes

- Increase in membership; at least five new members by the end of 2021
- Existing members feel confident that they can detail the benefits of membership to potential new members
- UK members feel supported and included in the work of the network

Funding the network – membership fees

We should with some urgency re-examine our membership fee structure with a view to proposing, for discussion at the next Extraordinary General Assembly on 3 December 2020 and approval at the AGM in the spring of 2021. This should be easier if we demonstrate during the year to come new and better benefits to members and a livelier network.

Outputs

- Treasurer leads a small group to re-examine membership fees before the AGM in 2021.

Outcomes

- A proposal is made to the AGM in 2021 for a modest increase in membership fees.

Funding the network – other sources

We are slowly but steadily looking at approvals of Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership and KA3 projects, where VolontEurope is a partner. As it stands, one project, led by CEMEA in France, is approved and starts on 31 December 2020 and others are in the pipeline.

With the new MFF, there are various factors which will contribute to increase competition which existed before the COVID-19 pandemic and have since been amplified further. As an example, Europe for Citizens, which used to provide core grant funding to VolontEurope when its Secretariat was managed by Volunteering Matters, is ceasing at the end of 2020 and incorporated into the Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Value Programme (CERV).

With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and introduction of the Corona Response Investment Initiative (CRII), in the Commission's proposal for the new MFF, despite the European Parliament's opposition, the CERV budget 2021-2027 is being substantially reduced in the current MFF negotiations following the proposal for the recovery plan.

It would be beneficial to also consider other, non-EU, sources of funding, such as for example foundation or private sector funding.

Outputs

- Fundraising should be a key point of discussion at each Board meeting.
- Directors should come to the Board meeting with ideas for fundraising efforts.

Outcomes

- The income of VE significantly increases by the end of 2021.

Partnership and project funding opportunities

Once agreed on a member exchange platform, other than the external facing website, we should have a dedicated space where partnership and project funding opportunities can be posted. This would mean any opportunities for, for example Erasmus+ funding, ESC partnership and any other programmes which might emerge from the new MFF. Members could post their ideas and develop virtual discussions around projects and form consortia to make project applications to the appropriate national agencies.

Outputs

- Development of an active space for members to seek partnerships, post opportunities for projects, etc.
- Development of a strategy around corporate volunteering as a partnership between VolontEurope and Volontare which would promote corporate volunteering to the European Institutions and to European Companies.
- Establish an alliance between VolontEurope/Volontare and European Companies.
- Funding applications to SME or CSR funding sources to support the above.

Outcomes

- Members find it easy to make partnerships and develop projects within the network.
- A corporate volunteering strategy is in place by mid-2021.
- Corporate volunteering increases in visibility in the European Institutions and European Companies and is associated with VolontEurope and Volontare.
- Funding is achieved at a modest level by end 2021.

Other services for members – information and advocacy

Members should be able to access an information and advocacy space on the member exchange platform where information is posted around the EU institutions relevant to them. This might be about petitions the network might support, the relevant workings of the European Parliament or Commission. Members could also look for support for their own issues from the network.

Outputs

- Develop an information and advocacy space.
- Populate the space with information from the EU institutions.
- Members also populate the space with their own issues and seek support if appropriate.

Outcomes

- Members feel more informed about EU institutional issues relevant to them.
- Members can ask for support with their own advocacy issues.

Developing a Brussels presence

In 2021, we should work towards increasing our presence in Brussels, COVID-19 permitting. We have already moved our physical office space to that of the Lifelong Learning Platform at Mundo-j, 10 rue de l'Industrie, in the heart of Brussels institutional quarter.

We should seek to have one employee based in Brussels once we the COVID-19 situation permits; however, we can also look to employ interns. This may be possible through the ESC programme, Traineeships, and Internships, where we are currently in the process of applying for an ESC Quality Label and once secured, will answer to calls for proposals for this stream of funding, with the view to offer this opportunity to Serkan Aba, our Board Director, to be based in Brussels.

Outputs

- Work towards having one employee based in Brussels by end 2021 as well as interns, via the ESC programme.
- Seek support from companies for an annual conference and a corporate volunteering prize in 2021.

Outcomes

- The network has increased visibility in Brussels and is able to follow the work of the EU Institutions.

- At least one employee is based in Brussels by end 2021 and we have regular interns in place.
- An annual conference is re-established by end 2021 with corporate support.
- A corporate volunteering prize is recognised as an achievement for European companies and is associated with VolontEurope/Voluntare.

Strategic partnerships with other networks

VolontEurope is a full member of Social Platform, Lifelong Learning Platform, Civil Society Europe, European Civic Forum, and a founding member of Europe Future Fringe. The annual membership fee with Social Platform is €737, with LLLP it is €800, with Civil Society Europe it is €500 and with European Civic Forum it is €100. We are also full members of Voluntare (annual membership fee of €100) and with IAVE (bi-annual membership fee of \$70). There is no membership fee for Europe Future Fringe.

We are very active in all the platforms but should look to engage ourselves in the activities and opportunities offered by them more, both in terms of the Directors' engagement, as well as that of members. The membership with VOLUNTARE and IAVE is also deemed as being strategic for the positioning and influence of VolontEurope in the international employee volunteering sector.

Outputs

- VolontEurope remains a full member in the current European and global platforms over the course of the next years covered by the strategy.
- Directors and Members become more engaged in the activities of these two platforms.
- VolontEurope joins other networks on strategic basis.

Outcomes

- VolontEurope is more visible as a member of European platforms, taking part in a greater number of activities, including through our involvement with Europe Future Fringe
- VolontEurope is an active member of Voluntare and IAVE.