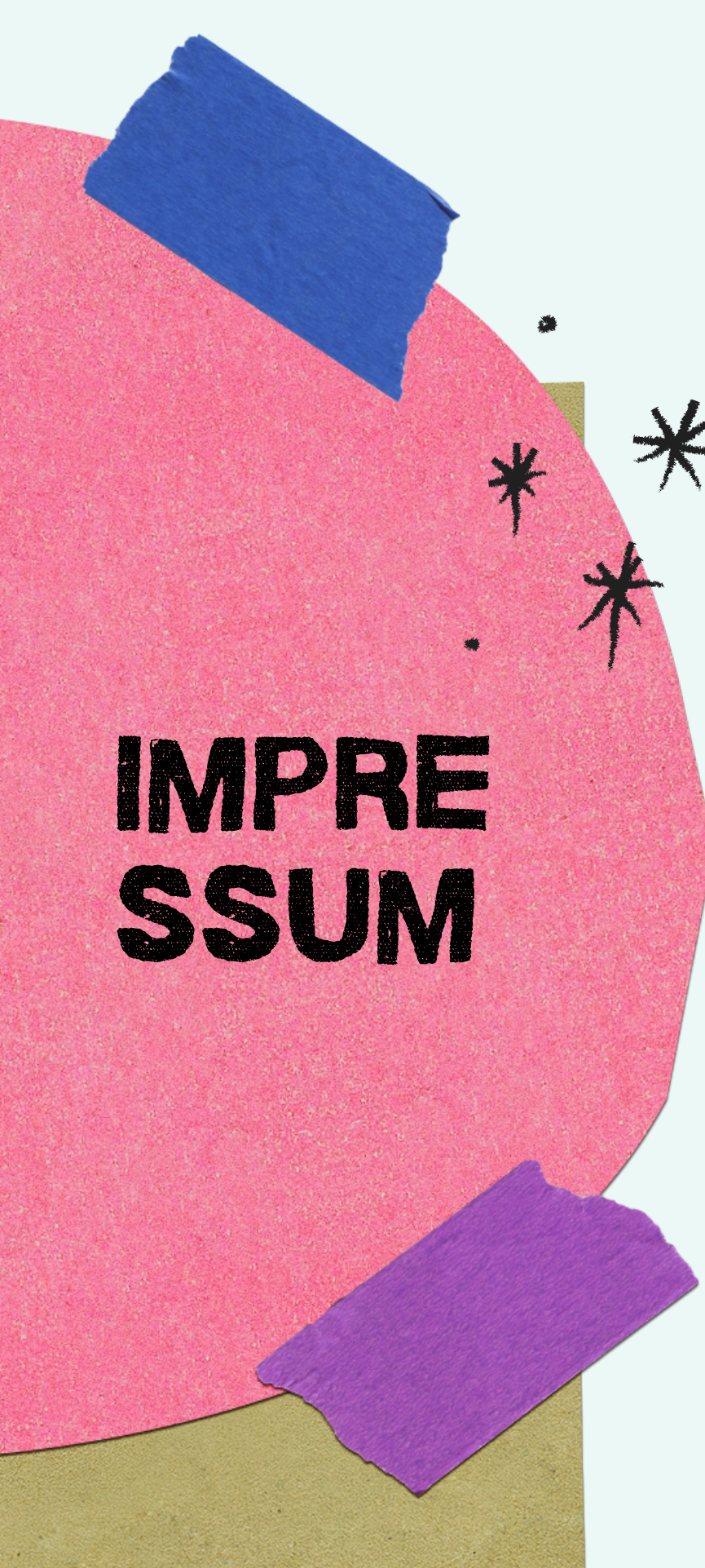




HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN POOL OF TRAINERS

WITHIN LGBTIQ+ AND OTHER
YOUTH ORGANISATIONS





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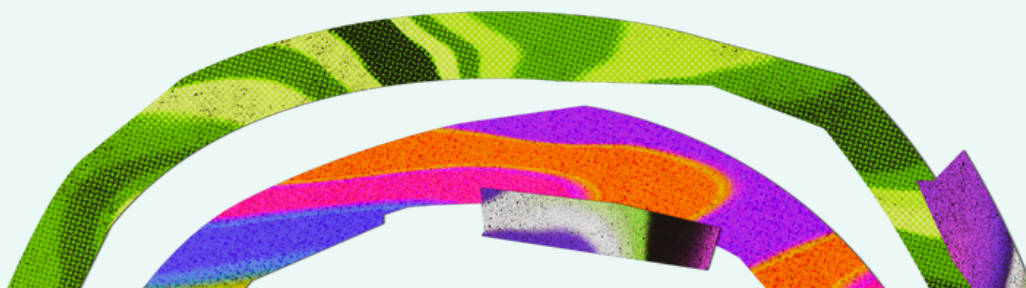


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FOREWORD - WHY THIS MANUAL?

While non-formal education (NFE) is a concept and a practice well established within the European youth (work) sector and a few other sectors, the role of the educators and trainers within the implementation of NFE is sometimes less recognised. Sometimes the role is blended with the role of a youth worker, sometimes it is considered as "external expertise". **With this manual we want to give more visibility to the fundamental role of the educator, the trainer within the youth (work) sector and wider.** But mostly our ambition is to support organisations and communities of trainers in a structural way.

We, the authors and partner organisations who created this manual, also carry another key background. **We are ourselves people coming from marginalised groups and our organisations have dedicated themselves to working with and for (young) people from marginalised groups.** We want to shed light on the specificities of NFE, the role and work of trainers and educators and the impact this brings when the people involved - both those implementing educational processes and activities, as well as the learners themselves - are (young) people from marginalised groups.

When looking across the youth sector in Europe we found that there is very little literature, manuals and other support guidelines about how to establish, manage and maintain the so-called "pool of trainers" - a structure within which trainers are organised or organise themselves, get support from each other and the organisation to learn, develop and practice their craft. On the other hand we found practically no literature and support tools for the specific perspective of trainers and educators coming from marginalised groups and pools of trainers made up of people from marginalised groups. In a few contexts we can see that trainers, facilitators and educators active in NFE organise themselves into trainers guilds or independent associations. Our focus was from the perspective of an organisation working within the youth (work) sector and **how a pool of trainers can enrich the organisation and fundamentally impact the quality of the (youth) work the organisation is providing.** At the same time we wanted to offer the **perspective and value it brings when your trainers and educators are people from marginalised groups.** But also highlight the **organisational responsibility and the need to create additional and specific support structures and measures.**

We hope this manual will support organisations in having a useful tool when reflecting on how they work with trainers and educators, how they can make strategic decisions that suit their unique situation and needs and of course to support the trainers and educators. Considering that more and more organisations come across and work with young people from marginalised groups, we hope this manual will trigger a reflection as well as empower the organisations to start including more trainers and educators from marginalised groups into their work.



NON-FORMAL EDUCATION FOR EMPOWERMENT OF MARGINALISED GROUPS



Non-formal education (NFE) plays an important role in empowering groups of marginalised people, particularly through its connection to youth work. NFE provides flexible, learner-centred approaches focused on developing practical skills, building confidence, and enabling empowerment and wellbeing of young people. Unlike formal education, NFE emphasises experiential learning and participation, creating safer spaces where young people feel supported to explore (their potential). NFE aligns closely with the main goals of youth work such as promoting active citizenship, social inclusion and personal empowerment. It is an approach designed to provide opportunities for self-expression, and equip young people with tools to navigate and challenge systemic inequalities.

Youth organisations serve as some of the main spaces where NFE takes place, offering an environment for young people to learn and grow. These organisations provide spaces where all young people, including those from marginalised groups, can engage in meaningful activities. While that sounds fairly simple and logical, in reality a lot of strategically thought-through and planned mechanisms need to be put in place to make that happen. Young people's participation is not a given, and that is even more true when it comes to young people from marginalised groups^[1]. Among these mechanisms, a really important aspect are the people engaged in the organisation, more concretely professionals, who work with the young people directly.

Trainers and youth workers in these spaces play complementary roles. Youth workers focus on building relationships, supporting young people's overall development, and guiding them, while trainers design and implement specific learning processes tailored to participants' needs. Trainers bring skills in creating engaging, inclusive learning environments and facilitating important discussions that equip young people to build both their competences and their confidence.

Trainers from marginalised groups add an additional value to this work. Their lived experiences help them connect with participants (especially those with experience of marginalisation), build trust, and create a learning environment. They challenge stereotypes, serve as relatable role models, and bring practical insights that make activities more inclusive and accessible for (marginalised) youth. These trainers also strengthen youth organisations with a better understanding of the challenges participants face. They also offer representation, often missing in youth spaces.

Trainers from marginalised groups are critical to ensuring non-formal education is inclusive and impactful. Their experiences can inspire participants and make youth work more effective in promoting inclusion and social change.

^[1] For more information on how to ensure inclusive spaces and policies within the youth spaces, see publication Inclusive Organisations, publicly available at <https://ljubljanapride.org/en/publications/>.

When working with trainers from marginalised groups, it's important for organisations to recognise that while their lived experiences bring additional value to the learning processes, these should not define their entire role. Trainers should not be tokenised or expected to represent the entire group or community (they belong to). At the same time, organisations should provide specific support, like creating inclusive environments, addressing biases, have active measures put in place to support the trainers as well as ensuring they have access to mainstream opportunities. This way, trainers can contribute their competencies without being reduced to only one aspect of their identity.

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2 WHAT IS A POOL OF TRAINERS

A pool of non-formal education trainers and/or educators is commonly understood as an organisational resource or sometimes even a defined internal organisational structure. When we were preparing this manual we looked at the pools of trainers of 11 different organisations^[2] active within the European youth work field on national, international and institutional levels.

In principle the pools of trainers are divided in 2 main categories - a list of trainers or a learning community of practice.

"The Trainers Pool of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe is a list of trainers and educational experts experienced in non-formal education and intercultural learning applied to international youth activities."

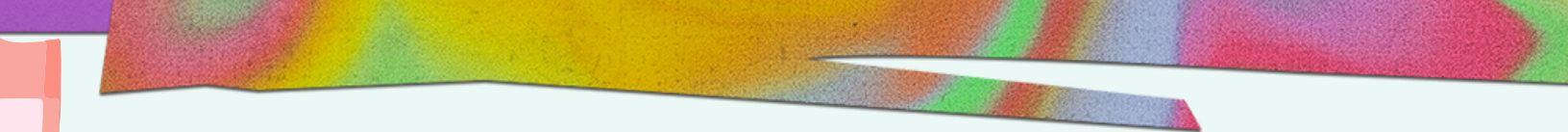
"The pool of trainers of Slovenian National Youth Council (MSS) is a working group of trainers from MSS member organizations and some other organizations, which takes care of the development of educational activities at MSS. Trainers conduct training for MSS and in other organizations, prepare publications and documents on the topic of non-formal education, and transfer knowledge to each other within the group."

