



BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE THROUGH REVERSE MENTORSHIP

Developing a sustainable model and insights
Guidelines for model implementation



Vilnius (Lithuania), 2024

"Bridging the Digital Exclusion through Intergenerational Exchange" is a novel initiative funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Lithuania, which aims to develop, test and scale up a mentoring system for young and elderly people in Lithuania and the Nordic countries. The project aims to bridge the generation gap by giving young people the opportunity to mentor seniors, promoting digital skills development and intergenerational cooperation.

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Project partners: Association "Langas į ateitį" (Lead Partner, Lithuania), Nordic Adult Learning Network (Finland) and IT-Guide (Sweden).



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This document outlines the methodology for bridging the digital divide through intergenerational experiences, focusing on engaging youth to mentor older generations in digital skills. The initiative targets various organizations, including schools, libraries, and senior communities, offering a structured approach to implementing mentoring activities that enhance digital literacy among seniors.

The project emphasises collaboration between youth and older adults, thus fostering stronger community ties while addressing the growing need for digital inclusion in a technology-driven world.

The methodology provides step-by-step guidance on how to integrate these mentoring activities into the existing activities of organisations. It includes recommendations on planning, organizing, and executing the initiative, tailored for different types of institutions, and encourages collaboration with local partners to ensure effective implementation and sustainability. Additionally, it highlights the benefits for participating organizations, youth, and seniors, with a focus on long-term community engagement and the development of key leadership and digital skills for youth.

Key outcomes of the project include improved digital literacy among seniors, strengthened intergenerational connections, and enhanced social and civic participation. The initiative also promotes the development of youth leadership through practical, hands-on mentoring experiences.

Introduction

In today's fast-changing digital world, the ability to use technology is becoming increasingly important in everyday life. Many public services are now delivered online and many more are being digitized. However, not everyone has the same access and skills to use them. There are many who for various reasons cannot or do not participate in digital life. It is therefore a question of equality to try and make the transition to digital services as smooth as possible for as many as possible. Statistics show that there are many seniors who for one reason or another do not enter the digital realm.¹.

To tackle this challenge, we propose to involve communities and organizations by promoting intergenerational communication and volunteering, using young volunteers to help seniors acquire the digital skills they need. The thinking behind this approach is that many young people are immersed in the digital world, and therefore have the opportunity to become excellent mentors and advisors for the elderly. Such activities will not only help seniors to become more digital, but also foster intergenerational communication and understanding, which can strengthen community ties. Improved digital skills, and in particular digital self-confidence, will help seniors to access services, communicate with each other and with their relatives, and engage in self-expression and creative activities.

Volunteers helping seniors in the digital sphere can be encouraged in various ways. First of all, it is a great opportunity for personal development - they can learn new skills, especially those relating to communication and training, which will be useful for their future career. In addition, interacting with seniors can give them the opportunity to hear interesting life stories and learn from the experiences of older generations. Volunteers can also feel useful and contribute to the well-being of their community by helping seniors to become more digital. Schools and other organizations can recognize the efforts of volunteers by giving certificates of acknowledgement and including social citizenship work in their curriculum.

Schools can make a significant contribution to the sustainability of this model. For instance, they can integrate volunteering into their curriculum by encouraging students to take part in projects that help the community. It is also possible to organize mentoring programs for older pupils to gain volunteering experience and work with local organizations to give pupils the opportunity to take part in volunteering activities they supervise.

Meetings between seniors and volunteers can take place in venues open to the public with the necessary digital infrastructure (computers, public Wi-Fi, etc.). This approach offers both security for volunteers and the required organizational support in terms of registering

¹ EU Agency for Fundamental Rights study, <https://fra.europa.eu/lt/publication/2023/older-people-digital-rights>

participants and publishing timetables. Municipal public libraries are best suited in this respect, as well as adult education institutions and universities of the third age (for the university students), community centres or other spaces that make participants feel comfortable.

Public libraries are often centres of community involvement, where the elderly feel comfortable and safe. They also have the necessary infrastructure and resources to offer digital literacy consultations as many of them are equipped with computers, internet access and other technologies that are essential for learning. In addition, libraries have qualified staff who can help coordinate volunteer activities and provide support to both volunteers and seniors.

Another important aspect is the accessibility of libraries. They are often conveniently located and easily accessible by public transport. This is particularly important for seniors who may have limited mobility or face other challenges.

