

Conceptual framework of the IB VAP – Volunteers' Abroad Programs

1. Aims

A voluntary service abroad is a learning service and encourages the education and orientation ability of each individual volunteer. It contributes to an understanding between people of different nationalities and to the discussion about social, political, cultural, economic and ecological interdependence worldwide. This special form of a voluntary service offers young people the possibility to global learning and contributes to strengthening social action, democracy, human rights and worldwide solidarity.

Through the volunteers' practical involvement in the host organization, the IB VAP provide a concrete contribution to solidarity in the host organization and raise awareness for social and ecological challenges in the world. A voluntary service abroad enables the volunteer to get to know diverse life styles and raise awareness for diversity in values. With that, the IB VAP contribute to the volunteers' further development of linguistic, intercultural and social competences which are crucial to the future career as well as to the dialogue between people of different cultures.

Moreover, the IB VAP put their main focus on the partnership with the host organizations in the different countries. Especially concerning choice and pedagogic supervision of the volunteers, we work together in terms of a partnership at eye level. The teams of the IB VAP constantly reflect and develop the cooperation with the partner organizations of the Global South and the Global North under a sustainable, diversity conscious and power critical perspective.

The IB VAP offer their volunteers the possibility to see themselves as part of a shared world and to see their familiar surroundings as well as the general living situation in Germany and especially themselves through different eyes. This change of perspective contributes to a better understanding of oneself and other people and to questioning personal thinking and action patterns.

Furthermore, the IB VAP aim at encouraging civic participation of young people in Germany after having come back from abroad.

2. Programs

The IB volunteers' abroad programs basically incorporate two kinds of programs: On the one hand, the international voluntary service for young people (Internationaler Jugendfreiwilligendienst – IJFD) – supported by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and on the other hand, the developmental program *weltwärts* – supported by the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

The guidelines of the IJFD derive from the act to promotion of voluntary services for young people and complement the act through the right to promotion of intercultural, sociopolitical and individual competences of the volunteers in a different culture.

The support guideline for implementing the developmental voluntary service *weltwärts* proposes a developmental voluntary service for young adults aged 18-28 living in countries of the OECD/DAC-list.

The preamble of the support guideline for implementing the developmental voluntary service *weltwärts* (01.01.2014) states that the focus hereby is a developmental learning and educational service which offers the volunteers great possibilities of “global learning” and furthermore motivates and strengthens a social commitment outreaching the voluntary service.

3. The pedagogical work

3.1 Seminars

The pedagogical work of the IB VAP consists of the selection process, implementing the educational seminars (get-to-know-, preparation-, introduction-, intermediate- and returnee seminars), advising and supporting the volunteers individually and cooperating with the host organizations.

At least 15 seminar days of pedagogical preparation and follow-up-work are part of both offered programs (*weltwärts* and IJFD). Additionally, intermediate seminars of five days are offered. In some countries the volunteers will also participate in introduction seminars in the host country. The preparation and returnee seminars are held outside of the actual voluntary service (within 3 months before departure and at the latest 6 months after returning). Moreover, the volunteers have to do an internship lasting 5 to 10 days in an institution in Germany whose working area is similar to the working area the volunteer will be working in abroad. Preparation, follow-up-work as well as the intermediate seminar are an essential part of the voluntary service and therefore obligatory.

Within the framework of preparing the voluntary service, we also offer two one-day-workshops on how to build a circle of supporters. During these workshops the volunteers receive information about funding their voluntary service. We will give impetus and examples for a successful set-up of a circle of supporters.

Aim of our seminar work is the preparation for intercultural and diversity conscious encounters and future tasks in the host organization. With our educational work, we would like to support the volunteers in their professional orientation, their personal life planning and in finding their social role. Of special importance hereby is the transparency of the learning objectives and the volunteers' participation in creating the contents of the seminars. To continuously improve this process we ask the volunteers for evaluation during and after the voluntary service.

Next to the personal level of intercultural encounters, the preparation and follow-up-seminars also put an emphasis on the discussion about sustainable, diversity conscious and power critical aspects of the commitment as a volunteer abroad.