As we can see from the above two descriptions there is already a significant difference in the expectations towards and the role of the pool of trainers based on this principal distinction.

A. A POOL OF TRAINERS AS A LIST OF TRAINERS

Any organisation that is rooted in youth work or has the ambition to structure and implement educational activities will sooner or later need to develop its own approach about who are the people preparing and implementing the educational processes and activities. And often the answer will be - trainers and educators whose pedagogical practice is rooted in one or another non-formal education approach. Then another important aspect of organisational development will eventually occur - the decision about the organisational approach and structural positioning of the trainers and educators the organisation is working with (see Chapter 4 for more details). If the organisation knows very well what kind of educational processes and activities need to be implemented, let's imagine the organisation might have an educational department of employed staff, or perhaps a training and education coordinator on staff, who already developed the educational modules and curricula, then the

^[2] Besides the three partner organisations of the project that financed this publication - Ljubljana Pride Association, Lunaria and Sapling - we also looked at the pool of trainers or its approximation at the European Youth Forum, the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, European Student Union, Eurodesk, Slovenian National Agency for Erasmus+ Youth Programme, Slovenian National Youth Council, the Association of Facilitators of Slovenia and Alliance ŠKISS (Alliance of student clubs of Slovenia).



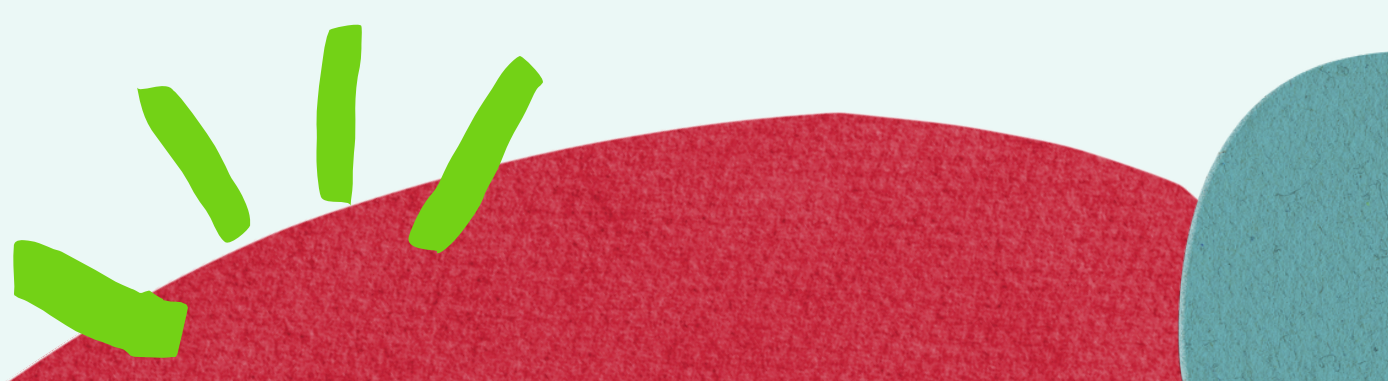
organisation might just want to work with (external) trainers or educational experts. Or let us imagine the organisation is a very big structure with a lot of trainer-expert needs, like trainer-authors of educational manuals and other pedagogical material or trainer-facilitators who will lead conferences, symposia and other large scale events that the organisational staff puts together and organises. In such cases the organisation might just decide that for their needs it is better to engage already well versed and experienced trainers, the organisation might just open an external call and recruit relevant profiles of trainers to implement such tasks. However, a challenge is very likely to occur - external trainers and experts will have very diverse values and approaches of work that might not be aligned with the organisation and it is very likely that it will make the process of collaboration difficult.

Let us imagine that we have an LGBTQ+ organisation with progressive values that implements educational activities for professionals, such as teachers, about how to work with LGBTQ+ pupils in schools. If this organisation hires external trainers several challenges are likely to occur:

- the trainers will likely not share an LGBTQ+ identity themselves and will therefore not be able to relate to the lived experience neither the people working in the organisation, nor the LGBTQ+ pupils, to whom the training should benefit in the end;
- the trainers will likely not be sensitive to practices like LGBTQ+ and trans inclusive language, while they lead the activities;
- the trainers will likely not be able to respond adequately to the needs and demands of the teachers that will occur spontaneously and are not scripted in the training modules for example...

That is why organisations who have a strong need for expert trainers and educators to implement a variety of organisational educational programmes, processes and activities will often opt for the creation of a pool of trainers that mitigates the above described risks by recruiting a group of expert trainers and educators, who join “a database” or a “list of” trainers that the organisation then recruits more diligently, invests some resources to ensure they share the organisational values and might get some tailored training in that regard. But foremost this will be the group of trainers that the organisation will always return to for their expert work when needed ensuring the trainers have a constant connection with the organisation, its values and programmes so that the trainers can be better aligned with the organisational needs.

Such pools of trainers require the trainers to be already well experienced and professionalised in their area of expertise. Within such a pool the trainers are more likely to be active because it offers them opportunities for paid work and their personal development as trainers is something they need to organise for themselves within other spaces. Within such a pool of trainers there is little interaction amongst the trainers on the “group” level, they might have periodic meetings or other ways to engage within the pool, however, these will not be strongly focussed on learning or internal community development. We can often see such a pool of trainers model within larger organisations, international networks and within institutions.



B. A POOL OF TRAINERS AS A LEARNING COMMUNITY AND/OR A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

When a Pool of trainers is more than a list of practitioners in a specific field, it is most commonly described as a place to share experience and expertise, a place of learning and capacity building both for the trainers themselves as well as for the organisation. To understand how this can be put into practice, it is helpful to consider the concepts of **Communities of practice** and of **Professional learning communities**.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Etienne Wenger defines Communities of practice (CoP) as groups who share a concern, set of problems, or passion for a topic and deepen their knowledge and expertise through regular interaction amongst each other. This happens through three coredimensions: through **a shared domain** - or rather shared interest or area of expertise that gives the community its identity, the next is **the community itself** meaning a group of individuals who build relationships, engage in shared activities, and learn together, the third dimension is **practice** - a shared repertoire of resources, tools, experiences, and stories developed over time through participation (Wenger, 1998).

Pools of trainers can be viewed through this lens as well, but the idea of a CoP is even broader than that as it can also include an informal community of trainers working in the same field/for the same clients/organisations etc. and are not organised formally. However, once a more or less formalised pool is organised, the concept of a community of practice can be fostered to enhance learning, exchange and collaboration amongst their members. For the concept of a community of practice the key perspective is to look at how learning functions as a social activity that happens in a group.

A PoT fits the framework of a community of practice when it is organised in such a way that it is fostering collaboration, shared learning, and identity formation among its members. When It is more than just a network; it is a living, dynamic system where trainers co-create knowledge, support each other, and advance their domain. By understanding and nurturing its role as a CoP, a PoT can strengthen its impact on the field of non-formal education or even on the field of youth work or other field that it is present in, particularly in addressing the needs of socially vulnerable and marginalized groups.

(PROFESSIONAL) LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Another way of looking at pools of trainers is through the framework of learning communities. The term learning communities is now often used in organisational frameworks when organisations value learning and exchange of knowledge very highly.^[3] All learning communities share 3 key elements:

1. **Shared learning:** sharing resources or knowledge, expertise. Working together to solve problems or develop new solutions, giving and receiving feedback, etc.
2. **Connectedness:** building connections, relationships between the learners is a very important aspect of a learning community.
3. **Support:** at the most basic level, there is the idea that learning comes with ups and downs and that learners can connect and support each other. Learning communities can also provide a space for experts to offer their support too. This might be in the form of mentors, coaches or course leaders who act as moderators in the community.

In our case when we speak of PoTs as learning communities, we are of course referring to trainers as learners, putting emphasis on the fact that in non-formal education the hierarchical dichotomy between the “educator” and the “learner” is actively being deconstructed. But in these cases, we are mostly referring to these communities as spaces for practitioners with various degrees of competences, knowledge and experience to share and learn from each other.^[4]

ACTION-BASED LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Since our publication focuses on pools of trainers that come from marginalised groups, the fact that learning is never a politically neutral experience, comes even more to the forefront. For PoTs composed of or prioritising trainers from marginalised groups, this means intentionally creating spaces where trainers lived experiences of marginalisation, oppression and resilience inform the community’s learning process. Trainers are not simply professionals improving their craft, but often work as agents of change, whose work connects non-formal education with activism. The scope of activist practices can be defined by the shared values and vision of the PoT as well as the organisations. Action-based learning communities also echo the principles of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), but extend them by making advocacy and activism central, not peripheral. In these communities, knowledge is mobilised to challenge injustice, whether through designing inclusive educational practices, amplifying marginalised voices, or working towards influencing policy. No matter how central the civic engagement of the PoT is, a PoT made of predominantly persons from marginalised groups will always have elements of Action-based learning communities (Thinkific, 2024; WeDevs, 2025) and it is important for the PoT to reflect this and take it into account.

B. 1. Putting learning communities into practice

Moving from theory to practice, we have gathered some examples from different PoTs on how they are putting the concepts of a learning community into practice.

^[3]The phrase professional learning community began to be used in the 1990s after Peter Senge’s book *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) had popularised the idea of learning organisations. In business management, a learning organisation is a company or more broadly an organisation that facilitates the learning of its members and continuously transforms itself. This is important to emphasise because it connects the learning and/or educational aspect of the concept of a pool of trainers to a more formalistic organisational aspect, which is an equally important function of the pool in connection to the organisation of which the pool is usually a part of or connected with.

^[4] This perspective closely resonates with Shirley Hord’s concept of professional learning communities (PLCs). Hord (1997) identifies five key dimensions of PLCs: (1) supportive and shared leadership, (2) shared values and vision, (3) collective learning and application of learning, (4) supportive conditions, and (5) shared personal practice.

