



YOU PART

Engage. Connect. Empower

VIRTUAL EXCHANGES

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VIRTUAL EXCHANGES

FACTS

Age of participants: 13+

Number of participants: 5-10

Duration: 120-150 minutes

GOALS

The activity enables online-facilitated discussions between participants based in different countries and/or regions with the focus on people-to-people interaction and dialogue. The main goal is to develop soft skills that are key to employability and are often not formally recognised, such as developing intercultural awareness, media and digital literacy, teamwork, etc. Virtual exchanges are able to prepare, deepen and extend physical mobilities, and create new demand for them.

TOPICS

Organisers of virtual exchanges are free to choose the topics on which they will focus on. For instance, virtual exchanges could be used to: encourage intercultural dialogue and increase tolerance through people-to-people interactions; promote various types of virtual exchanges as a complement to physical mobility; enhance critical thinking and media literacy; foster the digital and soft skills development of students, young people and youth workers to enhance employability; promote citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination; strengthen the youth dimension in the relations of the EU with third countries.

MATERIALS

Organisers of virtual exchanges must provide an IT-based online platform for the virtual exchange. This could be Microsoft Teams based meeting workspace (free of charge for non-profit non-governmental organisations) or some other alternative online meeting workspace.

Virtual exchange participants need a computer with a webcam and microphone, also with headphones if necessary. Tablet and/or smart phone can alternatively be used instead of a computer. Stable internet connection is however required.

All virtual exchanges need to be moderated by trained facilitators and besides the facilitator, organisers need to provide adequate IT support to help participants connect and stay connected to the virtual platform.

PREPARATIONS

As with a physical exchange, the organisers of the virtual exchange must first define the goals of the virtual exchange and target groups, as well as develop an agenda and working methods for the virtual exchange. The organisers also need to decide how many modules of the exchange they will organise. Then they need to invite potential participants to join the virtual exchange and provide them with clear instructions on how to join the virtual exchange; e.g. by email with a link to the respective platform.

INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1

Introduce yourself, preferably in a funny way. Go around the virtual room and invite the participants to briefly introduce themselves and, if applicable, to name the organisations where they work or volunteer and/or give some other personal info.

Step 2

At the beginning of the virtual exchange event, it may be useful to organise virtual “icebreakers”. The goal of this activity is to create a creative and relaxed working atmosphere.

You could also do a so-called “mood barometer” with the question “How are you feeling today?” The classic verbal “so, how are you folks doing?” might only provoke a few hesitant responses. However, since the virtual exchange is an online event, you should ask the participants “how they are doing” in a different way. This time, try a poll (using a tool like [slido](#)). For example, check the overall energy in the virtual room by running a poll such as: “On a scale of 1-5, how are you feeling today?” Or: “What is your energy level today?”

Everyone can contribute, so you can immediately find out how everyone is doing at the beginning of the session. Use the poll results as a discussion starter: “I can see that not everyone is feeling at their best. Would anyone like to share their thoughts?”

Step 3

Describe the previously chosen thematic focuses and explain the reasons for the choice. Present the overall and specific objectives of the virtual exchange.

Step 4

Virtual exchange activities can take many shapes and forms. Since it is not possible to list them all, here are just a few suggestions to inspire organisers and show what is possible via virtual exchange:

1. Support volunteers in the process of pre-departure training and post-project reflection as part of a volunteering project.
2. For mobility abroad, have participants work asynchronously on activities on preparing for life abroad, “culture shock” and intercultural competences. Let them get to know the young people they will be meeting abroad/living with in the virtual exchange session...
3. After the project, have the group come together for another online dialogue session to support reflection on their volunteering experience.
4. Young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods discuss the barriers they and their peers face in accessing their social rights. This information should be used by a consortium of youth organisations to develop a needs-based youth project that impacts young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods and helps them access social rights.

Step 5

At the end of the virtual exchange, ask the participants how they liked the event. You can ask for general feedback or ask the participants questions for a poll (as in Step 2).

If applicable, for instance if the virtual exchange is to be followed up by another virtual session or another physical mobility activity, consider assigning tasks to the participants. Something they need to do in order to utilise the skills acquired during the virtual exchange. For instance, participants could produce video clips on a specific topic and present them in the next session.

Step 6

After the virtual exchange, share material produced and collected with all participants. If applicable, share information about tasks to be completed by the participants after the virtual exchange.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATIONS FOR FACILITATORS

Virtual exchange is a technology-enabled people-to-people educational activity that takes place over a period of time and involves constant communication and interaction between individuals or groups who are geographically separated from each other, supported by facilitators and/or educators.

Virtual exchange projects are online people-to-people activities that promote intercultural dialogue and soft skills development. They make it possible for every participant to have access to high-quality international and intercultural education (both formal and non-formal) without physical mobility. While virtual debates or training cannot fully replace the benefits of physical mobility, participants in virtual exchanges ought to be able to benefit from some of the advantages of international educational experiences.

Virtual exchanges are particularly useful when organisers do not have the resources to gather participants in physical mobility activities and/or when this would not be cost-effective due to large geographical distances of potential participants. Virtual exchanges also help participants with physical mobility problems to overcome barriers that prevent them from participating in physical exchanges and thus in learning and interaction. Virtual exchanges can complement physical mobility activities, for instance to introduce relevant topics and skills to future youth exchange participants.



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