3.1.1 Get-to-know seminars

Aims and contents of the get-to-know-seminars are

- to get to know the IB as a responsible body for a voluntary service abroad as well as to present the framework for a voluntary service abroad;
- to inform the applicants in detail about the host countries and about our partner organizations. We present possible fields of action, the host organizations and their requirements and job profiles in individual and group conversations.
- to reflect the motivation, the individual interests and personal abilities of the applicants: hereby especially work out the participants' expectations and fears and get a first impression about their wishes and the requirements of the host organization;
- to enable a discussion about chances and limitations of a voluntary service.

An important component of the get-to-know-seminars are personality orientated and group dynamic processes which will give information about the applicants' motivation and values as well as their way of approaching matters. These are cross-sectional-tasks that build the basic fundament of the conceptual framework of the IB VAP. The seminars are held by the pedagogical staff of the IB as well as freelance employees and with support of former volunteers.

To be able to do a voluntary service, a willingness to work with people in the host country and to work with oneself is required. In addition to that, specified requirements of the host organization like language skills, physical and psychological resilience, special abilities or prior experience are needed. During the conciliation process it is clarified in dialogue between volunteer, sending organization and partner organization abroad which working place seems to fit.

3.1.2 Preparatory / pre-departure seminars

Preparation and follow-up work are an indispensable part of a voluntary service abroad. Besides sensitizing the volunteers for intercultural encounters and for the importance of global learning, the seminars focus on encouraging social skills and key qualifications, enabling the volunteers to reflect experiences of their personal living situation and their own (gender-)role. Furthermore we give and support knowledge of the respective host country and encourage the confrontation with social and political processes, especially regarding the voluntary service.

Next to clarifying organizational and practical questions, an important part of the preparation seminars is crisis and emergency prevention. On the one hand, it is about

giving out information and raising awareness about risks and possible action. On the other hand, it is about supporting resource-orientated coping strategies.

When carrying out these seminars, we especially put an emphasis on assuming personal responsibility, strengthening the sense of responsibility for the common good as well as a reflected discussion about different values, cultures and social conditions. We achieve this by self-catering, independent preparation of seminar contents and by using methods to sensitize the perception of oneself and how one is perceived by others.

The unification of individuals to form a community serves to build a network of volunteers who can strengthen and support each other during and after the voluntary service. Furthermore, democratic and civic structures are continued and newly built that way.

3.1.3 Introduction and intermediate seminars

In some countries, we – or rather our partners and/or external mentors – offer introduction seminars for an orientation on-site. This enables the volunteers to approach language, culture and history of the host country, everyday life and to find contact to our IB-mentors in a safe environment.

Having completed half of their voluntary service, the volunteers take part in intermediate seminars which usually take place in the host country or a neighboring country. The aims of our intermediate seminars are

- the definition of the volunteer's individual position
- reflecting integration and perception of culture, diversity conscious action or dealing with differences
- debating the work situation in the host organization
- clarifying possible fields of conflict and empowering strategies of action
- to work on perspectives for the time to come
- make room for free time for the exchange with other volunteers and for individual needs

This way the preceding time as a volunteer is reflected and wishes and projects/plans for the remaining time are expressed.

3.1.4 Return seminars and alumni work

The return seminars focus on reflecting the voluntary service considering personal experiences and impressions. The volunteers look back on their year abroad and compare their experiences and impressions with their expectations before going abroad. They hereby review their perception and identity as a German volunteer in a foreign country.

Another focus is the exchange about saying farewell to their host country and the “coming back again” to Germany as well as related questions about planning their future and the up-coming perspectives of the volunteers.

We especially put an emphasis on the continuing commitment of volunteers. Our aims hereby are

- to build up a network for the exchange of alumni
- to support voluntary and sociopolitical commitment and
- the connection with the IB and its work as well as the support of the seminar work of the IB VAP

These aims are carried out by active cooperation with the association “Zuhause Weltweit e.V” (engl. worldwide at home) founded by former volunteers of the IB, by contributing to our seminars and by supporting our public relations (informational events, fairs).