A PoT as a learning community goes beyond individual trainers delivering workshops, it becomes a collective entity that builds on shared experiences, evaluates practices, and innovates together. Based on the concepts of communities of practice, professional learning communities and learning organisations, let us take a look at some possible internal attributes and supporting conditions for both pools of trainers and organisations they are connected with. This relationship of course depends greatly on how connected the PoT is to an organisation. What is its position in connection with the organisation or does it even have an organisation or does it function as an independent one on its own. As we have shown in the beginning of this chapter, there are different models to look at. We will try to distil some supporting attributes and conditions that could be applicable along a vast array of models.

SHARED IDENTITY, PURPOSE AND VALUE ALIGNMENT

An important supporting condition is an alignment of values and purpose between the organisation and its PoT. This first of all means that both the organisation and PoT must be explicit about their values.

Example: Ljubljana pride does this with an Ethical code document co-created by the trainers.

This furthermore enhances the sense of shared identity that we have mentioned is important both for communities of practice and professional learning communities. An alignment of values as well as a shared purpose are a good starting point for a shared identity amongst members of a PoT, this is also a supporting condition for onboarding of new members and helps the sustainability of both the PoT and the organisation. Structures like a mission statement for the PoT, regular discussions about shared values, and onboarding processes for new trainers help reinforce this shared identity and also set a basis for the integration of the PoT into the broader organisational structure.

DEFINED ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

According to Senge (1990), learning organisations thrive when all members understand their roles and contribute toward shared goals. When establishing and running a PoT this mostly means finding a balance between flexibility and clarity. Roles should be flexible yet clearly defined—ranging from mentoring and facilitation to leading training design. It is very common for professionals in youth work and non-formal education to be “wearing many hats at the same time” meaning having different roles. The key is to have constant discussion and reevaluation about which roles are compatible and which must be operated by different people in order to ensure the best quality of learning processes. It is helpful if the organisation outlines roles for supporting the PoT, such as providing mentorship, administrative oversight, and strategic alignment. Tools such as role descriptions, mentoring frameworks, and systems for rotating responsibilities promote accountability and shared ownership.

We have mentioned previously how clearly defined roles ensure that everyone in the PoT knows their contribution to the collective goals and how this is connected to learning organisations. We have also already mentioned that people who work in youth work and non-formal education often hold many roles at the same time, this is especially true in smaller and less professional organisations. This can have a profound effect on trainers and their work.

This is why many organisations have standardised formats for trainings and workshops and roles that are defined. These can be defined in internal documents (guidelines, regulatory documents or other) and/or contacts between trainers and organisations.

It is important that these documents are shared and understood. When speaking of roles and responsibilities, transparency is the key word. If regulations for the work of trainers are created from top to bottom, trainers should be made aware of it and understand the reasoning behind it. However, having trainers included in creating guidelines for their work is a much better practice that ensures ownership and accountability.

Clearly defined tasks and responsibilities of a trainer can include:

- Developing an educational module/lesson plan for the training
- Attending meetings with the client (organisation)
- Expected expertise, competence and motivation of trainer
- Expected behaviour and other parameters of application of the training
- Reporting and follow up

The responsibilities of the organisation should also be defined. Examples of this can be:

- Providing key information on learning goals, learner profiles, etc.
- Organisation of training
- Communication with learners
- Providing space and logistical support
- Providing materials

It is important that as much as possible is made explicit and is in written form. The latter especially applies to agreements regarding fees for trainers, other remunerations (such as food and board, travel costs, etc.), expected results/outcomes (photos, documents, manuals, participant lists, reports, etc.), deadlines, etc.

COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURES

Collaboration is the foundation of professional learning communities, emphasizing teamwork and shared decision-making which means a PoT requires team-based structures that encourage trainers to collaborate on training and educational module design, reflective practice, and problem-solving. Structural conditions that enable collaboration can take form as regular meetings, peer learning processes or co-facilitation, job shadowing opportunities, etc. A very broadly used structure across the youth sector is trainers working in pairs or groups, depending on the number of participants. It can be beneficial for the organisation to establish platforms for collaboration, such as project management systems, shared workspaces, or structured retreats (trainers' weekends for example) to encourage exchange and innovation, depending on the structure of the pool, these can also be self-lead and self-organised.

Even if a PoT is not highly structured and formalised within the organisation, steps can be made to ensure collaboration and enhance learning amongst trainers.

Example: Sapling's PoT functions more as a database, but it still fosters collaboration by harvesting new training ideas from trainers after each activity. Trainers can propose new formats, which are then discussed and sometimes re-run, keeping the offer dynamic and responsive.

CAPACITY-BUILDING SYSTEMS

Capacity building aligns with the emphasis on developing shared resources and the focus on continuous learning. A PoT can offer structured professional development opportunities, such as skill-building workshops, access to resources, and coaching. Organisations should ensure these systems are sustainable by allocating resources (e.g., budgets, trainers' time, and access to experts). Reaching further, since our focus is on specific PoTs made of persons from marginalised groups, organisations that aim to have inclusive PoTs should also have internal policies that support the development of marginalised trainers (e.g., providing targeted mentorship).

Much was said about how one of the main purposes of PoTs that go beyond being a list of professionals is that it is a space to learn and share knowledge, experience and resources. In practice this means that both the organisation and the PoT can map out what their needs in terms of upskilling are. According to the needs and available resources, PoTs will have different training and other upskilling opportunities organised to ensure continuous learning. These can take on different formats such as thematic multiple day trainings, shorter workshops, peer-learning or sharing sessions, book clubs, mentorship programs, study visits, etc.

Example: Lunaria organises the annual Advanced Training for Trainers "PIRATES," a key event where members of the PoT gather to exchange knowledge, review and update toolkits, and collectively shape future educational approaches.

Organisations can also choose to allocate resources or support trainers in attending longer training or study programs.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND SHARED RESOURCES

Communities of practice rely on a shared repertoire of tools, resources, and stories to foster learning. To promote this a PoT can develop a centralised knowledge repository that includes educational modules, method and other resource toolboxes, a manual library, case studies, best practices, training tools, etc. Organisations should maintain this repository and ensure accessibility for all members. A PoT or an organisation should also consider systems for capturing and disseminating learning, such as reflective logs, evaluation reports, and collaborative platforms to help sustain the knowledge base over time.

A shared pool of resources enables trainers to learn from one another. It is a good idea to have a repository of knowledge of some sort that is maintained by the organisation or the PoT in order to ensure transference of knowledge. For this different online platforms can also be used such as:

- Google drive
- Microsoft teams
- SessionLab to store session outlines

Example: in Lunaria, toolkits created after each training are systematically collected, reviewed, and shared, ensuring that knowledge circulates within the PoT and strengthens future activities.

Example: Ljubljana Pride has developed pedagogical manuals and pre-made modules that support knowledge transfer and standardisation of practice across the PoT, these are shared with all the members of the PoT in SessionLab.

PoTs can have a weekly/monthly internal newsletter to keep track of everything that is relevant to their work, they can also keep internal communication channels, anything from mailing lists, chat groups to Slack or Discord channels, depending on their needs.

SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP AND SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES

Distributed leadership and shared responsibility are core attributes of both professional learning communities and learning organisations. This can be implemented within the structure of the PoT and the relationship of the PoT with the organisation in different ways, but broadly speaking practices such as distribution and rotation of roles can be encouraging ways to share leadership and responsibility within the PoT. Trainers should be encouraged to take on different roles such as facilitators, coordinators, or peer mentors, depending on their interest and level of experience but also to learn-by-doing by taking on new roles. The organisation should support this by creating leadership pathways, recognizing trainers' contributions, and ensuring shared decision-making processes wherever it is applicable. Transparent policies and clear reporting structures between the PoT and the organisation foster trust and accountability.

INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Broadly speaking inclusivity is essential for equitable participation and fostering a sense of belonging within communities of practice and learning organisations, but it is even more so important since our focus is on pools of trainers from marginalised groups, where it is even more essential that we acknowledge power imbalances and structural differences persons from marginalised groups face.

Examples: Sapling ensures inclusivity by focusing its PoT on queer-inclusive trainings. Trainers who are queer themselves act as role models and create safer spaces, which is particularly impactful for queer participants who may experience learning success for the first time in non-formal settings. At Ljubljana Pride, inclusivity is built into the structure itself: all trainers are LGBTIQ+, which not only empowers the trainers but also ensures participants see their experiences and identities reflected in the training space.

Reflecting power imbalances also means a more complex and intersectional approach is required when we are putting an emphasis on inclusion. This means the way we structure a PoT must ensure (by putting in place structural measures) all trainers—particularly those from marginalised groups—can access opportunities, resources, and leadership roles. The organisation should adopt policies promoting accessibility, such as offering training in multiple languages, providing financial support, or adapting activities to diverse needs. Practices like regular feedback sessions and anonymous reporting mechanisms help ensure that all voices are heard. Other mechanisms will be further elaborated in following chapters of this publication.

Inclusive practices include adaptations of various support systems for trainers. Ensuring trainers feel supported both professionally and personally is critical, especially when working with marginalised groups.

FEEDBACK AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICES

In order to promote meaningful learning outcomes and build community practices, pools of trainers should integrate reflective practices such as post-training evaluations, peer feedback, and structured debriefing sessions into their schedules. The organisation must provide the tools and time for



reflection, ensuring that insights are systematically captured and integrated into future planning. A culture of constructive feedback fosters trust, mutual respect, and professional growth. Feedback systems help the PoT evolve and respond to changing needs, but also ensure that the quality of non-formal education they provide is up to standard.

C. Looking at existing models of pools of trainers in practice

Now that we have a deeper insight into the theoretical and practical distinction between the pools of trainers who operate as lists of trainers vs. those who operate as learning and/or communities of practice, it is important to put that into a practical perspective from the field.

We looked at 10 local/national/international organisations active in the European youth work community of practice and their past and/or current pools of trainers and we compared their approaches and models. We based the analysis on information we could find online, as well as on experiences of some members of those pools of trainers. We do not consider this comparison a complete insight into any single pool of trainers but rather an illustration of some key characteristics.

We looked at the Trainers Pool of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, the pool of trainers of European Students' Union, Eurodesk's Pool of Trainers, PoT of the European Youth Forum, pool of trainers of MOVIT - Slovenian National Agency for the Erasmus+: Youth and European Solidarity Corps Programmes, PoT of National Youth Council of Slovenia, PoT of ŠKIS - Association of Student Clubs of Slovenia and the three partner organisations' pools of trainers - Ljubljana Pride Association, Lunaria and Saplinq.

What is clear is that each organisation that has decided to set-up a pool of trainers did it "their way". We have mapped some main criteria to compare their models in a way that we can support other organisations when they are trying to define their own way of setting-up or managing their pool of trainers.