Finally, libraries are places where lifelong learning is encouraged. They already are regarded as centers of education and information, so it is natural that they can also become digital literacy hubs offering the mentoring activities described in this model. This environment fosters learning and communication, so that seniors, on the one hand, can feel motivated and supported, and volunteers, on the other, can feel useful and valued.

Counselling for the elderly can also be undertaken by voluntary organizations, alongside the provision of mainstream social services and home visits, local youth NGOs, students and young professionals from socially responsible companies.

In the following part, the two models of action are supported by various means and recommendations for their implementation are proposed to address the issue at community level, promoting intergenerational communication and volunteering.

Overview of the social and legal environment

Volunteering in Lithuania

Volunteering in Lithuania is open to anyone aged 14 and over in any non-profit organization, as stipulated in the Law on Voluntary Activities of the Republic of Lithuania (XI-1500)².

Any non-profit organization can sign a bilateral volunteering agreement and recruit volunteers. Each organization foresees the need for volunteers and the corresponding profile, and during a face-to-face meeting, the expectations of both sides are discussed: tasks, scope of activities, timetable, communication, matching the capabilities of both parties.

Volunteers can find an organization of interest independently in the dedicated database³ and contact the organization directly or the Voluntary Service Organization (VSO) in their county or municipality⁴.

Volunteering can take many forms - volunteering and voluntary service, national and international volunteering, short and long-term volunteering. Each form has its own advantages, so it is important to choose not only a topic but also a form that suits the needs of the volunteer. Voluntary service programs are open to Lithuanian citizens aged 14 and over and persons under 18 can volunteer if their legal representatives do not object. Volunteers must comply with the rules of the host organization and prepare themselves properly for the specific activity. The host organization undertakes the responsibility to explain the rules, train the volunteers in the activity and provide them with the tools they need to carry out the activity.

In July 2024, an updated Law on Voluntary Activities of the Republic of Lithuania came into force, defining the activities of the coordinating organization (usually an NGO) and distinguishing between short-term and long-term volunteering⁵.

² Law on Volunteering of the Republic of Lithuania <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.402802>

³ <https://old.jrd.lt/informacija-jaunimui/savanoryste/organizaciju-paieska>

⁴ <https://old.jrd.lt/savanoryste/svo-akreditacija/akredituotu-svo-organizaciju-sarasas>

⁵ Law on Volunteering of the Republic of Lithuania (2023 revision)) <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/5abd316094f911eea70ce7cabd08f150?jfwid=mqzcg2qk>

Youth voluntary service

Youth Voluntary Service (YVS) is an intensive 6-month program for young people aged between 14 and 29, where young people volunteer for at least 35 hours a month at an accredited host organization of their choice. Volunteers meet regularly with their assigned mentor and learn to overcome difficulties. The JST program offers the opportunity not only to discover an activity you like, but also to get to know yourself better and develop general competences.

The organization commits to a 40-hour per month volunteering schedule that matches the volunteer's competences and is meaningful for both parties. A mentor is assigned to the volunteer to train, develop and support him/her during the service⁶.

Participation in the JST program (6 months) earns 0.25 entry points to Lithuanian higher education institutions and counts as civic and social activities at schools.

The European Solidarity Corps

The European Solidarity Corps is a European Union-sponsored program that aims to give young people opportunities to develop themselves by helping others. It is open to all young people aged between 18 and 30. More information: <https://www.solidarumokorpusas.lt/>.

Volunteering experiences in Lithuanian schools

Starting in the 2017-2018 school year, the general curriculum of primary and secondary schools includes compulsory practical socio-civic activities, which are measured in hours.

Social and civic activities are mandatory for pupils in the basic education program, with a minimum of 10 hours per school year, depending on their grade. Schools can assign more hours based on pupils' age.

For the 2023-2024 school year, pupils in grades 6, 8, and 10 must complete at least 10 hours, while pupils in grades 5, 7, and 9 must complete at least 20 hours. From 2024-2025, all pupils in grades 5-10 will need at least 20 hours. Secondary school students must complete at least 70 hours over two years. These activities should be recorded and can be done individually or in groups, often in cooperation with associations or local authorities. Voluntary service, with proof, can also count.

