Best Practices

Welcomers

The Welcomers initiative aims to create a welcoming, friendly, and inclusive environment for newcomers to the municipality, as well as for individuals who may feel isolated during events organized by the municipality.

The project is based on the observation that people who attend events alone, as well as couples without children, do not always feel comfortable participating in local events when they do not know anyone there. More generally, it seeks to support those who are not yet well connected within the community and may hesitate to attend events on their own.

It is also intended for people who think, “Why not go and have a look at this event?”, but who, once there, do not always feel confident enough to join conversations or meet other participants. As a result, they may simply enjoy the event briefly and leave shortly afterwards. The initiative aims to provide them with a genuine opportunity to build connections and enjoy a more social and enriching experience.

As part of the Welcomers project, the municipality ensures the presence of identifiable volunteers, for example by providing them with T-shirts bearing the Welcomers name or logo. These volunteers are responsible for welcoming participants, proactively facilitating interactions and introductions, and providing information about the municipality to anyone interested.

Objectives

- Encourage the involvement of newcomers in community life by helping them build connections more easily and discover local activities.
- Promote participation in municipal events by reducing the apprehension associated with attending alone or not knowing anyone.
- Strengthen social ties among residents and encourage interaction between people of different ages, backgrounds, and life experiences.
- Combat social isolation by providing a welcoming and supportive environment that fosters connections.
- Develop a sense of belonging to the municipality by creating opportunities for interaction and conviviality.
- Ensure a warm and accessible welcome for everyone through the presence of easily identifiable volunteers.
- Help make municipal events inclusive spaces where everyone feels welcome and valued.

Methods

Mobilisation and coordination

The success of the *Welcomers* initiative relies on the commitment of volunteers who wish to contribute to the welcoming and inclusion of participants at municipal events.

The municipality will issue a call for volunteers through its usual communication channels (website, social media, municipal newsletter, local events, etc.). The Municipal Commission for Intercultural Living Together (CCVEI) will be involved in this process and will actively contribute to identifying, informing, and mobilising interested individuals.

The CCVEI is responsible for coordinating the *Welcomers* group. In this capacity, it may review the applications received and, where the number of candidates exceeds the needs of the programme, select volunteers based on criteria such as motivation, interpersonal skills, availability, and commitment to the values of hospitality, respect, and inclusion.

Selected volunteers are registered on a contact list maintained by the municipality and/or the CCVEI. To facilitate communication and coordination, a WhatsApp group or another suitable communication tool will be established.

Implementation during events

During municipal events, the *Welcomers* are present to welcome participants and help create a friendly, inclusive, and supportive atmosphere.

Their role includes in particular:

- Welcoming participants upon arrival;
- Paying attention to people attending alone, newcomers, and individuals who appear isolated, and proactively approaching them;
- Facilitating conversations and introductions between participants;
- Encouraging attendees to stay, interact, and actively take part in the event;
- Directing interested individuals to municipal services, local associations, or community activities;
- Helping to create an environment that promotes social connections and participation for all

Budget

The project requires only a limited budget. The main costs relate to the purchase of materials that allow the *Welcomers* to be easily identified during events, such as T-shirts, badges, lanyards, or similar items.

As the activities are carried out by volunteers, no additional staffing costs are anticipated. Depending on needs, an additional budget may be allocated to communication and awareness-raising activities related to the project.

Materials

A distinctive item provided by the municipality (T-shirt, badge, lanyard, or any other visual identifier bearing the name *Welcomers*).

Periodicity

Two to three times per year for small-scale events organised by the municipality.

Evaluation indicators

- Number of *Welcomers* volunteers recruited and actively involved.
- Number of municipal events benefiting from the presence of *Welcomers*.
- Estimated number of people welcomed or supported by the *Welcomers* during events.
- Percentage of participants reporting that they made new connections thanks to the initiative (survey).
- Number of interactions with individuals approached by the *Welcomers*.

Practical advice - DO's

- Clearly identify the *Welcomers* through a visible distinguishing sign.
- Organise a short preparatory meeting before each event to define roles and areas of presence.
- Proactively approach people who are attending alone or who seem hesitant to join in.
- Facilitate introductions between participants who share common interests or backgrounds.
- Adopt an open, welcoming, and inclusive attitude towards every participant.
- Move regularly throughout the event to identify people who may benefit from a welcome or some support.
- Be familiar with the municipality's main associations, activities, and services in order to provide useful information.
- Encourage interaction and networking throughout the event.
- Organise a feedback session with volunteers after events to gather experiences and suggestions.
- Appoint a person or the Commission for Intercultural Living Together to coordinate and support the *Welcomers* volunteers.

Practical advice - DONT's

- Do not wait for isolated individuals to ask for help or initiate contact themselves.
- Do not force anyone to join a group or participate in a conversation.
- Do not monopolise conversations; the role of a *Welcomer* is to facilitate connections between participants.
- Do not spend time exclusively with people you already know or only with fellow volunteers.
- Do not adopt an overly formal or administrative attitude.
- Do not make assumptions or judgments about participants' backgrounds, personal situations, or motivations.
- Do not disclose any personal information obtained in the course of the role.
- Do not limit your involvement to welcoming people at the entrance; remain attentive to participants' engagement throughout the entire event.