Criteria nr. 1 - Type of organisation?

Criteria nr. 2 - Does the organisation have an education department or similar internal structure?

Criteria nr. 3 - Does the organisation have an established PoT?

Criteria nr. 4 - What is the role of the PoT in the organisation?

Criteria nr. 5 - Is there a coordination structure for the PoT, which kind?

Criteria nr. 6 - Is there a Code of Conduct/Principles the PoT must follow?

What we can see is that:

It is more likely that an organisation will opt for the approach of a list of trainers if they are large structures and already have a strong/developed educational department or unit. What is also visible is that their trainers are considered experts and that they comply with a clear Code of Conduct, Quality Criteria and the values and principles of the organisation.

Example: PoT of Youth Department of the CoE and Eurodesk.

When organisations are bigger, composed of member organisations, perhaps active on national or European level and at the same time their aim is to capacitate and empower their member organisations through educational activities, their pool of trainers is often composed of trainers coming from the member organisations. We can see that the PoT is often composed of both experienced trainers as well as junior trainers and it has a clear capacity building and training element for the trainers themselves embedded.

These types of PoTs are already more than a list of trainers-experts. They might not be fully integrated learning communities, but they are communities of practice.

Example: European Students' Union PoT, PoT of the European Youth Forum, PoT of MOVIT - Slovenian NA, PoT of National Youth Council of Slovenia, PoT of ŠKIS, PoT of Saplinq.

On the other side when we have organisations that embed their PoT into their core functioning, where the PoT might even be the substitute for an education department and where the PoT has a high level of autonomy and power within the organisation to shape the content of activities as well as the organisational structure itself, then we see that the PoT is also a structure of deep integration for the trainers and a core resource for the whole organisation. In such cases we have mostly a PoT as a learning community and community of practice.

Example: PoT of Lunaria, PoT of Ljubljana Pride Association.

Continuing from that - and after exploring different models and typologies of pools of trainers, it becomes important to look more closely at the elements that shape how a PoT functions in practice. These elements help organisations reflect on what is needed for their specific context and identify the structures, principles, and processes that will support the quality, sustainability, and development of their PoT.

In this part we looked more closely into the PoTs of Lunaria, SaplinQ and Ljubljana Pride Association to show off this in practice. While they share similar structures and approaches, it is the small differences (the specific way roles are defined, values are applied, or learning is supported) that make the real impact in practice.

INTERNAL COORDINATION OF THE POT

Refers to how the pool is organised and managed; it includes coordination roles, communication channels, and decision-making processes.

In **Ljubljana Pride Association**, a coordinator of the PoT is one of its members, who is also employed by the organisation. This person primarily communicates with the rest of the trainers, keeps track of the training needs, serves as a bridge between a trainer pair selected to implement an activity and the person in the organisation who coordinates the activity, makes sure the trainers agreements are signed and reports submitted, among other.

In **Saplinq**, the PoT is currently without a coordinator - and they recognise it as their biggest need at the moment in order to develop the pool further. Right now, the person who leads the organisation also takes on roles related to coordination of the trainers.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE AND OWNERSHIP

Represents the trainers' competence, commitment, and sense of belonging. It includes mechanisms that support quality, shared responsibility, and professional identity of the trainers.

In **Ljubljana Pride's PoT**, the trainers carry most of the organisation's educational activities, and are in that way acting transversally throughout all the programmes of the organisation. Moreover, they are also taking part in shaping the organisation's broader work: they often provide strategic and expert inputs for publications, research, advocacy etc. Sometimes they also contribute to project writing or activity coordination. This allows trainers to take ownership over the educational and developmental dimensions of the organisation's work. The PoT also organises its own internal capacity-building activities to strengthen expertise and ensure quality and consistency in its educational approach.

On the other hand, in **Sapling** the main strength of the PoT lies in its unique focus on queer topics and in the composition of trainers who are both willing and able to deliver queer-inclusive trainings regardless of the theme. Many of the trainers are queer themselves, which enriches their professional practice. This expertise, combined with the trainers' authenticity, enables a strong sense of ownership and commitment. They act as role models, inspiring participants who often experience belonging and educational success for the first time in non-formal education spaces. Over the years, this has created a growing interest among participants to become trainers themselves, showing how ownership and professional identity can expand through community inspiration.

In **Lunaria's PoT**, professional expertise and ownership are nurtured through structured opportunities for learning and exchange. The annual Advanced Training for Trainers "PIRATES" serves as the key event where trainers and facilitators exchange methodologies, strengthen their competences, and co-create new tools for youth participation. This, along with regular bimonthly meetings and local training sessions, fosters a culture of continuous professional development and shared responsibility. Through this sustained engagement, the PoT members have co-developed Lunaria's educational approach, which they collectively own and apply in the organisation's projects and activities.

VALUES OF THE POT

The shared ethical and educational principles guiding the work of the trainers. It includes the alignment of practice with the organisation's mission and culture.

In **Ljubljana Pride's PoT**, the values are clearly defined in the Ethical Code, which is publicly available on the organisation's website. These values were developed through a participatory process involving all PoT members, as part of a longer internal effort to map and align the core principles guiding the organisation's educational work.

In **Sapling**, there is a clear expectation that all trainers act in line with the organisation's values, even though these are not formalised in a written document. The emphasis is placed on mutual understanding, shared purpose, and trust within a small community of trainers who have been collaborating for years.

In **Lunaria's PoT**, there are no formal internal documents or strategies that explicitly structure the PoT's work. However, a set of pedagogical approaches developed over time by active members serve as the de facto foundation of the PoT's shared values. These approaches emphasise participation, intercultural learning, and social inclusion, shaping how trainers design and deliver their educational work. Over the past year, Lunaria and the PoT have been discussing the creation of a Code of Conduct and a structured Inclusion Strategy, with plans to begin the process soon.

SCOPE OF WORK

Defines what the pool actually does (e.g. designing trainings, advising, representing the organisation).

In **Ljubljana Pride's PoT** the trainers hold ownership and expertise related to the organisation's educational processes. They design and implement trainings, workshops, and capacity-building activities within the programmes and projects managed by the organisation. Beyond delivery, PoT members also contribute to the development of methodologies, curricula, and educational tools, ensuring that all training work remains consistent with the organisation's values and inclusive approach.

In **Sapling**, the PoT primarily provides trainers for the implementation of both international Erasmus+ trainings and local educational activities. While the trainers form a crucial part of the organisation's educational work, the connection between the PoT and the broader organisational structure remains limited. The PoT is loosely placed within the Erasmus+ department, and there is currently little communication between trainers and other organisational units.

SIZE OF POT

It includes the number of trainers in the PoT, which should match the organisation's capacity.

In **Sapling**, at the time of the writing of this manual, there were 5 internal trainers and a few more external ones - they did not have a fixed list.

At the same time, **Lunaria's PoT** involved around 20 European and international trainers, as well as 10 national trainers and facilitators.

In **Ljubljana Pride's PoT**, there are currently 7 trainers.

MEMBERSHIP PROFILE

Describes the background, skills, and experience of trainers. It includes diversity among trainers, balance between senior and junior trainers, and their areas of expertise.

In **Lunaria's PoT**, members are trainers and facilitators with diverse profiles, competences, and areas of expertise built through almost 15 years of collaboration. The pool combines junior and senior trainers who bring both thematic expertise and methodological innovation.

In **Ljubljana Pride's PoT**, the trainers are LGBTIQ+ people who share the organisations and PoTs core values and principles and have diverse competences. Many have backgrounds in youth work, activism, social sciences, or education, and combine their professional knowledge with lived experience.

As previously stated, in **Sapling** the PoT brings together both queer and non-queer trainers, with the key expectation that all have strong competences in working with LGBTIQ+ participants and in creating LGBTIQ+-inclusive learning environments.

INCLUSION OF NEW MEMBERS

Refers to how new trainers join the pool. It encompasses selection criteria, process of onboarding and other processes that really ensure a new person is integrated into the pool.

In **Sapling**, new trainers are most often recommended by trusted sources within the organisation's network. There is currently no formal screening or selection procedure, potential trainers are rather expected to demonstrate prior experience in implementing trainings related to the topic of the upcoming activity. This can be proven through references, including self-reference, and by showing alignment with **Sapling's** LGBTIQ+-inclusive approach. While the process is informal, it relies heavily on trust and prior relationships, ensuring that those who join can competently and sensitively work within the organisation's queer educational framework.

In **Lunaria's PoT**, trainers and facilitators are selected according to the themes and methods of specific projects, with an effort to match profiles and expertise to project needs. Instead of launching open calls to all active PoT members, **Lunaria** uses calls targeted to those best suited for each activity.

To be included, trainers must commit to all project phases: from online preparation and in-person meetings (including two prep days) to toolkit design and evaluation. They are also expected to embrace the organisation's values and educational vision. While this process is selective and project-based, it ensures that all trainers who join or engage in a given cycle share a strong sense of purpose and are well-aligned with Lunaria's pedagogical and ethical framework.

When new trainers enter the PoT of **Ljubljana Pride**, which is at the moment done mostly by recommendation of already existing members (as the prerequisite is that the trainers are LGBT people themselves), they are a part of the process of mentoring before they fully start preparing, implementing and evaluating the activities.

This includes obligatory job shadowings (once in the role of classical observer with little active role in implementation and once with being already fully integrated into the team in preparation and implementation phase) with at least 2 different trainers from the PoT, and two different types of activities (example: one residential training and one shorter workshop in a school classroom). During the job shadowing more emphasis is put on understanding the approaches and policies and work approaches of the PoT. Requirements to stay members include respecting the Ethical Code and participating in most of the trainers meetings, as well as implementing at least some activities on a yearly basis.

INTERNAL CAPACITY BUILDING

Involves learning opportunities within the pool. It includes activities like mentoring, skill-sharing, additional trainings, peer learning and reflection that strengthen individual and collective competence.

In **Saplinq**, internal capacity building is currently informal and happens primarily through collaboration during project preparation and delivery. Trainers exchange experiences, adapt methods together, and learn through practice. While there are no structured internal learning activities in place, this peer-based approach still allows for mutual support and organic knowledge sharing, particularly among trainers who have been working together over time.

In **Lunaria's PoT**, capacity building is a structured and ongoing process. The annual Advanced Training for Trainers "PIRATES – Pedagogical approaches, Intercultural learning, and Raising Awareness Tools in Europe" is the key event for shared learning, exchange of methods, and co-creation of new educational tools. Additionally, regular bimonthly meetings and local training sessions enable peer learning, updates on ongoing work, and collective reflection.