Especially as part of the get-to-know and preparation seminars these “alumni” are a great enrichment with their experiences and knowledge and essential for future volunteers in their role as authentic rapporteurs. We also support the commitment of individual “alumni” by offering external qualification to integrate them afterwards in our seminar work as freelance employees.

3.2 Pedagogical support outside of the seminars

The individual support of the volunteers is carried out by the IB as the responsible body in Germany, by the partner organization abroad, by external mentors as well as in some countries by internal IB-mentors in the host country.

The IB is in regular contact with the volunteers and the host organizations. This contact is realized via telephone, E-Mail, Skype or in personal contact on business trips. The frequency and intensity of the contact depends on the volunteer’s needs, but happens at least once a month. Throughout the year, the volunteers hand in written reports on a regular basis referring to the respective period of time which serve as a reflection of this period. The pedagogical staff of the IB responds in detail to these intermediate reports. It is ensured that our staff is accessible. The volunteers get the contact details of an emergency phone before leaving the country which can be called in case of an emergency.

If possible, the pedagogical staff of the IB will visit partner organizations abroad every two or three years in the framework of a business trip.

During the voluntary service in the host country the partner organization is responsible for guidance and individual support. This includes

- introduction into the daily routine with clear comprehensive information about the working area and its procedures and structures
- naming a contact person for operational and personal concerns
- support handling patients, inhabitants and clients

- regular reflection talks

Next to contact persons in the host organization, there are a lot of countries where external mentors are available which have been chosen and are financed by us as the responsible body. These mentors do not work at the site of deployment, are contact persons for the volunteers when they arrive in the host country, offer support in dealing with authorities and are contact person for all questions and problems on-site. Furthermore, in their function as contact persons of the IB, the mentors are an essential support when difficulties need to be clarified and solutions need to be found.

4. Working with the partner organization

International voluntary services for young people can only be successful through a networked process. The IB VAP see themselves as a learning organization which is process and dialogue orientated, also with regard to the cooperation with partners. Communicating over great spatial distances, linguistic and cultural barriers, different organizational structures, basic conditions and values are challenging.

Our aim is the best possible support of the volunteers' commitment as well as of social and intercultural learning in the framework of a trusting partnership with the host organizations. For that, we work together with our partner organizations to establish a shared understanding, to find agreements and in the communication and regulation of responsibilities.

The practical cooperation covers the individual preparation, guidance, support and follow-up work of the volunteers and furthermore aims at building and expanding lively and long-term partnerships.

In cooperation with partner organizations in countries of the Global South, the IB VAP are part of the pilot stage of the South-North-component in the weltwärts-program and coordinate the intake of an initially limited number of volunteers from the Global South in Germany.

5. Evaluation, quality management and quality development

The satisfaction of the volunteers as well as of our partner organizations is evaluated on a regular basis to meet the demands of our volunteers and partner organizations und to review our own quality standards. Another important part of our quality management is a cross-provider network and cooperation with other sending organizations. The quality of our voluntary service is measured

- by the effect for our volunteers (quality of results) – e.g. by inviting former volunteers to evaluate the IB VAP on the website

www.meinfreiwilligendienst.de and through a scale of satisfaction in their final evaluation report

- by an equal interaction with our partner organizations considering their resources (structural quality)
- by a successful communication and agreeing on quality criteria with our partners while implementing a voluntary service (process quality) and
- by creating relationships which respect existing differences of culture and a respectful treatment of each other on eye-level (relationship quality)

The pedagogic employees of the IB train themselves by taking part in conferences and congresses as well as internal and external training offers. Hereby the focus is on topics like health prevention of the volunteers, crisis- and conflict management and quality development.

6. Support cycles

To fulfill the demands and personal quality standards of the IB voluntary programs abroad, the sending organizations have to raise significant own funds. These funds are mostly provided by donations or contributions of the support circles of the volunteers.

The employees of the IB advise and support the volunteers when building up their support circles by giving them a handout and offering workshops in which volunteers receive practical examples.

Building a support circle is based on the idea of solidarity to enable all volunteers independent of origin and financial possibilities to actively participate in enabling themselves and others to do a voluntary service abroad. Furthermore, the supporters contribute to intercultural dialogue and international understanding.