The general curriculum for elementary and secondary schools includes specific socio-civic activities designed to develop students' competences through practical activities. These include civic engagement, which develops decision-making skills and motivation to

⁶ <https://old.jrd.lt/savanoryste/jst>

participate in school and local community activities; civic knowledge is implemented through practical or project-based activities in cooperation with various children's and young people's organizations, interest groups, and government and local authorities; media and information literacy; and social/charitable activities aim to develop the values of respect, caring for and helping others.

Pupils routinely record the hours of socio-civic activities they have completed by filling in a dedicated sheet. However, only a small number of pupils reflect on their activities by writing evaluations or reflections, or by keeping a competence journal. Pupils tend to follow teachers' recommendations on which activities to carry out, and they also tend to choose their own activities from a list provided or to rely on the recommendations of subject teachers. The usual choice of activities is school based, although extracurricular activities may now be required in the three areas of social citizenship. Students in large cities are more likely than others to choose activities outside school, as there is a lack of out-of-school activities in smaller areas⁷.

The coordination of socio-civic activities is the responsibility of the tutor, or another person designated by the head of school. Their role is to help the pupil to plan and evaluate his or her activities and, if the social-civic activities are carried out outside the school, keep in contact with representatives of the organizations and take an interest in how the pupils are doing⁸.

Sources used and recommended readings in Lithuanian:

- Information about volunteering for those working in organizations, including opportunities and benefits of engaging in volunteer work.
[Link: Savanorystė – Savanoriška veikla](#)
- A guide for young people interested in volunteering, providing resources, opportunities, and insights on how to get involved.
[Link: Information for Youth – Volunteering](#)
- Details on the Youth Voluntary Service program in Lithuania, including steps to participate and the benefits for young volunteers.
[Link: Youth Voluntary Service](#)
- An analysis of various volunteering models across Europe, exploring best practices and trends in voluntary engagement.
[Link: Analysis of Volunteering Models in Europe \(2011\)](#)

⁷ Socio-political education through practical activities: experiences of school representatives and students
<https://www.nsa.smm.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Socialine-pilietine-veikla.pdf>

⁸ On the approval of the general curricula for primary, primary and secondary education for the school years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, Annex 9.

- The official legal framework regulating voluntary activities in Lithuania, outlining rights, responsibilities, and procedures.
[Link: Law on Voluntary Activities of the Republic of Lithuania](#)
- A government-approved national program promoting volunteer work in Lithuania, including strategic goals and implementation methods.
[Link: National Volunteering Program \(2013\)](#)
- A report offering an in-depth look at the state of volunteering in Lithuania, including statistics, challenges, and opportunities.
[Link: Overview of Volunteering in Lithuania \(2012\)](#)
- A comprehensive guide for organizations on how to manage and work effectively with volunteers.
[Link: Kurapkaitienė N. "Fundamentals of Working with Volunteers"](#)
- A report detailing the experiences of schools and students in Lithuania engaging in practical social and civic activities.
[Link: Social and Civic Education through Practical Activities: Experiences of Schools and Students](#)
- Methodological recommendations for organizing and conducting social activities in schools, designed to enhance social and civic engagement.
[Link: Social Activity Methodological Recommendations](#)

Stakeholders: experiences and expectations

During the implementation of the initiative, meetings were held with organizations from Lithuania and partner countries to share their experiences and expectations.

Lithuanian organizations

Seniors' organizations

One of the most important organizations in Lithuania for older people who want to learn and develop is the Lithuanian Third Age University. There are more than 50 third age universities in Lithuania, which are quite diverse. Some universities are linked to education centres in the regions, and in many cases, they cooperate with schools. They are united by the National Association of Third Age Universities (TAU).

Representatives of the Medardas Čobotas University of the Third Age and Kaunas University of the Third Age believe that young people could offer guidance, instructions and hands-on training of apps, social networks, other online services, etc. Seniors need to be introduced to the available topics so that they know what can be answered and the help they can receive. Not all topics are relevant for both sides. Kaunas' TAU and Medardas Čobotas TAU has had an emergency IT support model for a year, whereby those who want IT support register and then receive it over the phone or on-site at a computer.

Medardas Čobotas University of the Third Age (MČTAU), together with partners from Finland, Sweden and Norway, carried out a project that resulted in a set of practices for digital skills training programs that can help improve the digital competences of seniors in the Nordic and Baltic countries (read more about it here (tauasociacija.lt)).