In **Ljubljana Pride's PoT**, capacity building takes place through a mix of structured and organic learning opportunities. Transfer of knowledge is supported through various pedagogical manuals and toolkits developed by trainers over recent years, which document both the concepts the organisation works with and specific methodological approaches. In the past two years, the PoT, together with international partners, has also created a series of ready-to-use educational modules for field implementation. Trainers have access to both internal and external learning opportunities - the organisation regularly shares information on relevant trainings and organises its own sessions based on identified needs. These include capacity-building activities open to staff, volunteers, and trainers alike, such as workshops on mentoring or using Canva as a tool. Additionally, members can engage in job shadowing through the organisation's Erasmus+ Key Action 1 accreditation and can receive financial support for participation fees or for purchasing pedagogical materials and publications.

EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

Refers to processes for assessing and improving the work of the PoT. It includes feedback from trainers, participants, and organisers to ensure learning and integration of those learnings into the wider structures on one hand and accountability on the other.

For instance, in **Ljubljana Pride's PoT**, evaluation and feedback are integrated throughout the yearly cycle. Trainers meet monthly, with agendas prepared in advance to include reflection on past activities, discussion of upcoming events, and planning. Twice a year, more extensive evaluation moments take place: a three-day trainers' meeting in January focused on strategic planning, collective reflection, and team building; and a one-day evaluation session around June or early summer, closing the first half of the year.

After every training, trainers also complete trainer reports that include structured evaluation questions guiding them to provide relevant feedback to the organisation.

In **Lunaria's PoT**, evaluation is systematically embedded into all educational processes. Each training course or youth exchange includes an in-person evaluation session with the PoT, followed by an online debrief once the activity concludes. Participants also complete detailed evaluation questionnaires addressing the relevance of the topic, group dynamics, applied methodologies, and their learning outcomes. These findings are processed within Lunaria and shared with the PoT and teams of upcoming activities, ensuring that lessons learned inform future work. Additionally, the annual PIRATES training serves as a crucial platform for evaluating educational practices collectively and introducing new improvements. Internally, monthly staff meetings also provide space to assess the PoT's impact on the organisation's activities and overall quality of youth work.

In **Sapling**, evaluation processes are more informal and happen mostly after specific projects or trainings. Trainers usually provide verbal or written feedback to the organisational team following the implementation of activities, reflecting on what worked well and what could be improved. While there is no structured cycle or formal feedback tool in place, these exchanges contribute to incremental learning and mutual understanding.

COMPESATION

It looks into how trainers are remunerated for their work. It includes payment systems, trainers contracts and recognition of their time and expertise.

In **Sapling**, compensation for trainers depends on the scope and budget of each project. Trainers are paid per activity or project, usually following standard Erasmus+ or partner organisation rates.

While the system is less formalised than in some other organisations, agreements are made on a case-by-case basis, ensuring that trainers are remunerated fairly and in alignment with the available project resources.

In all **Lunaria's** projects there is a forecast of a trainer fee, which changes according to the trainer/facilitator profile (junior and senior).

In **Ljubljana Pride's PoT**, trainers receive a clearly defined/standardised fee for their work, which is reviewed annually and adjusted when necessary. The fees are set transparently and are covered by a clear agreement outlining what they include.

EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

Refers to processes for assessing and improving the work of the PoT. It includes feedback from trainers, participants, and organisers to ensure learning and integration of those learnings into the wider structures on one hand and accountability on the other.

In **Lunaria's PoT**, recognition is embedded in both formal and informal practices. Trainers contribute to the co-creation of pedagogical approaches and tools, which are applied across the organisation's projects, giving visibility and acknowledgment to their work. Participation in the annual PIRATES training and regular internal meetings allows trainers to share achievements, discuss improvements, and build professional recognition within the network.

In **Ljubljana Pride's PoT**, trainers are recognised not only through financial compensation but also through opportunities to contribute. Their expertise is visible both internally and externally. The organisation also supports trainers' professional growth through access to capacity-building activities, mentorship, and networking opportunities with international partners.

By reflecting on these key elements, organisations can tailor their PoT to their own context, making deliberate choices that shape not only how trainers work, but also how the PoT contributes to the organisation's mission, culture, and long-term impact.

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3 WHY A POOL OF TRAINERS

When speaking about a pool of trainers, the question of its purpose naturally arises. Why would an organisation choose to establish and continuously maintain one, when many manage to function without it?

For some organisations, creating a pool may not be feasible due to lack of resources (financial, spatial, material, time, etc.) or a small scale of the activities they implement. Others might already benefit from strong partnerships with external experts or prefer to cooperate with trainers only when specific activities are carried out. This just highlights that the decision to have a pool of trainers should be grounded in mapping of organisational needs, challenges, and resources and most importantly, in a clear vision of where the organisation wants to go and how it aims to develop.

If an organisation considers learning processes (planning, support, and facilitation of learning) as central to its work, having a pool of trainers is not just a nice addition, but a strategic necessity. A dedicated pool of trainers ensures that the organisation has the right in-house competences to design, guide, and reflect on learning experiences consistently. This enables the organisation's work to be more intentional, professional, and sustainable.

There are additional clear benefits to having a pool of trainers of your own. **This is especially true when it includes trainers from marginalised groups, whose knowledge and experiences bring additional perspectives and values.** The benefits those PoTs bring are not reserved just for the organisation itself, but rather impact the quality of the wider youth sector. There are also clear benefits for individuals involved: trainers who operate within the PoT as well as young people they are working with.

In order to bring these benefits closer, we have asked our partners to share their experiences, the impact of having or participating in a PoT has left them and hear about it directly from the practice.

TRAINERS

Learners are at the heart of any learning process and the ones who benefit most directly from a skilled pool of trainers. With engaging activities and supportive guidance, young people gain confidence, practical skills, and new perspectives of themselves and the world around them.

Additionally, having the presence of a trainer from the marginalised group leading the process can give young people role models they can relate to, broaden their perspectives, and inspire them to see new possibilities for themselves. For those who are themselves members of marginalised groups, it can be especially empowering, helping them feel seen, valued, and confident in their own potential.

Ljubljana Pride Association: *Impact of working with trainers who are LGBTIQ+ themselves is huge, and nicely highlighted by stories from the field. We experienced young LGBTIQ+ people coming out during or after the workshops, connecting with people from the community for the first time, reporting on feeling safe and accepted as they could identify with the trainers and connect better with them. Having the experience themselves, trainers know how to prepare the learning process better as well as can connect to their lives and experiences and use storytelling to explain and bring some topics closer to the participants - this additionally enables them to create a more powerful impact as it supports the learners journey.*

Sapling: *LGBTIQ+ trainers, as trainers from marginalised groups act as role models, which is immensely important and impactful in non-formal education. One of the powers of the non-formal education is that it gives space to grow for people who do not fit the formal education for any reasons. Our experience shows that queer people are over-represented in this group and therefore many of them experience learning and educational success for the first time in their lives in the non-formal education setting. Seeing a (successful) queer person in the trainer's role is hugely inspirational for them and over the years many of our participants said they want to become a trainer one day too.*

LEARNERS

PoTs are often not very welcoming, accessible or adjusted to trainers from marginalised groups, which is why there are clear benefits for them in participating in a pool of trainers made up of diverse and marginalised voices. Here, we asked members of the Ljubljana Pride PoT to share the benefits they've experienced.

"The majority of my work tends to be in heteronormative spaces and at times even in criminalized countries. For me, being part of LJ Pride's pool of trainers means being in a safe space as a trainer, where I can be fully myself, bring every part of my experience and expertise to a training context, and learn from and with other trainers. Working in a structured and long-term manner together has allowed me to diversify my methodologies, discuss challenges during training contexts with peers and grow as a trainer. It has also brought a great sense of joy, pride and belonging to my personal and professional life."

"I don't have to explain every time when planning the activities as a trainer why we should do specific inclusive practices. That can also be on a very small scale, like asking the participants to share their pronouns when introducing themselves. My co-trainer here knows we need to do it. When compared to my other trainers work, here I definitely feel more relaxed because I don't have to justify to my co-trainer why this is important to address"

"For me the benefit comes from the opportunity of sharing experiences, tools and perhaps even training strategies that are specific to my background without having to do the extensive emotional labour of having to explain my lived experience and being at risk of having it minimalised or brushed off as irrelevant. It is a great safe space for learning and upskilling and the collaborations are extremely valuable."

"There are quite a few benefits in being part of a specific LGBTIQ+ pool of trainers as a queer person, as beyond peer-to-peer support that is priceless, there are possibilities to develop skills and knowledge that help to build up and develop engaging educational, training and facilitation activities for the LGBTIQ+ youth/adults. It helps to dedicate time to strengthening and deepening existing training practices targeting LGBTIQ+ people specifically without spending time on education/explanation of colleagues who are not aware of lived experiences of vulnerable groups and being specific instead of being generic."

It also creates a possibility to widen, strengthen and diversify the existing practices of informal education by enriching and adjusting them for specific groups and issues. It definitely brings more diversity, various perspectives, methodologies and approaches to the sector."

"Besides the obvious benefits – doing work I enjoy and being fairly financially compensated through the pool – the greatest value I gain from being part of the LGBTIQ+ trainers' pool is the growth in the quality of my training work. Through the connections I've built in the pool and activities we develop together, I've really learned a lot. As a result I've noticed how much of this knowledge, particularly around inclusive methods and approaches, I am able to apply and transfer to my other professional relationships and tasks outside the pool."

"The LGBTIQ+ specific pool of trainers allows me to develop pedagogical processes and activities with my colleagues in a way that we automatically "speak the same language" - we share the common experience of the systems of oppression as queer people and we do not need to explain to each other that this oppression is real. We do not need to explain that this oppression has a detrimental impact on us as human beings and as trainers - we live and feel this reality. We do not need to explain that this oppression has the same detrimental impact on the young people and wider society and finally, we do not need to fight about the idea that our pedagogical work should always strive to fight these systems of oppression and should support us all (us as trainers and human beings as well as all our marginalised participants). Everywhere else, doing pedagogical work is also a fight to have these views and experiences included. Here, in our PoT we can just do it and not waste energy and time on convincing others of our realities and needs."

ORGANISATION

For the organisation, a pool of trainers brings together different skills and specialisations, helping keep the work consistent and high-quality while having a potential to create a real learning community. It also gives the organisation more capacity to try new approaches, work long-term with specific groups, keep up with trends, and better understand and respond to the needs of the people it supports.

