



Nordic Council
of Ministers



BRIDGING THE DIGITAL GAP THROUGH REVERSE MENTORSHIP

Guidelines for model implementation

This document outlines a methodology for bridging the digital gap through intergenerational experiences by engaging young people to mentor older generations in digital skills. The initiative targets various organisations – including schools, libraries, and senior communities – offering a structured approach to implementing activities that enhance digital literacy among seniors.

The methodology provides step-by-step guidance on integrating mentoring activities into the ongoing work of organisations. It includes practical recommendations on planning, organising, and delivering the initiative, tailored for different types of institutions. It also encourages collaboration with local partners to ensure effective implementation and long-term sustainability.

The approach places a strong emphasis on cooperation between youth and older adults, fostering stronger community ties and promoting digital inclusion in a technology-driven world. Benefits include strengthened intergenerational connections, increased social and civic participation, and the development of leadership and digital skills among youth through hands-on experience.

This methodology is one of the outcomes of the project “Bridging the Digital Gap through Intergenerational Exchange”, implemented between September 2023 and March 2025. The initiative was initiated and supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers Office in Lithuania and delivered in partnership with Association Langas, j ateitį (Lithuania), Nordic Adult Learning Network (Finland), and IT-Guide (Sweden).

Contents

Introduction	5
Overview of the social and legal environment	7
Systemic Enablers: Case of Volunteering in Lithuania	7
Youth voluntary service	7
The European Solidarity Corps	8
Volunteering experiences in Lithuanian schools	8
The situation in Finland	9
Services promoting digitalisation	9
Government report: Digital Compass	10
Priority of digital communications by public authorities	10
Digi arkeen Advisory Board	11
Support services and stakeholders	12
Swedish case	12
Support services and digital inclusion stakeholders	13
Stakeholders: experiences and expectations	14
Lithuanian organizations	14
Seniors' organizations	14
Possible voluntary work organizers	15
Policy-implementing organizations	15

Nordic projects	15
Notable projects in Finland	15
Notable projects in Sweden	16
Activity Models: Analysis and Application	19
Community Model	19
Implementation Plan	21
Consultations with Schools	22
Consultations with Libraries	23
Consultations with Senior Organizations	24
Organization Model	24
Implementation Plan	25
Readiness of Volunteer Organizations	26
Recommendations and Learning Materials	27
Recommendations and Self-Learning Materials for Volunteers	27
Recommendations for Institutions	28
Insights from Pilot Consultations	28
About this publication	30

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<https://pub.norden.org/temanord2025-555>

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 seniors are disproportionately affected, with many unable to access or benefit from digital tools and services.^[1]

To tackle this challenge, we propose to involve communities and organizations by promoting intergenerational communication and volunteering. In this model, young volunteers help seniors to acquire the digital skills they need through informal mentorship. Young people, who are typically digitally fluent, are well-positioned to act as approachable mentors for seniors. 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.

This approach also benefits young volunteers. 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 volunteers the opportunity to hear interesting life stories, learn from the experiences of older generations and contribute to the well-being of their community by helping seniors to become more digital.

Schools can make a significant contribution to the sustainability of this model. For instance, they can integrate volunteering into their curriculum which would encourage students to take part in projects that help the community.

Meetings between seniors and volunteers can take place in public venues with digital infrastructure (e.g. computers, public Wi-Fi, etc.), providing both safety and support. Municipal public libraries are particularly well-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 both seniors and youth feel comfortable.

Libraries are already recognized as inclusive community hubs and trusted places for seniors. They also have the necessary infrastructure and resources to offer digital

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

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 meeting locations. 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.

Counselling for the older adults 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 sections, we present two complementary models - the Community Model and the Organization Model - for promoting intergenerational volunteering to strengthen seniors' digital inclusion. These are supported by an overview of the social and legal context, insights from Lithuanian and Nordic experiences, stakeholder perspectives, and practical recommendations for implementation, including consultations with schools, libraries, and senior organizations.

Overview of the social and legal environment

Systemic Enablers: Case of Volunteering in Lithuania

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 database^[2] and contact the organization directly or the Voluntary Service Organization (VSO) in their county or municipality^[3].

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 as stipulated in the Law on Voluntary Activities of the Republic of Lithuania (XI-1500)^[4]. 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 volunteering^[5].