Possible voluntary work organizers

The Lithuanian Association of Municipal Public Libraries unites 60 public libraries in all municipalities of the country. The experience of public libraries in involving local young people in volunteering in libraries varies, but all of them are active in this field. Some libraries have open youth centres where volunteers also work. Library staff provide digital advice to seniors when needed. Libraries would also be willing to engage in the activities of the initiative if the benefits for the libraries can be made clear.

The Lithuanian Red Cross is one of the most important humanitarian NGO that complements the work done by the State, with a strong focus on the care of lonely seniors. Red Cross volunteers of all ages work in 16 branches covering all 60 municipalities of Lithuania. In some areas, there are seniors' clubs organized by the Lithuanian Red Cross and a seniors' assistance program. Volunteers also visit seniors at home. The digital literacy

consultancy methodology could be useful in seniors' clubs, where volunteers could give IT lessons, as well as in home visits to seniors under the "warm visits" program.

Policy-implementing organizations

The activities of the Agency for Youth Affairs in Lithuania are aimed at workers and organizations working with young people, and it coordinates the Youth Voluntary Service Program. The Youth Voluntary Service consists of a total of 240 hours volunteering over a period of 6 months. Each young person has a mentor with whom they meet every month to discuss their learning, understanding and improved general competences. The mentor comes from the host organization and is also responsible for planning the activities. Around 1000 young people a year take part in the service.

Information about the service is disseminated informally or through a network of local organizations. There are about 625 registered host organizations. A volunteer will receive an extra 0.25 points for their voluntary service when applying to higher education in Lithuania.

The Youth Voluntary Service accounts for about 40 hours per month (compared to 4 hours of compulsory school activities). It is intended to develop guidelines for schools to carry out such activities.

Each municipality has a youth coordinator who can be contacted about voluntary service.

Nordic projects

The Nordic partners have extensive experience in similar projects and have highlighted intergenerational support as a good example.

Notable projects in Finland

In Finland, several notable projects have strengthened intergenerational connections while offering valuable guidance to seniors.

- The "Oman muotoinen koti" project seeks to find solutions to end youth homelessness and promote intergenerational relationships. The "Asunto palvelutalossa nuorelle 360 e/kk - yhdellä ehdolla (iltalehti.fi)" series of articles covers the story of three young people who have moved to a retirement home in Helsinki. They pay low rent and spend time with older people. More about the project's objectives, implementation, target groups and partners, as well as the expectations and experiences of young and older people during their time living together, is presented in the blog post "Nuoria muutti asumaan vanhusten palvelutaloon Helsingissä - mitä ihmettä? - Uudistuva sosiaalialan osaaminen - Metropolian blogit".

- "It - Svenska pensionärsförbundet" (spfpension.fi) website provides information and advice for seniors using computers, tablets or smartphones. The website contains

educational and demonstration material on a variety of topics such as online banking, email, social networks and various digital assistants.

- "Netikäs-projekti (2017-2020) | Eläkeliitto (elakeliitto.fi)" was a three-year project that promoted the well-being and empowerment of seniors through digital services and solutions. The project developed and tested various digital products, such as the Netikäs app, which is used as a personal health diary for seniors, and the Netikäs volunteer training, which trained seniors to teach other people their age to use digital services.

- "Yhtä köyttä vetämässä | Eläkeliitto (elakeliitto.fi) is a nationwide project that aims to organize meaningful encounters between the elderly population and immigrants through intergenerational community activities. The project organizes, for example, meetings, trainings, discussions and outreach that promote participation, well-being, community and cultural competence of the target groups.

Notable projects in Sweden

- The IT-Guide project is an initiative launched in 2011 by Enter Sweden NGO to help young refugees and migrants integrate into Swedish society. The project organizes and provides free IT training and advice for older people who want to learn how to use digital technologies and services. The project also promotes intercultural dialogue and solidarity between different generations and cultures. The participants in the IT-Guide project are refugees or migrants aged between 17 and 20 who have arrived in Sweden. They are trained and certified as IT facilitators who can help elderly people who want to learn how to use computers, the internet, mobile phones, social networks and other digital tools. IT assistants work and gain experience, competences and contacts that can help them in their future job or studies. The project website is <https://it-guide.se/>

- "Digital in five weeks" project is initiated by Post och Telestyrelsen, Sweden's national communications regulator. It started during the Corona pandemic. The aim is to bridge the digital divide between the generations and to increase older people's independence and social participation. During the project, older people receive one-to-one support from young volunteers who teach them how to use computers, telephones, the internet and other digital tools. Link to a radio interview with participants in the project <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/unga-hjalper-aldre-ta-sig-fram-i-den-digitala-varlden>.

