



Good practices presented during the U.N.I.C Budapest project meeting 31 January - 2 February 2010

SLIC workshop

Based on the handbook which can be downloaded from:

<http://www.slic-project.eu/outcomes/handbook/index.php>

(The handbook is available in English, German, Italian, Finnish and Hungarian language.)

Why is this workshop relevant?

It is now common knowledge that demographics in Europe are changing and the proportion of older adults to younger people is expected to increase for the next four decades. The issue of how older adults spend these extra years of life is taking on new personal, social and political significance. Also, a fixed age for retirement is no longer taken for granted as some continue to work and others look for new ways to remain active and use their skills or develop new skills. The development of the SLIC workshops was a response to this changing demographic landscape.

What is the SLIC project?

SLIC was a two-year project funded by the European Commission's GRUNDTVIG sub-programme of the Lifelong Learning programme and led by the Austrian Red Cross, with partners based in organisations from Austria, Hungary, Germany, Italy, Finland and the UK. The aim was to develop new practical ways to help older adults review their past experience and personal skills and explore new and potential opportunities for learning and community engagement. This was done through the development of an innovative workshop model as set out in this handbook.

What are the objectives of the SLIC workshop?

The main parts of the two-day workshop are:

- To create an individual skills profile from past experience and learning.
- To create a personal action plan based on identifying and prioritising areas of new interest.

The workshop format offers a high degree of interactivity in a secure and confidential environment with small group work identified as an ideal way to address diverse needs.

Who can participate in the SLIC-workshops?

The course was tested on the basis of 103 adult learners from 6 countries: it worked well with groups of volunteers coming from established programmes and with other groups of

participants identified as potential community champions or older people from local ethnic communities. It can be particularly useful when inserted into a longer term programme on training or community engagement for older people. An ideal group size is 10-15 participants.

IDEAS BEHIND THE WORKSHOP

This section gives a brief overview of the main ideas behind the methods used in the pilot workshops. It provides a deeper understanding of the rationale for the SLIC workshop activities.

Skills profile

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) definitions for skills and competences were used as a guide by the SLIC team:

- **skills:** the knowledge and experience needed to perform a task
- **competence:** the ability to apply knowledge, know-how and skills in an habitual or changing situation

While CVs are the norm with respect to paid work, some older adults may have little personal experience of drawing up a skills profile. The SLIC approach allows people to prioritise and to identify expertise and experience that may previously have been lost or disregarded. This process can:

- improve positive feelings and self esteem
- provide greater insights into personal strengths
- encourage uptake of further learning
- highlight the value of using skills for volunteering

Action plan

There is good evidence that action plans need to be specific, realistic and achievable. While the main activities of the workshops are focused on the creation of the skills profile, it is important that people leave with an idea of their next step forward. This will inevitably involve tapping into local community organisations and resources beyond the host organisation. Some partners created opportunities within the workshop events for local volunteers and volunteering groups to make short presentations, facilitating this forward planning process.

Empowerment

The partnership adopted an empowering approach in workshop design. Empowerment is defined as an 'active engagement' in which older adults are given a real opportunity to have an active part in the learning process rather than being presented with a ready-made agenda. Empowerment of individuals also embodies the idea of community and collective action.

Links between community development, volunteering and lifelong learning

The above concepts are often addressed in isolation from each other. SLIC attempts a holistic approach. Volunteering is an important pathway for contributing to communities while enhancing the volunteer's life. SLIC's approach links lifelong learning to later life transitions, rather than the more common context of training for work.

Active ageing

People's sense of identity is strongly linked to paid work and social status within the work environment. Self-confidence can decrease after retiring from paid work. The SLIC workshop approach contributes to raising awareness of the future potential and resources older people have to offer. It is designed to help people prioritise, make choices and consider if further learning is required to make new options a reality and thus enable active ageing.

Disadvantaged groups

EU policy promotes social inclusion and social cohesion. Some older adults are seen as at risk, especially those with lower levels of previous education and economic status. The SLIC approach aims at being inclusive and attracting people with less experience of formal learning, while raising awareness of the informal learning in which they have already engaged.

PLANNING AND RUNNING A SLIC WORKSHOP

(a) Planning a workshop

Have you identified specific aims and objectives?

The overall aims of the workshops are outlined on page 4. (Objectives of the SLIC workshop) However, it may be important to pay special regard to the strategic aims of your organisation or group. You might want to put the focus on a certain sector, community or region, or you could focus simply on raising the participants' skills awareness and follow-up activities. The focus needs to be defined early on in the planning process and discussed with the stakeholders in terms of benefits for participants, the organisation and/or the community.