Youth voluntary service

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

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2. <https://old.jrd.lt/informacija-jaunimui/savanoryste/organizaciju-paieska>
 3. <https://old.jrd.lt/savanoryste/svo-akreditacija/akredituotu-svo-organizaciju-sarasas>
 4. Law on Volunteering of the Republic of Lithuania <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.402802>
 5. Law on Volunteering of the Republic of Lithuania (2023 revision) <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/5abd316094f911eea70ce7cabd08f150?ifwid=mqzcgq2gk>

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 service^[6]. Volunteers meet regularly with their mentor and learn to overcome difficulties.

Participation in the YVS 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.

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 be counted.

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 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, 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

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

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 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 areas^[7].

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 doing^[8].

The situation in Finland

Services promoting digitalisation

The Digital and Population Data Services Agency promotes the digitalisation of society and electronic services in Finland.

The agency service design team helps public administration organisations that need support in improving the customer orientation of the organisation or its services and its strategic reform.

The agency also coordinates a national digital support network. The task and aim of the work are to have the same opportunities to use digital services for everyone in Finland and, when necessary, to get help in the use of e-services flexibly and at a time that is best for them. Digital services and digital skills are for everyone.

To steer and manage the development of government digitalisation, the Digital and Population Data Services Agency forms a situational picture of data management for public administration by compiling information from studies and evaluations on public administration data management, the management of data, information security, and e-transaction services. The data is used as a knowledge base for the supervision of development of government digitalisation and in the services of the Digital and Population Data Services Agency and other organisations that produce shared services.

More information: <https://dvv.fi/en/services-to-promote-digitalisation>

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, basic and secondary education for the school years 2023–2024 and 2024–2025, Annex 9.

Government report: Digital Compass

A Digital Compass was drawn up to direct and manage the development of the digital transformation in Finland. The work was steered by the ministerial working group on developing the digital transformation, the data economy and public administration. The Compass was prepared by a coordination group for digitalisation.

The Digital Compass is based on European values and the programme – Digital Decade 2030. It steers the development work and strengthens the shared understanding of the benefits, concepts and direction of digitalisation and the data economy. It also sets out priorities for Finland's advocacy work in the European Union.

The report indicates a common roadmap for the development of digitalisation and the data economy in Finland. According to the vision, Finland is building a digitally capable country that is attractive, competitive, sustainable and prosperous.

Achieving the objectives set for the Digital Compass calls for extensive systemic change; determined cooperation with the public and private sectors, universities, research institutes and organisations. To accelerate digitalisation and the data economy, Finland needs investments and cross-sectoral practices.

More information: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-609-9>

Priority of digital communications by public authorities

The work began after Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government Programme stated that Finland will gradually make digital services the primary channel for accessing public authorities' services. In this context, this refers to notifications from public authorities to citizens. The aim is that citizens who use e-services will primarily receive notifications sent by public authorities electronically. At the same time, alternative channels for communicating and for accessing services will be available for people who are unable to use digital services and communication channels.

To achieve this objective, the Ministry of Finance has launched the Programme to Promote Primarily Digital Official Communications for the period from 27 April 2024 to 31 December 2027. In addition to developing legislation, the programme is tasked with developing [Suomi.fi](https://suomi.fi) messages in a customer-oriented manner, providing instruction and advice to citizens and public authorities on the use of the service, and providing digital support to citizens in switching to digital official communications.

The programme has the following objectives:

- To take legislative measures to make electronic notifications the primary option for those people for whom this is possible. To provide support to customers of administration in this transition in the form of information guidance and advice.
- To create savings for public administration by primarily sending notifications to customers of administration electronically (suomi.fi messages) rather than by posting paper letters.
- To increase the number of organisations in public administration and organisations performing public functions that use Suomi.fi messages through legislative measures, information guidance, and advice and by supporting public authorities in adopting the service through a round of discretionary government grants.
- To expand and streamline the use of suomi.fi messages by taking a customer-oriented approach to developing the service, which will support the productivity goals for public administration.
- To draw up alternatives and solutions for a gradual transition in public administration towards the more extensive use of digital services as the primary channel for accessing the services of public authorities.
- To look into possibilities and means to enable sending mail from public authorities to private digital mail services.

More information: <https://vm.fi/en/priority-of-digital-communications-by-public-authorities>

Digi arkeen Advisory Board

The Digi arkeen (Digitalisation for everyday life) Advisory Board was a channel for cooperation and dialogue between NGOs, researchers, different authorities and the Ministry of Finance, which is responsible for the digitalisation of public services.