Ljubljana Pride Association: *Core concepts of the whole organisation is youth work practice that is heavily based on non-formal education approaches. Hence having a strong and functional PoT is a prerequisite and a consequence of the way the organisation works and is structured.*

Sapling: *The main contribution is that we re-run favourite trainings and we can come up with new ideas and new trainings. We harvest those when trainers from the PoT run a training and then we ask them if there is a topic/training they would like to implement. And since almost all of our trainings are marketed as queer inclusive and provide safer space primarily for queer young people, they contribute to the mission of our organisation and the purpose for which it has been established, notably to develop young activists.*

Lunaria: *The PoT's purpose is to successfully contribute to the implementation of the educational activities of the organisation. Moreover, a big space is left to the design, testing and upgrading of tools and approaches to better impact the work of the organisation and to bring on board new beneficiaries and young people from more marginalised groups.*

LEARNING COMMUNITY

As a learning community, the pool of trainers helps the organisation grow into a stronger learning organisation by sharing skills, learning from each other, and building a culture of continuous learning.

It also supports the organisation in staying adaptable to changing needs and contributes to capacity building across the wider youth sector.

Ljubljana Pride Association: Its work is crucial for the organisation as they also develop materials, new approaches and channel it back into the organisational work. In that way, the process is double sided/win-win for all. Without good reporting and monitoring of the situation in the field, the organisation cannot plan its activities in a fully meaningful way.

Lunaria: The PoT is a crucial body for our organisation, since most of our activities revolve around non formal education. The PoTs is therefore a very valuable and important resource for our organisation, because the PoTs is concretely supporting the implementation of all the educational activities implemented by the organisation. Moreover, all the PoTs members contributed to create the "Lunaria educational approach" proposed and applied to the projects we implement.

YOUTH SECTOR AND THE QUALITY OF YOUTH WORK

A PoT doesn't just help one organisation, it strengthens the whole youth sector. By sharing expertise, trying out new approaches, and spreading good practices, it supports young people in getting access to quality learning, which contributes to Youth Goal #8 and the broader set of European Youth Goals (Youth Goals, n.d.). PoTs create numerous pedagogical materials, manuals, teaching aids, and games, which enrich and support youth workers, youth organisations and the wider youth (work) sector. Trainers are key actors in the youth work community of practice, they see the trends and how youth is changing. By coming together with other trainers within a PoT they reflect the lived reality of the field and can channel their observations into policy processes and other structural processes to co-shape the youth sector on all levels. The work of trainers and the PoTs is crucial for quality youth work development and for youth services tailored to the needs of young people.

Additionally, PoTs composed of trainers from marginalised groups bring in a unique perspective and often trainers capacitated and empowered through such PoTs are more supported to enter mainstream youth work settings, mainstream PoTs and organisations and that allows organisations that have less capacity or less experiences to work with youth from marginalised groups to gain crucial competence through these trainers.

Joint statement from Barbara Mastnik, trainer and facilitator, and Elizabeta Lakosil, program officer of the National Agency of the EU Programmes:

The establishment of the National agency's pool of trainers is a great added value for the youth sector, as it ensures the continuity of quality education and training. The pool offers its members the opportunity to participate in various types of training and skill-building, enabling them to continuously upgrade their knowledge. The pool's meetings and training sessions also help to build solidarity and mutual respect among members, who also share their specific knowledge with each other. The pool coordinators provide members with guidance based on the management of EU youth programmes and a broader view of the youth work sector, and inform them of new developments and changes that are important for their future work. National agency ensures the visibility of the pool, and the work of the trainers is not limited to working only with the National agency, but trainers can also use their knowledge in their work elsewhere in the youth sector and beyond, thus enriching the youth sector itself and other areas, thereby increasing the visibility of non-formal learning and youth work outside the youth sector.

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4

HOW TO SET-UP YOUR OWN POOL OF TRAINERS

How do you get started? Like other organisational decisions, also the question “**How to set-up a pool of trainers?**” starts by actually asking yourselves:

1. Do we need a pool of trainers?
2. What should be the aim of our pool of trainers?
3. Which role should it play within our organisation and the organisational structure?

So basically we start with a classical **needs assessment**. We can start with the needs of the organisation or the wider organisational perspective and then of course we also need to have a process of the needs assessment of the **educators/trainers** that will be the members of the PoT. If our PoT should implement activities that the organisation wants to “sell on the market”, let’s say the organisation would like to offer workshops for companies or other NGOs or other similar actors, then it makes sense we also map the needs of the “**clients**” and incorporate that into the aim of the PoT and its modalities. And finally, we should also have an extensive needs assessment with the **beneficiaries-learners** of the educational activities the PoT is intended to implement.

For example, if the PoT should implement educational activities for LGBTIQ+ youth, we should map the specific needs of the LGBTIQ+ young people. Very likely we will see needs like “feeling safe and included” or “not having to explain to the trainer my pronouns”, indicating that to LGBTIQ+ youth relatability and representation matter. So in such cases we might make decisions like - the PoT needs to be composed of LGBTIQ+ trainers; or the PoT needs to be composed of LGBTIQ+ young trainers.

So once we’ve mapped the needs and can clearly answer the question **A - yes, we do need a PoT** and out of the needs assessment we are also able to answer the question **B - formulate the PoT’s aim**, as well as understand the role and structural function the PoT should perform; then we are ready to decide on the **PoT model: a list of trainers or a community of practice** as a framework.

CONCRETE STEPS TO SET-UP YOUR POT:

Create a Terms of Reference

In order to set-up the PoT you will need some kind of a written document of the aim, basic principles and composition of the PoT, so that you can start recruiting its members. If your PoT will have a formal position in the organisation, there might be the need to have an adopted formal decision about this. If you deem it important to have a Code of Conduct for the trainers or another type of a document of principles and values that the trainers need to agree with, then it makes sense this is drafted at the very beginning of the set-up process.

Mobilise the PoT members - the trainers, educators

You might want to open an external call for members of the PoT; you might have an internal recruitment from the organisation's membership or existing associates; you might have an application process or you might invite people directly. In order to be able to have the recruitment

of the PoT members, you will need to have a defined profile of who the people should be and which competences they need to have in order to join. In addition it is important to also communicate openly in the recruitment process if you expect the trainers to agree with a Code of Conduct.

Determine the coordination structure of the PoT

Will you have a PoT coordinator? Or perhaps a staff member that will support the PoT with logistics and coordination. Will you dedicate resources to have a paid position for the coordinator or will this role be voluntary for one of the PoT members? Whichever way you decide, it is important that you determine the coordination structure and have a transparent process of assigning the role(s) and responsibilities.

Plan periodic meetings and/or regular forms of communication with the PoT and within the PoT

Depending on the type of PoT (a list or a community of practice) it will be more or less relevant to invest in regular meetings, perhaps on a monthly basis, perhaps every 3 months. Even if you opt for a list of trainers and experts and there is not the need or expectation that you would build a tight community, it is still important to have at least once a year a meeting with the trainers and experts in order to have better alignment with the organisation's mission and its needs. If you want to support your PoT to become a true community of practice you will need to invest in physical meetings. Often organisations ensure that the PoT can meet regularly online or physically for shorter meetings on a frequent basis and at least once a year the PoT has a 2-3 day residential meeting.

You will also need to ensure that you have clear and established communication channels through which the organisation can communicate with PoT members individually, as well as with the collective. But the more your PoT is a community of practice, the more it will be crucial that the PoT has also established internal communication channels and processes. Perhaps you will organise a mailing list; a chat; command digital spaces for file sharing; online community, etc.

Ensure the PoT has work to do

The trainers and educators will be learning and developing if they get the chance to work together and in different fields important for the organisation. If your PoT is a list, people will need to get opportunities to work in order to stay motivated to be active in the PoT. Working as PoT members will keep them close to the organisation's values and principles as they will encounter this all the time while working. If your PoT is a community of practice, working together will be the crucial way to develop, to reflect, and to learn. This will benefit your organisation as your trainers and educators will be close to the learners and even your organisation's partners and clients. If you can not guarantee enough working opportunities for the PoT, do you then really need a PoT?

Dedicate resources and a budget

On the level of the organisation it is crucial that resources and financial support is dedicated for the functioning of the PoT. Supporting the travel cost of trainers coming to meetings, hosting the trainers for a yearly residential meeting, investing in training opportunities for the trainers, and investing in training materials and resources. These are key elements to ensure the PoT can function and perform its tasks. At the same time it is important to dedicate resources for the coordination structure, be it a staff member from the organisation or an external person, be it one of the trainers from within the PoT, it will be important to compensate their role with some financial compensation as quality coordination is difficult to expect on purely voluntary basis.

Evaluation processes, feedback loops

Like any other community, also the PoT needs to have evaluation and feedback loops embedded in its internal operations. You can build a process together with the members of the PoT, taking in consideration the yearly dynamics. Will you have regular check-ins and evaluation after events in which the trainers were involved in? Will you have a bigger yearly evaluation moment? Perhaps you want to evaluate more frequently than once a year?

You will also need to evaluate the role and impact of the PoT within the larger organisation, where and how will this evaluation happen? Who should be involved?

Ownership and collaborative structures

What will be crucial for a well functioning PoT is that the actual trainers and educators, the PoT members, are involved within all the processes that are being set-up within the PoT and for the PoT. This chapter is just as well intended for the organisation as they are intended for any trainer active within the PoT. It is important that the organisation is willing to initiate and support the establishment of a PoT, however it is just as important that the trainers and educators themselves feel the need for it and are willing to initiate and lead the processes of setting up a PoT. There is no “right way” of who should be at the forefront of the PoT set-up. Whatever works for the organisation, for the trainers group and answers to the needs, will be the right process.

Recruitment of new members and sustainability

Any structure, and PoT is a structure, will need to have mechanisms of how to ensure its own continuation, sustainability and attracting new members. It is important to have an agreed approach and transparent process on how new members can join. How will you recruit additional trainers and educators to your PoT? What is the process, what are the criteria? Will you have open calls, will you invite them directly? And then what? They agree to join, so what will be the onboarding process? Will you organise internal training for trainers, some mentoring programme for newbies, will you organise a junior/senior trainer approach, perhaps a system of job shadowing with more experienced trainers? All of these are options and many more, it's important to have something meaningful in place so that new people can actually perform according to your needs and expectations and will get the support for it.