Have you a clear idea of your target group?

You will want to choose your target group according to the precise objectives you have for your workshops. Consider whether you would like to address older men or women or prefer to have a mixed group. Also you might want to think about targeting people from ethnic minority groups or making sure you have a mix of participants with different ethnic backgrounds. In some cases you might target younger older people, for example those shortly before retirement or those recently retired. It is important to consider the different expectations and needs of different target groups as this will affect the contents, the timing and methods employed.

How will you find participants?

- Contact existing active volunteers in your organisation to value their activities, motivate them to continue or encourage them to become peer trainers
- Recruit participants that are already in contact with your organisation by poster, email, post or telephone
- Recruit new participants through local newspaper or radio adverts or through your organisations' regular communications media

It is essential to produce good promotional material, with clear information of what can be expected, to attract people who will be interested in the workshop and will benefit from it. Publicity material should provide information about:

- The workshops' aim of helping people build a skills profile through reflection
- The workshops' aim of thinking of one's future plans and actions
- The benefits of attending the informal and friendly workshops using activity methods
- Timing and location, and the requirement to attend both sessions
- A tear-off slip to allow an immediate response

What type of venue is suitable?

The venue that you choose should:

- Be close to participants' homes or close to public transportation
- Be large enough to allow for work in small groups around tables and space to move around
- Be well-ventilated and appropriately heated
- Have a refreshment/eating space in the room or close by

What is the best time frame?

Within the pilot workshops two one-day sessions from 10.00 – 16.00, with a gap of a week to allow time for reflection, were tested and found to be successful. The exact time frame will depend on number of participants, life and learning experience of the group and the nature of the activities. If resources are available, a third follow-up session is useful to bring people together to share developments and to discuss networking activities and support for each other.

What resources will you need?

At the very least you will need one (preferably two) experienced facilitators, administrative help, a fitting venue, some basic materials and some kind of catering facility. A budget for running a two-day workshop needs to be drawn up and a decision made about the extent to which your own organisation can absorb costs or whether you need to find partners or external funding from local or national sources, or through the European community.

How do you ensure you have the right facilitators?

Ideally you need someone with experience of teaching older adults so she/he will be an "enabler" and be capable of handling a diverse group while attending to individual needs.

A good facilitator is able to:

- Lead the group without being dominant
- Encourage participation and self expression from everyone
- Handle expressions of different opinions
- Respond sensitively to disagreement or difficulties
- Be flexible, adaptable and remain positive throughout the workshop

If the facilitator is an older person it should make it easier to create quickly the rapport and trust necessary for reflective exercises. However, a well-trained and experienced younger person could do an equally good job. Be wary of putting an inexperienced facilitator of any age with such a group as the chances of success would be greatly reduced.

(b) Running a workshop

Challenges likely to be encountered:

- Sharing personal information

It should be made clear that it is an individual choice whether to share information or personal experience with the group and it is acceptable to leave if the workshop is not what the participant expected. Informative and accurate promotion material should avoid this.

- Some people may feel inhibited in front of the others.

It should be explicit from the start that conversations within the workshop are confidential. Once people have got to know each other, working in small groups has proved to be very liberating.

- Discussion moving away from the point

A good facilitator will tactfully bring the group back to the original goal of the session.

- Ensuring creative flow of activities

The facilitator should aim for a smooth and unrushed flow of activities, with individual supportive materials, written guidance for tasks and encouragement to interact, discuss and help each other. Also, the facilitator should move participants towards thinking creatively about their skills as well as new future possibilities in a non-threatening and inspiring way. He or she should be prepared to adapt activities and timing if participants are getting tired.

- Difficulties with writing

The facilitator should be aware that someone may have writing difficulties. Suggest people share group tasks so that anyone who wishes to can opt out of a particular activity easily.

- Breakout times

Use breaks for extra or personal issues. Also networking and interaction among participants during and after the workshop should be actively encouraged.

How do you maintain the momentum for more workshops?

- Refine your most successful methods by using evaluation techniques
- Disseminate your experiences and workshop successes in your organisation's media, as well as in community publications and online
- Liaise with other organisations to attract more like-minded people
- Plan "public relations" activities to follow on immediately from successful workshops
- Delegating someone to be a contact person for this or other similar projects if resources permit it.

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This paper reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.