- [Digidelcenter](#) is one of the projects that aims to increase the digital participation and competence of citizens. Digidelcenter are places, run by the municipality, usually at the library, where people can get free help and advice on how to use digital equipment and the internet. The project is run jointly by Internetstiftelsen, Post- och telestyrelsen (PTS) and the

15 municipalities receiving project funding. Digidelcenter also cooperates with other organizations such as SeniorNet Sweden and study association.

- [Jönköping University National centre for lifelong learning ENCELL](#) is a national organization responsible for research and knowledge dissemination on adult and lifelong learning. From 2015 to 2017, it carried out the Nordplus-funded project Young and Old in Dialogue: dialogue and cooperation between young and old people. The aim of the project was to promote dialogue and cooperation between young and old to build mutual understanding and respect. The project involved partners from Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland. During the project, young people and seniors took part in various dialogue and cooperation activities such as: storytelling, language learning, community activities.

- The Stureskolan Inter - Generational Project was a social experiment in which 15-year-old (Grade 9) pupils from Stureskolan School in Sweden spent a week together with senior citizens from a retirement home. The aim of the project was to promote intergenerational relationships and social learning. The pupils and the pensioners took part in a variety of activities such as nature photography, dance, storytelling and creative writing. The results of the project revealed that the experience increased self-esteem, empathy and positivity in both groups. In this project, the participants were mainly engaged in artistic and cultural activities that stimulated their creativity and communication. The young people received evaluations and diplomas for their work.

Activity Models: Analysis and Application

The initiative "Developing Digital Skills by Sharing Intergenerational Experiences" aims to enhance digital literacy among elderly individuals by engaging young volunteers, thus fostering intergenerational communication and understanding.

To implement the initiative's activities, two models are proposed:

- **The Community Model**
- **The Organization Model**

The **Community Model** supports a relatively spontaneous consultation process led by the local community (understood broadly as a set of residents and educational, cultural, and community organizations in that location).

The **Organization Model** emphasizes the primary role of a legal entity that organizes volunteer work and coordinates mentoring activities.

Community Model

In this model, the local community consists of residents, members of educational, cultural, and other community institutions like libraries, schools, museums, parishes, and others.

The activity organizers are the heads of these institutions, employees, or elected or appointed representatives.

Participants include:

- A structure organizing and providing volunteers (e.g., a school),
- An institution open to holding meetings (a library, for example), which manages the meeting schedule and registers the volunteer work,
- An organization representing or able to inform the elderly (e.g., a local community organization), which plays a crucial role in motivating elderly people to participate,
- Volunteers,
- The elderly (final beneficiaries).

Volunteer work, as described earlier in civic education plans, is well received by schools, and additional volunteer work opportunities in the community are welcomed by schools.

Currently, there are 795 general education institutions in the country (excluding primary schools)⁹.

In this model, **local public libraries** could play a key role in Lithuania, by offering spaces for consultations and managing the schedule and registration of volunteer work. Public libraries operate in areas with over 900 potential visitors, and there are more than 1,000 public libraries and branches with public internet access points (PIAP).

Libraries operate according to strategic plans for 2022–2024, aligned with the Ministry of Culture's "Library Development Path for 2016–2022."¹⁰

One of the main goals of library activities is to "contribute to the creation of a knowledge society by promoting informational and computer literacy and lifelong learning" and to improve the library's image. Corresponding objectives are identified, such as teaching residents to use digital technologies and organizing public events.

Library staff already have extensive experience in conducting training sessions and supervising the consultations provided by volunteer e-scouts (project "Connected Lithuania," 2019–2021)¹¹.

The involvement of libraries in project activities will also be encouraged by the opportunity to attract more visitors, strengthen communication with them, and enhance the library's prestige and role in the community (these aspects are emphasized as desirable in the SWOT analysis of many libraries).

Local communities (often legal entities like associations) unite and inform local residents. Their objectives include fostering civic participation, integrating those who cannot do so independently, and mobilizing volunteers¹².