The aim of the Digi arkeen Advisory Board was to support the development of digital services so that different population groups can use them on an equal basis.

The Advisory Board has strived to increase the dialogue between the designers and users of digital services, for example from the perspective of special groups. The work was also aimed at identifying and supporting new ways of organising cooperation between the administration, NGOs and research.

The period of the Digi arkeen Advisory Board was from 15 April 2020 to 31 March 2023.

The Digi arkeen Advisory Board had 17 members in addition to its chairperson. The Advisory Board was chaired by Marianne Heikkilä from the Martha Organisation, with Sari Vapaavuori from VALLI, the Finnish Union for Senior Services, as vicechair.

More information: <https://vm.fi/en/digi-arkeen-advisory-board>

Support services and stakeholders

Examples of actors currently providing digital guidance and support for citizens:

- DVV maintains an active online directory of guidance and support actors: <https://www.suomi.fi/kartta/palvelupaikat/sivusto-haku?lat=7208914&lon=454714&zoom=1&q=digituki+TAI+asiointipiste+TAI+yhteispaivelu>
- The national Digituki-network Facebook group currently have 1,700 members, a mix of organisations and individuals: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/digituki/>
- Senior organizations such as SPF, Svenska Pensionärsförbundet have maintained IT support and guidance for many years: <https://www.spfpension.fi/sv/it/>
- Other actors include Folkhälsan: <https://www.folkhalsan.fi>
- Sininauha: <https://sininauhakoti.fi>
- Moniheli: <https://moniheli.fi>
- Seniorsurf: <https://seniorsurf.fi>

Swedish case

Sweden has been actively promoting digital inclusion and fostering volunteerism, with a particular focus on supporting seniors in ICT (Information and Communication Technology) matters. Here are some key initiatives:

1. **Digitalisation Council (Digitaliseringsrådet):** Established by the Swedish government, this council plays a pivotal role in advancing the national digitalisation agenda. It ensures that no one is left behind in the digital transition by advising on policies and promoting digital skills across all demographics.
2. **National Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition:** This multi-stakeholder partnership brings together organizations from various sectors to enhance digital competence. It focuses on creating inclusive environments for collaboration and knowledge sharing, which benefits citizens groups, including seniors, needing digital support.
3. **Digital Education and Lifelong Learning:** Sweden emphasizes lifelong learning through digital education programs. These initiatives aim to equip individuals with the necessary skills to navigate the digital world effectively.

Sweden has implemented various **community-driven initiatives** to support seniors in navigating the digital world. These efforts aim to reduce digital gap and empower older individuals to actively participate in society. Here are some notable aspects^[9]:

1. **Volunteer Programs:** Many organizations in Sweden recruit volunteers to assist seniors with digital matters. These programs focus on providing personalized guidance, such as helping seniors understand technical terms, manage passwords, and use digital devices effectively.
2. **Educational Workshops:** Community centres and senior organizations often host workshops tailored to the needs of older adults. These sessions cover topics like online safety, using social media, and accessing e-services.
3. **One-Stop Support Centres:** Initiatives like "SeniorsGoDigital" have established centres where seniors can receive comprehensive support. These centres offer both in-person and online assistance, ensuring accessibility for individuals in rural areas.

Support services and digital inclusion stakeholders

- <https://pts.se/digital-inkludering>
- <https://sqr.co/digitalhjalpen/>
- <https://digidel.se/>
- <https://www.digg.se/digitala-tjanster>
- <https://www.1177.se/>
- <https://digitalidag.se/start>
- <https://digiteket.se/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Digidelnatverket>
- <https://internetkunskap.se/>
- <https://urplay.se/serie/214200-seniorsurfarna>
- <https://www.facebook.com/anpassadit>
- <https://www.volontarbyran.org/>

9. <https://selid.efos-europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Swedes-and-the-internet-Odin.pdf>

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. As part of this process, partners contributed to developing a stakeholder map, identifying key actors, their roles, and their influence on the initiative's success. This mapping exercise helped to contextualize the initiative within a broader ecosystem, clarifying how different stakeholders – ranging from policymakers and educational institutions to community groups and industry representatives – interconnect and contribute to its objectives.

All readers are encouraged to reflect on this stakeholder landscape in their contributions, detailing the relevance of each group, their engagement strategies, and how these interactions shape both the initiative's outcomes and its long-term sustainability.

