



The Experience Bank

Project **Summary**

The Project

The purpose of The Experience Bank project was to connect older people with Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs), who value mature volunteers and their life experience. Its aim was to promote older people as active citizens, address barriers to volunteering experienced by people 55+ and to build their potential to take on roles within their communities.

The concept was to set up a “bank of experience”, showcasing volunteers’ lived experience, skills, and interest via a “volunteer profile”. VIOs could then browse The Experience Bank and chose people they would like to engage with to explore the opportunity to volunteer with them.

Participants were encouraged and supported to join The Experience Bank by a group of peers, called Community Ambassador Volunteers, and Dublin City Volunteer Centre staff. The project was guided by an Advisory Panel made up of experienced volunteers aged 55+.

Key Components

- **15 participating Volunteer Involving Organisations**
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- **31 volunteer participants (55+)**
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- **12 participants agreed to volunteer with 11 organisations**
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- **Advisory Panel / 5 volunteers (55+)**
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- **Community Ambassador Volunteer Programme / 6 volunteers (55+)**



Key Findings

There is a definite appetite and need for **more targeted projects for volunteers aged 55+**. Volunteers and organisations both valued being part of a specific project as it created a **clear focus** and a meant both were **available and ready to engage** within the **specific timeframe** of the project.

The **concept** of The Experience Bank, to have volunteers create profiles to develop a bank of experience, and for VIOs to select volunteers from that bank, worked successfully and was very well received by both, volunteers and organisations.

Life experience

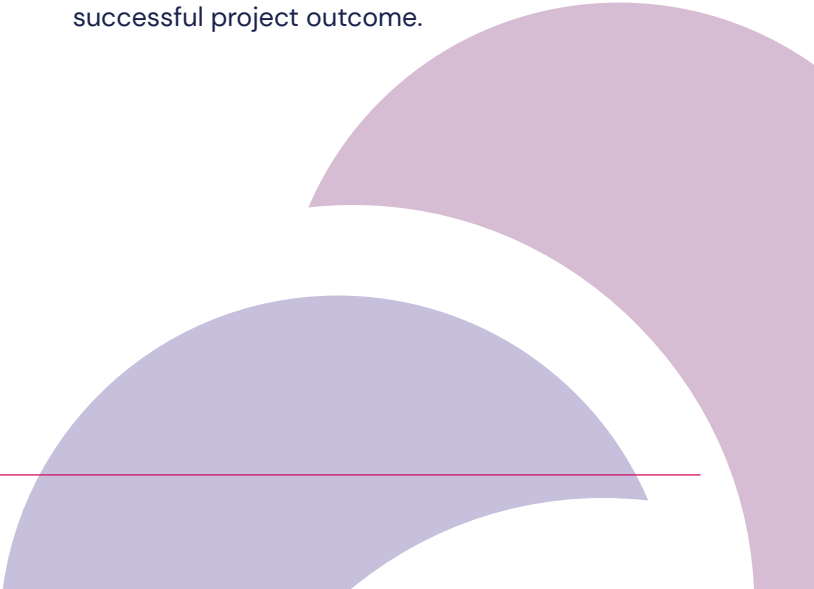
- Participants appreciated the focus on their **life experience** rather than their skills. They felt this was more appropriate for their life stage, was more inclusive and better suited to reflect them as a person.
- Participants liked the idea of “putting themselves out there” and felt very positive about **being “selected”** by the organisations. This gave them more self-confidence and made them feel valued and wanted.

Personal Approach & Support

- A focus on the **personalised experience** and **one-to-one contact** was very successful and valued by volunteers as well as by the Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs). VIOs felt their time was well invested, as it allowed for a more **focused “selection” process**. Volunteers felt more **appreciated**, felt that their **life experience was valued** and that they were “seen” for who they are and what they have to offer.

- The **personal support/ coaching/ brokerage** offered to the potential volunteers is key to the success of the project. This support helps the volunteers to work out what they are interested in and what they have to offer, in order to create a profile that positively reflects them as a person. This in turn improves the selection process for the VIOs.
- There is scope to **further develop a revised Community Ambassador volunteer role** to provide this **personal contact and coaching**.
- Having an Advisory Panel made up of peers of the target audience was extremely valuable and added depth and expertise to the project.

Brokerage

- Having a Project Manager to act as **point of contact** and to personalise and support the experience for participants, VIOs and project volunteers was important, specifically for this age group. The Project Manager is also essential to oversee the overall coordination and implementation of this kind of project. This role needs to be properly resourced to ensure a successful project outcome.
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Planning

- **Running The Experience Bank project once or twice a year** with plenty of lead-in time would increase the success of the project:
 - It would create more focus and time-bound engagement.
 - It would allow VIOs to plan ahead and to consider participation in The Experience Bank project as part of their annual volunteer-recruitment strategy.
 - It would give more lead-in time to promote the project to VIOs.
 - The project could be sign-posted to volunteers with plenty of notice as part of other Dublin City Volunteer Centre events and engagements, which would also tie-in well with retirement planning and give people the opportunity to consider volunteering before committing to join The Experience Bank.
 - A longer planning and implementation timeframe would allow space for Community

Ambassadors to reach out to and to build relationships with local interest groups and potential volunteers.

Project Objectives

- As most volunteers did not start to actually volunteer within the timeline of the project, it was not possible to determine the impact of their volunteering experience on their sense of isolation and their feeling of making a contribution to their community. Regardless, 55% of participants stated that through engaging with The Experience Bank project, their sense of isolation had decreased. 37% of participants noted their sense of purpose had increased, while 45% reported an increase in their motivation to volunteer.

80% of the Volunteer Involving Organisation felt they got suitable candidates from The Experience Bank Project.



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