During the "Connected Lithuania" project (2019–2021), more than 500 local communities were contacted¹³, and 120 were actively involved in organizing various digital literacy

⁹ Number of general education schools by subordination and type (2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022, 2022-2023) https://www.svis.smm.lt/file/manual/Statistines_thematic-tables/General_Education/2022-2023/Schools/1_Number_of_general_education_schools_by_subordination_and_type.xlsx

¹⁰ Kretinga district municipality M. Valančiaus Public Library Strategic Plan 2022-2024 <https://www.kretvb.lt/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/bibliotekos-strateginis-planas-2022%E2%80%932024.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.prisijungusi.lt/skaitmeniniai-konsultantai/>, <https://www.prisijungusi.lt/e-skautai/>,

¹² Statutes of Miežaičiai Village Community <https://miezaiciai.lt/bendruomenes-istatai/>

¹³ <https://www.prisijungusi.lt/bendruomenes/>

activities. If at least 25 seniors in each community expressed interest in IT consultations, this model could serve around 3,000 beneficiaries.

This model could be sustainable in the long term, even without external funding, if strong relationships are established between participating parties and they remain interested in maintaining the program. However, this model would only work in locations where there is both a school and a public library (typically a population of around 1,000 or more).

Strengths

- Participating schools ensure a steady flow of young volunteers.
- Public libraries provide spaces where consultations can be held.
- Participating communities help reach seniors and encourage their involvement.

Weaknesses

- It may be difficult to engage seniors unaware of the program.
- Encouraging students to participate in external volunteer work could be challenging.
- Not all necessary components (school, library) may be available in certain areas.

Opportunities

- The program could strengthen intergenerational relationships and solidarity.
- Public libraries offer space not only for consultations but also for various educational activities.

Risks

- Seniors may be hesitant to join the program if not adequately informed.
- Without financial support, libraries may lack motivation to take on the coordinator role.

Implementation Plan

Initiators of the model in a selected community should ensure that at least two key components—school and library—are present, and ideally, also a community organization.

Recommended implementation steps:

- Agree with public libraries on the possibility of hosting IT consultations on their premises.
- Inform schools about the volunteering opportunities.
- Ensure the school's administration designates a person responsible for cooperation.

- Provide young volunteers with all necessary information and resources for preparation.
- Collaborate with local communities that have direct contact with seniors and inform them about the available IT consultations using information materials and various communication channels.
- Develop a consultation schedule (facilitating communication between the librarian, volunteer, and senior).
- Conduct consultations and register them.
- Collect and respond to feedback from all parties.

For the model to be sustainable without financial support and external coordination, it is crucial to establish strong community ties and use creative ways to involve local people. Key factors for sustainability include:

1. Support from the local community: Engage local community members willing to voluntarily coordinate activities, and designate more consultation spaces.
2. Informing and holding events: Organize campaigns and other events to promote the project to both volunteers and seniors.
3. Partnerships with schools: Create cooperation agreements to involve students in volunteer work and integrate the program into school volunteer work plans.
4. Local funding: Seek local sponsors to motivate participating volunteers and library workers, and help establish more consultation points.
5. Local communication: Use social networks, community meetings, and other free communication methods to promote the program and attract new participants.

Those overseeing the premises where consultations take place (in this case, library workers) should monitor participant activities, collect relevant data, and register consultations so that students can receive credit for volunteer work in school.

It is important that this system is clear, reliable, and understandable to all stakeholders. The consultation schedules could be prepared and coordinated by a library staff member or a designated (involved) community representative.

Consultations with Schools

For the community model to function effectively, it is recommended that initiators consult with the general education school community to address the following questions:

1. What requirements does the school set for students' volunteer work?
2. How important is volunteering for the school? Does it help the school achieve its goals?

3. How much time do students typically dedicate to volunteer work weekly or monthly?
4. What experience does the school have in organizing student volunteering, especially outside school? Does the school collaborate with public libraries, senior organizations, or other local community groups?
5. What challenges does the school see in implementing this model?
6. Could the school contribute to preparing volunteers for consultation (by providing learning resources, explaining rules, etc.)?
7. How could the school contribute to the model's implementation?
8. Does the school have suggestions for improving the model?
9. How could the school collaborate more effectively with the library in implementing this model?
10. Does the school wish to directly collaborate with senior organizations?
11. How does the school view the model's sustainability, and what would need to be done for it to function independently?

* We do not limit ourselves to formal senior organizations; it can also be a local community where a significant portion of the members are elderly individuals.