In order to showcase the above process in practice, here is the story of how the PoT of Ljubljana Pride Association was established:

Ljubljana Pride Association was established in 2009 by representatives of other LGBTIQ+ organisations with the sole purpose to organise the yearly Pride Parade. However, by 2014 it became clear that this aim can not be fulfilled without developing a stronger organisational team and activities year-round. There was a clear need to organise activities for LGBTIQ+ youth and the organisation started to implement workshops supported by external young LGBTIQ+ trainers, active in other LGBTIQ+ organisations and abroad. By 2017 the need for trainers grew to the extent that a strategic partnership project was developed to train up a group of young LGBTIQ+ educators into more experienced and capacitated trainers. This group of 5 trainers became by the end of the project in 2019 the core of the PoT of the organisation, developing also the Ethical Code of the PoT and implementing a first round of recruitment of newer junior trainers. But after an intense 1-year semi-successful process of upskilling

and mentoring the new trainer-mentees and a very steep organisational growth trajectory with big need for expert-trainers, the PoT transformed its concept away from integrating younger and less experienced candidates and rather recruiting more experienced LGBTIQ+ trainers from the field. During the first few years there was not a clear coordination structure inside the PoT and only in 2022 the PoT got a first freelance coordinator, one of the members, who later transitioned into a paid role as the PoT coordinator. By now the PoT had 9 members at its peak and mostly operates at about 7 fully active members. It has developed its first 3-year Strategy in 2024 and in 2025 the PoT has gained its formal status by being incorporated into the organisations Statutes. The association could not have developed its expert work in most of its areas if the PoT had not been hands on in co-creating the knowledge and resources. The trainers identify deeply with the organisation and will often take on additional roles.

What this example illustrates is that setting-up a PoT is not a linear process. Ljubljana Pride Association's PoT had its Ethical Code in 2017, but its formal position within the organisation was codified in the Statutes only in 2025, so 8 years later. At the same time we can see that the concept of who should be the trainers in the PoT, their expertise and recruitment has changed several times. And that is often typical as needs in the organisation can change over time, also the recruitment and profile will change and adapt. The internal coordination structure did not settle for several years but still the PoT was operating and fulfilling its roles. What is key is that the trainers, members of the PoT are at the core of the development and internal PoT processes.





SPECIFICS OF WORKING IN ORGANISATIONS THAT WORK WITH MARGINALISED GROUPS AND/OR TRAINERS FROM MARGINALISED GROUPS

Working with and within organisations that work with marginalised groups can never be neutral. It means navigating and addressing social inequalities while striving to create safer spaces both for learners and trainers, recognition of lived experiences as well as learning outcomes, and empowerment both of individuals and communities. Not only is this work not neutral, it is a complex task and recognising it as such is the first step towards an inclusive and empowering learning environment. Trainers who themselves come from marginalised groups bring a unique added value to this work: they embody lived experience, act as role models, and can connect with learners in ways that external experts and trainers with a mainstream background often cannot. At the same time, they face risks of tokenisation, burnout, and structural exclusion if their contributions are not supported by strong organisational systems.

KEY POINTS ON WORKING WITH MARGINALISED GROUPS IN NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Power Dynamics

Power is never absent in non-formal education (NFE). Despite its participatory ethos, trainers, learners, and organisations bring unequal social positions into the room. It has been pointed out that NFE should be seen as a complementary space to formal education, precisely because it allows young people to renegotiate power dynamics through participation (Schild et al., 2013). However, this does not mean that NFE and its methods and approaches somehow inherently possess a magic wand which eradicates inequality and we leave our complex social fabric outside the room once we enter a training or workshop. Addressing power dynamics in NFE is essential because unequal social positions often silence young people from marginalised groups, both by limiting accessibility of learning spaces, reinforcing internalised oppression and limiting their ability to contribute meaningfully.

Do:

- Be explicit about power dynamics in your planning, facilitation, and evaluation.
- Share decision-making within groups of learners and ensure that no single learner or trainer is made to “speak for their community.”
- Support trainers from marginalised groups by recognising that they face double power imbalances – both in the room with majority learners and within the organisation, especially when they are not part of the decision making structure
- Build structures such as a Pool of Trainers (PoT) where trainers can influence strategy and organisational practice and where voices of marginalised groups are purposefully amplified

Don't:

- Assume NFE automatically “levels the playing field.” Inequalities from society enter the room with participants and trainers.
- Leave trainers from marginalised groups isolated or without structural authority.
- Treat representation as symbolic — avoid inviting trainers only for their identity.

Good practice examples:

Example: *Ljubljana Pride, Sapling and Lunaria all employ to a different degree the principle of “Nothing about us without us” which ensures that trainers working on topics touching various marginalised groups always include a trainer or expert from that group.*

Example: *Ljubljana Pride addressed the power imbalance by formalising its PoT and ensuring the members have some level of autonomy in how the PoT functions and in its strategic planning, ensuring that trainers’ voices are not symbolic but structurally recognised.*

INTERSECTIONALITY

Marginalisation is rarely experienced in isolation. Analysis of intersectionality highlighted how overlapping systems of oppression—race, class, gender, sexuality, different ability—create unique experiences of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149). When learners hold multiple marginalised identities (e.g. queer and Roma, or differently abled and migrant), they face layered power dynamics in group processes. They may be more vulnerable to microaggressions, stereotyping, or exclusion from peer groups. In NFE, this means educational approaches must be designed to embrace complexity, rather than simplifying learners’ or trainers’ identities.

This principle should apply also to understanding power dynamics within the PoT, whether it comprises solely of members of one specific marginalised group or whether its members come from various, also more mainstream backgrounds.

Do:

- Recognise that learners and trainers may face overlapping forms of discrimination.
- Design educational approaches that embrace complexity rather than reducing people to single identities.
- Consider intersectionality also within your PoT: acknowledge both diversity and unequal privilege among trainers, even if your pot is made up entirely of trainers from marginalised groups.

Don't:

- Assume one trainer (or learner) can represent all experiences of a community.
- Overlook the multiple vulnerabilities that make some participants or trainers more exposed to microaggressions or exclusion.

LEARNING-BASED APPROACH

At the heart of NFE is experiential, participatory learning. Trainers with lived experience embody this principle, since their knowledge is grounded in navigating exclusion and marginalisation. But also a learning based approach does not only imply that the learning of learners is at its core, but also that the trainers, organisations and PoTs must apply this approach in their work and their structures. Understanding marginalisation, power dynamics and the needs of learners means constant learning on the part of all stakeholders. We have talked about the importance of a PoT being a learning community,

however it is beneficial if the entire organisation applies elements of this approach, so that everyone involved in implementing NFE activities from administration, logistics to strategy and management is empowered to ensure a positive learning environment for marginalised groups attending and implementing activities.

Do:

- Apply experiential, participatory learning for both learners and trainers.
- Treat both the PoT and organisation as learning communities – everyone should be part of creating an inclusive learning environment.
- Regularly revise methods, toolkits, and structures based on feedback.

Don't:

- Assume only participants need learning support. Trainers and organisations also need continuous reflection and growth.
- Freeze tools or curricula as static; NFE requires adaptability, especially to the circumstances and needs of marginalised groups both of learners and trainers

Example: *Lunaria operationalises a Learning-based approach by treating its toolkits as "living documents," revised after each activity to include feedback from both trainers and participants.*

CENTERING YOUNG PEOPLE'S NEEDS

Connected to the Learning based approach is centering the learner - in this case young people from marginalised groups. NFE in youth work rests on the principle that young people are active agents in their own learning. For marginalised youth, this is especially vital, as they are often failed by formal systems.

Marginalised learners may be invited into projects as representatives of their identity group, rather than as full learners in their own right. This tokenistic approach can reinforce feelings of being on display, instead of fostering empowerment. Participation must be meaningful and supported by structural safeguards, otherwise it risks reinforcing inequalities and as such negatively affecting learning outcomes of marginalised groups.

The Council of Europe frames non-formal learning as most effective when "learner-centred, voluntary, and connected to real life" (Schild, Connolly, Labadie, & Vanhee, 2013, p. 25). Power imbalances can directly affect how learners engage and what they take away from NFE. Implementing a learner centered approach means putting the lived experiences of marginalised groups at the center of the learning process and not overlooking their specific lived experiences. This is much easier to achieve when the trainer is sensitised to recognise these lived experiences, possibly by being part of the same marginalised group themselves. Furthermore, active and successful members of a marginalised group can serve as role-models for young people from those groups and motivate them.

Do:

- Recognise young people as active agents in their own learning.
- Ensure that participation is meaningful, not tokenistic.
- Put the lived experiences of marginalised groups at the centre of learning processes.
- Provide role models from the same or similar backgrounds to strengthen empowerment.

Don't:

- Invite marginalised learners only as “representatives” of an identity group.
- Overlook the barriers that prevent marginalised youth from fully engaging.

Example: *Sapling underlines that “seeing a successful queer person in the trainer’s role is hugely inspirational,” as it creates trust and hope among queer youth participants.*

ACCOUNTABILITY

When implementing activities in NFE, organisations and trainers are held accountable by many stakeholders, but let us bear in mind that different stakeholders hold different degrees of power to enforce such accountability. Marginalised groups are usually the ones with the least power to hold us accountable to them. This is why prioritising accountability to marginalised groups should be a conscious decision supported by concrete steps we take when implementing activities which include both learners and trainers from marginalised groups.

Do:

- Make accountability to marginalised groups a conscious organisational priority.
- Use concrete measures: codes of conduct, mentoring, co-trainer models, and institutional backing for trainers from marginalised groups.
- Create feedback loops where trainers and learners influence future programmes.
- Remember that overlapping marginalisations mean some groups or individuals have the least power to demand accountability so organisations must proactively ensure it.
- Advocate the need for resources for accountability to marginalised groups in relation to the donors and protect your participants from further marginalisation that donor and reporting requirements might bring.

Don't:

- Reduce accountability to marginalised groups when it is challenged by donors and their reporting requirements.
- Place responsibility for enforcing safe spaces only on marginalised trainers.

Example: *Sapling safeguards accountability to trainers from marginalised groups by never sending them into unsafe situations alone. They require a co-trainer model and give trainers organisational backing to enforce safe space principles, including the authority to intervene or even stop an activity if group agreements are violated. This makes the organisation accountable to trainers’ safety rather than expecting trainers to bear that burden individually.*

MINORITY STRESS AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS

Understanding minority stress is really important for anyone working with marginalised groups, as it describes specific occurrences that can impact individuals deeply. Minority stress is chronic stress, and it refers to the unique psychological and social stressors experienced by members of marginalised groups in society. Meyer (2003, as cited in Sateenkaari-ikkuna ry, 2024) points out it is distinguished from general stress, stress that all people may experience, by its origin in prejudice and stigma. These stressors arise from discrimination, prejudice, and systemic inequalities, which they face due to personal circumstances such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other aspects they identify as

part of a minority group.