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 by involving local young people to volunteer 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 (YVS, see above). Around 1,000 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. 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"^[10] series of articles covers

10. iltalehti.fi

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"^[11] 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"^[12] 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"^[13] is a nationwide project that aims to organize meaningful encounters between the older adults 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^[14] 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 and are studying in gymnasium. They are trained and certified as IT facilitators who can help older adults 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.

11. spfension.fi

12. elakeliitto.fi

13. elakeliitto.fi

14. <https://www.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.^[15]
- Digidelcenter^[16] 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 (2018). Digidelcenter also cooperates with other organizations such as SeniorNet Sweden and study association.
- Jönköping University National centre for lifelong learning ENCELL^[17] 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.
- Digitalidag - started in 2019 and since 2024 a part of the Swedish Post and Telecom Agency (PTS) is a national collaboration platform that works to increase digital inclusion in Sweden and prevent new knowledge gaps from

15. A radio interview with participants in the project: <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/unga-hjalper-aldre-ta-sig-fram-i-den-digitala-varlden>.

16. <https://internetstiftelsen.se/kunskap/for-alla/digital-delaktighet/>

17. <https://ju.se/center/encell.html>

arising. By bringing together actors from the private and public sectors and civil society, the goal is to inspire all people to want and be able to participate digitally in society. In 2025, they started a hotline with volunteers from various partners.

- PRO, SPF, Seniornet and other senior associations are offering different kinds of training, both courses and internet cafes providing personal support with other senior members. Recently, there has been a lot of focus on digital security.

Activity Models: Analysis and Application

The initiative "Developing Digital Skills by Sharing Intergenerational Experiences" aims to enhance digital literacy among older adult 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 older adults (e.g., a local community organization), which plays a crucial role in motivating older adults to participate,
- Volunteers,
- The older adults (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, which are located in most areas. Currently, there are 795 general education institutions in Lithuania (excluding primary only schools)^[18].

In this model, **local public libraries** and other accepting organisations could play a key role offering spaces for consultations and managing the schedule and registration of volunteer work. For example, in Lithuania, 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 (PIAPs).

Libraries here operate according to strategic plans for 2022–2024, aligned with the Ministry of Culture's "Library Development Path for 2016–2022."^[19] 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")^[20].

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 volunteers.

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).

18. Education and Culture in Lithuania (edition 2023) <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/lietuvos-svietimas-ir-kultura-2023/svietimas/bendrasis-mokyklinis-ugdymas>

19. 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> (as typical example)

20. <https://2018.prisijungusi.lt/skaitmeniniai-konsultantai/>, <https://2018.prisijungusi.lt/e-skautai/>

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating schools ensure a steady flow of young volunteers. • Public libraries (and other accepting organisations) provide spaces where consultations can be held. • Participating communities help to reach seniors and encourage their involvement. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program could strengthen intergenerational relationships and solidarity. • Public libraries (and other accepting organisations) offer space not only for consultations but also for various educational activities. 	<p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 (or other accepting organisation) are present, and ideally, a community organization.

Recommended implementation steps:

- Agree with public libraries or other accepting organisations 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 (or another accepting organisation) 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 older adult individuals.

Consultations with Libraries

(Note: this model is not limiting to libraries, but any supervised space that is open to the public can be involved.)

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?
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 or 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.

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?
3. What resources can be allocated by the organization?
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 are their interests? 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 older adults:

- 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. 3 public libraries, 3 schools, the Lithuanian Red Cross^[21] and the association "Public Internet Access Points" were involved in testing the models in a number of the municipalities of Lithuania^{[22] [23]}

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 to solve problems they encounter while using their smartphone or computer.

21. <https://norden.lt/en/news/young-volunteers-bridge-the-digital-divide-in-lithuanian-red-cross-communities/>
22. <https://www.langasiateiti.lt/2024/07/30/siauliu-miesto-bibliotekoje-jaunuju-siauliu-savanoriu-konsultacijas-seniorams-apie-skaitmenines-technologijas/> (in Lithuanian)
23. <https://www.langasiateiti.lt/2024/09/06/jaunieji-pasvalio-savanoriai-surenge-skaitmeniniu-technologiju-konsultacijas-seniorams/> (in Lithuanian)

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.

Providing comprehensive support to young people who wish to participate in this activity is recommended. 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!

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