Consultations with Libraries

To understand the goals and opportunities of local public libraries, initiators should consult with library staff and address the following questions:

1. What experience does the library have in hosting students for volunteer work and organizing events or consultations for seniors (e.g., during the "Connected Lithuania" project)?
2. What are the library's capacities for providing space for student volunteer work?
3. Would the library help create a consultation schedule and record student volunteer hours?
4. Does the library collaborate with the school, senior organizations, and other local groups?
5. How could the library inform seniors about the opportunity to receive consultations?
6. Would the library be willing to use consultations as a way to attract more visitors and raise its profile in the community?
7. How will the library ensure a safe and friendly environment for both students and seniors?
8. Does the library have suggestions for organizing student consultations for seniors more effectively?

Consultations with Senior Organizations

To assess the viability of the planned activities, initiators should consult with local senior organizations. As they represent the end beneficiaries of the service, it is essential to clarify the demand and communication aspects.

Key questions to address:

- What are the primary digital needs of seniors? Are there specific topics they would like assistance with?
- How does the senior organization view the need for student-led consultations?
- What times are most convenient for seniors to attend consultations?
- How can the organization inform seniors about the opportunity for consultations?
- Does the organization have experience working with schools or libraries?
- What challenges does the organization see in implementing such a volunteer model?
- Could the organization directly organize student volunteer work (space, scheduling, registration, etc.)?
- Does the organization have suggestions for improving the model?

Organization Model

The central entity in this model is a non-governmental organization (NGO), budgetary institution, or social enterprise that organizes youth volunteer work and provides assistance to seniors.

In this model, organizers are the organization's leaders, employees, or appointed representatives.

Participants include:

- The structure that organizes and provides volunteers (e.g., an NGO), which manages volunteers, schedules meetings, and communicates with the seniors or their organizations,
- An organization that represents or informs seniors (e.g., a university of the third age, a retirement club, a social department, a parish, etc.),
- Volunteers,
- Seniors (final beneficiaries).

This model works with any organization that already has experience working with youth or seniors and wishes to expand its activities.

Participation in this project would benefit the organization by:

- Expanding and enhancing its activities by contributing to community well-being,
- Increasing its involvement and service diversity in pursuit of its core goal of growth,
- Attracting more volunteers and using them more flexibly,
- Providing volunteers with new digital skills and experiences,
- Reaching more organizations that could contribute to the organization's goals.

Implementation Plan

Unlike the community model, this model relies on the organization's existing experience, skills, and relationships. It only requires offering new knowledge and resources to prepare volunteers and conduct a pilot consultation cycle.

In Lithuania, more than 700 organizations have registered as volunteer-hosting institutions, mainly for specific types of work (teaching, clerical work, etc.). Only 26 organizations organize volunteer work, 10 of which are involved in social services¹⁴.

Strengths

- Wide acceptance of volunteers from various organizations and sectors.
- Coordinated work with seniors and youth, promoting intergenerational understanding.
- Expansion of activities by incorporating new content or partnerships with senior (or youth) organizations.

Weaknesses

- It may be challenging to ensure that all volunteers are adequately prepared for consultations.
- The organization may lack volunteers with the necessary skills.
- Managing relationships with various sending and receiving volunteer organizations could be difficult.

Opportunities

- Expanding volunteer training programs.
- Reaching more seniors and their organizations, and involving new individuals in the organization's activities.

Risks

- Competition for volunteers with other organizations.
- Financial risks due to the growing scope of activities and needs.
- Reputational risk if the organization cannot ensure proper consultation.

A good opportunity for the organization to start consulting seniors is through international digital knowledge development campaigns, such as Senior Week, Safer Internet Week, Digital Weeks, etc.

Readiness of Volunteer Organizations

Organizations intending to implement the activities of the organizational model should first assess their capabilities and local circumstances by discussing the following questions:

1. What is the organization's experience in working with youth or seniors?
2. What are the organization's goals and expectations in participating in this initiative?

¹⁴ <https://old.jrd.lt/informacija-jaunimui/savanoryste/organizaciju-paieska>

3. What resources can the organization allocate?
4. How does the organization plan to manage the work and schedule of volunteers?
5. How does the organization communicate with seniors or organizations representing them?
6. How does the organization plan to assess the digital needs of seniors?
7. What are the organization's proposals for new knowledge resources for volunteers?
8. Does the organization have suggestions for better organizing these consultations for seniors?