Having knowledge of these structures and how they affect the learner (and consequently the learning process) will allow the trainers to better understand how the learner engages and feels in the learning space, hence it is relevant for any trainer working with marginalised groups.

In order to reduce the minority stress and its consequences, support mechanisms should be put in place. Some of the examples of the supportive mechanisms are peer support, mentorship, accessible resources, establishing safer spaces, and clear organisational policies. They can help learners to fully participate in their learning, reduce the harm and build resilience.

It is important to have in mind that support mechanisms are always more effective when developed in collaboration with young people of the specific marginalised groups involved, ensuring that it meets real needs and reflects lived experiences. Consulting with them can help tailor support mechanisms, making them more relevant for the learners they are designed to support.

Do:

- Train trainers (and staff) to understand minority stress.
- Recognise that learners and trainers may face stressors rooted in stigma, discrimination, and structural inequalities.
- Reflect on supportive mechanisms you're using - is it enough? Is it appropriate? What more can you do?
- Embed inclusive practices into organisational structures, not only in individual workshops.

Don't:

- Assume all members of a marginalised group experience stress in the same way.
- Forget on the level of the organisation: a lot can be done to establish spaces and processes that could support learners.
- Treat support measures as optional or symbolic.
- Ignore feedback from learners regarding the effectiveness of support mechanisms.

Example: *Sapling combines mental health resources and peer networks to allow marginalised youth to safely participate in learning activities and feel empowered to contribute.*

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6

SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE FUNCTIONING OF THE POOL OF TRAINERS

As already stated several times throughout this manual, we need to emphasize again that sustaining a PoT in the long run takes organisational commitment and resources. If we know that a PoT is contributing crucially to our organisational goals and has overall important positive impact on the organisation and its environment, then it is logical we want this structure to be functioning, that the trainers are performing their tasks with quality and dedication and that we can sustain a stable structure over a long period of time. In order to ensure the support for the functioning of the PoT, we should find ways to structurally embed it within the organisation.

For example we can create a budget line within the yearly organisational budget that is always available as part of core budget lines like the office cost budget or statutory meetings budget. We can formalise the PoT in our statutes or other core documents describing the organisational structure and organs.

We can make it part of our organigram and give the PoT a core role in the topical and structural work within the organisation. We can make it an element of our educational programme. The important part is that the organisation needs to stand behind the PoT and support its functioning as well as be ready to learn from its competence and insights. We need to make sure we avoid situations where the PoT is competing with other organisational structures or where the PoT is sidelined because the core staff is threatened by the trainers expertise - we need to make sure that the PoT is a resource always in collaboration with every other structure within the organisation.

The PoT is an amazing enrichment for the organisation, not a threat. It's important that the trainers get ample opportunities to work together with other staff and volunteers, that there are common processes and activities to create a good team spirit and that we all learn from each other and can build together the support we can offer to each other in the work and beyond.

It is important that whenever we are doing programming, budgeting and mobilising future grants and opportunities, that we factor in the PoT, the activities trainers can take over and develop, the financial compensation for the work and so on. If we treat the PoT like any other resource, then it will also perform like that. We also need to factor in the resources needed for the recruitment of new PoT members, for sufficient coordination capacity and other necessary elements.

In cases when we have a PoT made up of trainers and educators from marginalised communities, like LGBTIQ+ people themselves, we also need to ensure that we have mechanisms and resources to support trainers themselves to deal with minority stress and other detrimental effects of the systems of oppression that disproportionately affect marginalised groups. We need to be in tune with the reality and needs of the trainers and make sure we are ready to support their needs. We might invest in supervision or intervision processes. We might invest into more physical meetings and retreats to recharge. We might want to invest into offering paid counseling and therapy for the trainers in difficult or traumatic situations. But most of all, we need to have the organisational capacity to recognise that minority stress is affecting the trainers from marginalised groups and that systems of oppression like

patriarchy and homophobia and transphobia do have a disproportionate toll on our trainers and therefore we as organisation need to listen to their needs and support them. We need to co-create a safe space with them, for them.

ENSURING SUSTAINABLE POT BY KEEPING TRAINERS MOTIVATED

Apart from the structural elements that can influence sustainability which we have previously mentioned (process of recruitment or supportive mechanisms for new members to name a few), one should be aware of the power of the individual level - primarily through the motivation of trainers to take active part in the PoT and stay engaged in it longterm.

Often this translates into trainers who stay because being part of the PoT gives them a sense of purpose, it allows them to contribute to social change, and brings comfort of belonging to a community of people who share their values. When trainers feel that the pool supports their own growth and reflects what matters to them, they're much more likely to stay engaged and keep bringing energy and stability into the group.

Below you can find some recommendations on how to keep the trainers motivated.

PEER LEARNING

Consider how you can integrate the peer learning to really be a part of your PoT reality. The community of practice model enhances the motivation and the aspect of what you're gaining by participating in a PoT.

EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES

Regular exchange of experiences at the peer level allows trainers to share insights, lessons learned, and creative approaches from their work. Discussing real-life challenges and successes inspires new ideas, helps solve problems collaboratively, and creates a continuous cycle of improvement that benefits both trainers and the organisation as a whole.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Informal connections among trainers and regular meet ups of the PoT can help establish trust and connections among the trainers. These take a step further from the idea of the PoT as just work, and bring it closer to a community. Starting very small, this can mean making sure trainers can have time and space for a non-formal coffee together after a meeting, or share what is happening in their personal lives.

ASSESSMENT OF THE COMPETENCES

You can integrate assessment of the competencies into your PoT as a yearly element, or a basis on which part of the reflection is being implemented. Asking the members of the PoT to also reflect on the areas they would like to furtherly develop can, if you integrate their needs into the account later on, enable them to see what they are getting from their involvement in the PoT.

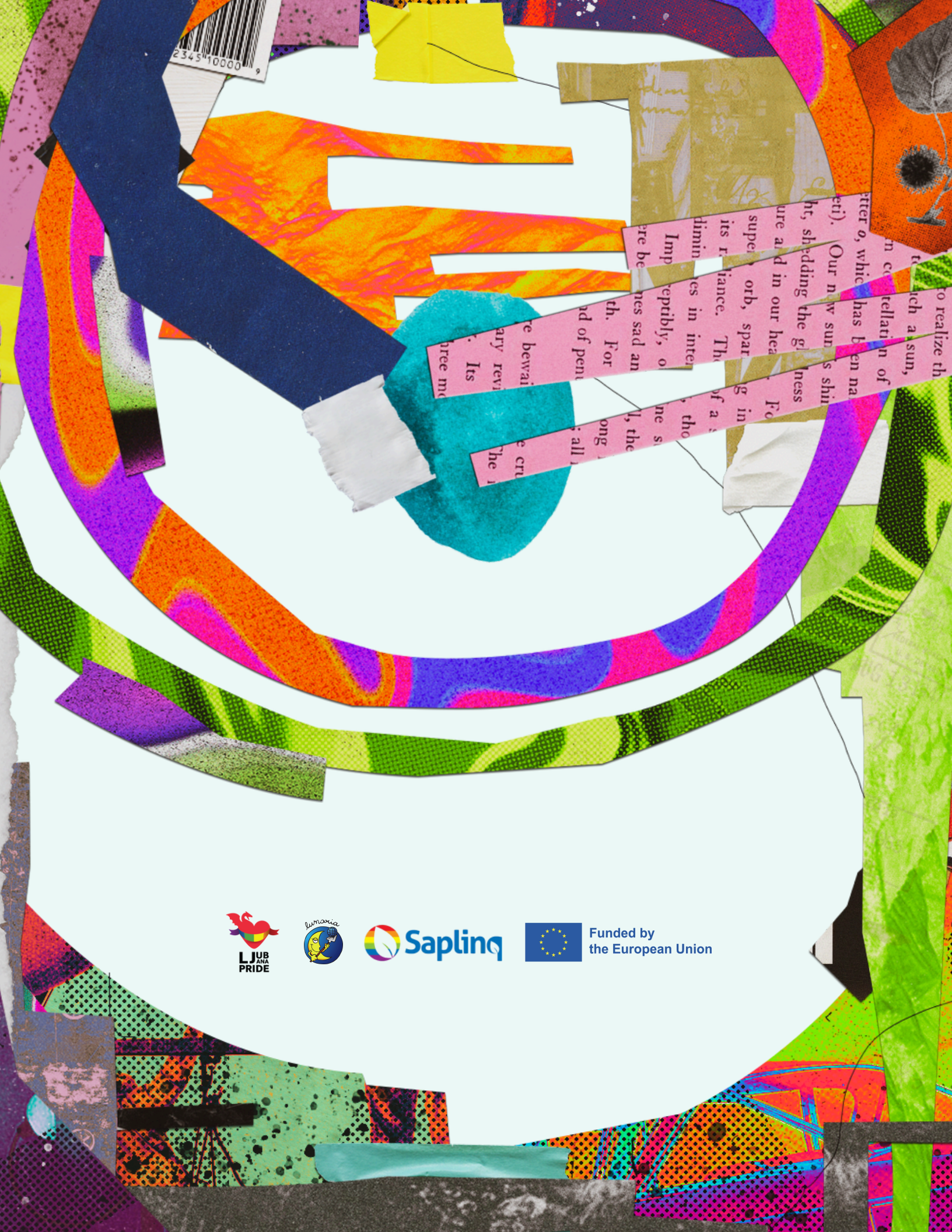
EVALUATION AND CELEBRATION

It is important to celebrate milestones and successes, both within the work sphere as well as personal ones. Congratulating birthdays in a common group of all trainers of the PoT, asking on the trainers report to share what was their trainers success during the activity, and similar small elements can support the trainers to feel valued and important.

POOL OF TRAINERS AS A WAY OF ACTIVISM

For many trainers, especially those from marginalised groups, being part of a PoT is more than just implementing activities, it's also a way of putting their values in practice and doing activism. In that way, the activities can allow them to challenge inequality, open important topics, facilitate deep conversations, and/or create safer spaces for young people. This makes their participation in the PoT seen as something bigger.





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