Recommendations and Learning Materials

Recommendations and Self-Learning Materials for Volunteers

To help young volunteers successfully provide ICT consultations to seniors, recommendations have been prepared that youth can review independently or with the help of a teacher, librarian, coordinator, etc.

The recommendations cover the following topics:

1. How to communicate with seniors? What interests them? Ethics and etiquette.
2. How to evaluate your experience? How can I help seniors? What should be explained to seniors: smart devices, communication tools, safety, useful applications, etc.
3. Where to learn more about e-safety? Recommended learning materials can be found on the websites epilietis.eu and prisijungusi.lt.
4. How does a consultation work? How to plan and prepare for it. What to do and what not to do.
5. Schools and libraries—their roles and responsibilities. Organizing and accounting for volunteer work.

Self-learning materials and practical consultation tips for volunteers are published on the website: <https://norden.lt/en/project/it-mentorship/>. The proposed materials contain many links to lessons on digital topics (in Lithuanian language): <https://www.epilietis.eu/category/mokymai/>.

During the pilot consultations, young volunteers primarily assisted seniors with the following topics, which were relevant and requested by the elderly:

- How to use smartphone functions (downloading apps, enlarging text, saving phone numbers, transferring them from the SIM card, updating apps, sending pictures),
- How to create an email account,
- How to use social networks safely,
- How to shop online,
- How to pay for utilities online.

Personal data protection and safer internet practices are always cross-cutting topics in consultations, complementing all subjects.

It should be noted that while young volunteers generally had sufficient digital knowledge and understood how to use such technologies, they often lacked information about communication peculiarities with older people.

Recommendations for Institutions

Schools, libraries, and hosting organizations should agree on the following information and necessary document formats:

1. How does a consultation work? How to plan and prepare for it. Identifying the need, planning consultations, and creating timetables.
2. Schools and libraries—their roles and responsibilities. Organizing and accounting for volunteer work. Sample contract and accounting sheet, and how to fill it out.
3. How can a volunteer help seniors? What should be explained to seniors: smart devices, communication tools, SAFETY, useful applications, etc.
4. Recommended learning materials for volunteers.
5. Examples of announcements in schools about volunteer consultation opportunities and examples of announcements in libraries, senior organizations, and communities.

Recommendations for educational institutions, libraries, senior organizations, and organizations promoting volunteering can be found at <https://norden.lt/en/project/it-mentorship/>.

Insights from Pilot Consultations

A series of pilot consultations was held between February and July 2024. The following organisations were involved in testing the models: Šiauliai City Municipality Public Library and its “Saulės” Branch, “Lieporiai” Branch and Children's Literature Department, Šiauliai University Gymnasium, Šiauliai Sandora ProGymnasium, Pasvalys Marius Katiliškis Public Library, Pasvalys Petras Vileišis Gymnasium, the Lithuanian Red Cross and its Kuršėnai and Elektrėnai branches, the association "Public Internet Access Points", in cooperation with the Varniai Branch of the Karolina Praniauskaitė Public Library of the Telšiai.

The organizers of the pilot consultations agreed that individual consultations are one of the most effective forms of digital literacy training for seniors. This type of activity allows for consideration of the specific needs and expectations of each senior and can help solve problems they encounter while using their smartphone or computer.

The success of the pilot sessions depended on the full involvement of all participating parties. School coordinators played a critical role by selecting motivated and active youth to participate in the activities. Meanwhile, library staff promoted the activity and invited seniors to participate in consultations.

It is recommended to expand such activities by involving other institutions, such as municipal education departments and senior organizations.

It is recommended to provide comprehensive support to young people who wish to participate in this activity. During preparatory meetings, it is suggested to focus on introducing young people to the communication and learning characteristics of older people, the challenges of digital literacy learning among seniors, and the specific learning needs, style, and pace of seniors. Additionally, more attention should be paid to the support provided to young volunteers by consultants, as these individuals help, encourage, and respond to young people's questions.

In addition to consultations, it is also advisable to offer a variety of activities (for example, integrating this activity into the Youth Volunteer Service program or supplementing it with other activities) to motivate and attract more young people to participate in the initiative.

Motivational tools that increase the motivation of participating organizations and young representatives can be used, such as certificates, incentive souvenirs, and public recognition of their contributions and efforts within the community.

We invite educational institutions, public libraries, senior citizen organizations, and NGOs promoting volunteering to join this initiative!