Social Enterprise Incubator Project Guidelines

Developed by Valmieras Development Agency and WeLearn

RURAL IMPACT
Harnessing the Potential of Youth Social Entrepreneurship for Rural Economies

Table of Contents

Introduction

About the Social Incubator Guidelines

The Social Incubator Guidelines have been developed within the Rural Impact project to support the creation and management of rural-based incubators for social enterprise. They are designed to help project teams, VET institutions and community partners to translate the vision of rural innovation into practical, achievable actions.

When delivered correctly, social enterprise incubators can help young people to transform ideas into initiatives that address local challenges, including employment, sustainability and social inclusion. These guidelines draw on European and local experience to show how incubators can be designed, managed and sustained in ways that are inclusive, participatory and grounded in the realities of rural life.

The document is both a reference handbook and a working tool. It can guide new incubator initiatives from early design through implementation and evaluation, or it can be used to strengthen existing programmes that aim to support social entrepreneurship in vocational and community education settings.

Structure of the Guidelines

The Guidelines are divided into 12 chapters, each focusing on a specific aspect of developing and managing a rural social incubator. The chapters combine conceptual understanding with practical tools and templates to support planning, delivery and reflection. The following provides an overview of the content of each of these 12 chapters included in this Guideline document.

Chapter title	Focus of the Chapter
1. Understanding the Role of Social Enterprise in Rural Development	Introduces the social enterprise concept and its relevance to rural revitalisation.
2. Defining the Purpose and Model of a Rural Social Incubator	Explains how to align the incubator's mission with local needs and opportunities.
3. Setting Up the Incubator Structure and Team	Describes operational design, governance, and staffing considerations.
4. Designing Training, Mentoring, and Support Activities	Outlines approaches for developing learning and guidance programmes for participants.
5. Financial Planning and Resource Management	Covers budgeting, funding sources and the use of financial management templates.
6. Managing Communication and Internal Collaboration	Focuses on internal communication strategies and coordination mechanisms.

7. Engaging Incubators, Entrepreneurs, and Support Agencies	Looks at stakeholder collaboration and includes a Stakeholder Mapping Template.
8. Establishing Partnerships with Local Organisations and VET Institutions	Provides guidance on building long-term, trust-based partnerships.
9. Assessing the Impact of the Incubator	Introduces quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods and includes an Impact Assessment Matrix.
10. Promoting Sustainable Practices in Social Enterprises	Highlights circular and environmentally responsible approaches for participants.
11. Promoting the Incubators to Attract Participants and Support	Outlines communication, outreach, and visibility strategies.
12. Hosting Networking Events to Foster Community and Peer Support	Provides guidance for planning inclusive events and includes a Networking Event Planning Template.

How to Use These Guidelines

These guidelines are intended as a live document that can be adapted to the needs and contexts of different rural regions. They are not a prescriptive manual but a practical companion. When using the guidelines, consider the following recommendations:

- ✓ Read them sequentially for full understanding, especially if you are establishing an incubator for the first time. Each chapter builds logically on the previous one, creating a comprehensive roadmap from concept to evaluation.

- ✓ Use the templates and annexes actively, not just as reference documents. They are designed to be filled out, shared and discussed with partners and participants.

- ✓ Adapt the examples and tools to local conditions. Rural areas differ widely in terms of infrastructure, population and opportunities, so adaptation is key to success.

- ✓ Encourage collaboration across stakeholders. These guidelines work best when they are used jointly by incubator staff, VET professionals, mentors and community partners.

- ✓ Reflect and review progress regularly. The annexed tools, including the Impact Assessment Matrix and Networking Event Planning Template, are designed for iterative use, helping teams track growth, document learning and celebrate achievements.

1. Overview of the concept and importance of social enterprise incubators

Purpose:

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the concept of social enterprise incubators, highlighting their role in rural development and in expanding opportunities for VET (Vocational Education and Training) learners. The chapter defines social enterprises and incubators, explains how this model differs from traditional business incubators and outlines its alignment with Erasmus+ and national/regional development strategies.

Key Aspects:

What is a social enterprise and an incubator?

A social enterprise is a business model driven by the goal of creating positive social or environmental impact while remaining financially sustainable. These enterprises typically operate in areas where market mechanisms fail to address public needs, like supporting marginalised groups, providing socially important but non-profitable services or addressing environmental challenges.

An incubator is a structured support environment that helps early-stage entrepreneurs (especially youth and first-time founders) to develop their business ideas. It typically offers mentoring, training, access to networks and resources. A social enterprise incubator specifically supports enterprises with a social mission.

Why are such incubators important in rural areas?

Rural regions can face structural challenges such as population decline, unemployment, lack of public services and limited infrastructure. Traditional business models may struggle to succeed in such contexts, while social enterprises can offer locally rooted, mission-driven solutions.

Social enterprise incubators provide a supportive space for young people and others to explore ideas, build capacity and launch initiatives that address real community needs while also encouraging economic activity and inclusion.

Differences from traditional business incubators

While traditional incubators tend to focus on high-growth or tech-based ventures, social enterprise incubators place equal value on social impact. Their core principles include sustainability, inclusion, community engagement and public benefit; not just profit generation.

They also play an important role in shifting mindsets by encouraging young people and communities to take ownership of local challenges and co-create meaningful solutions.

Why is this model important for VET learners?

VET learners typically develop practical skills but often lack the experience, support or motivation to start a business. A social enterprise incubator offers them a purpose-driven, applied learning environment that connects their skills with community needs and social impact.

This model provides young people with an accessible and meaningful entry point into entrepreneurship, especially for those who are not drawn to traditional profit-oriented ventures.

How does this align with Erasmus+ and local strategies?

The Erasmus+ programme emphasises inclusive education, youth entrepreneurship, digital skills and sustainability. Social enterprise incubators contribute directly to these goals by:

- bridging access gaps to knowledge and resources,
- fostering mission-driven entrepreneurship,
- encouraging innovation and mobility within the VET sector.

In addition, incubator development supports national and regional policies for rural revitalisation, youth engagement, and local resilience.

Additional Note:

These guidelines are designed to help develop incubators that not only support social enterprises but also strengthen rural communities, empower young people and establish long-term, sustainable local initiatives.

2. Overview of challenges faced by young VET learners in rural areas when establishing and managing social enterprises

Purpose:

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and explain the key barriers faced by VET learners in rural areas when trying to establish and run social enterprises. These challenges are both structural and personal, and understanding them is of paramount importance for developing inclusive and supportive incubation models. The chapter also highlights the need to adapt incubator approaches to address social exclusion, gender inequality and limited digital access in rural regions.

Key Aspects:

Social, economic, and cultural barriers

Rural youth can live in isolated communities with limited access to entrepreneurship role models, resources or structured opportunities. Social barriers may include public skepticism toward youth-led initiatives or low trust in young people's capacity to lead projects. Economic barriers include limited financial opportunities, small local markets and poor infrastructure. Cultural barriers may also include a resistance to change, fear of failure or lack of exposure to innovation and creative thinking.

Lack of motivation and entrepreneurial competences

VET programmes tend to focus on technical skills but can overlook soft skills like leadership, initiative, impact thinking or sustainable business development. Many young people are not confident in their ability to start a business, especially without the "right connections" or access to funding. In addition, there is oftentimes little awareness of social entrepreneurship as a viable career path, and few mentors or success stories to inspire youth in rural areas.

Limitations in infrastructure, access and funding

When planning an incubator, it is very important to consider the very real physical and digital access issues rural youth face, including:

- Lack of public transport to reach events or training.
- Poor internet connection or limited access to computers for online workshops.
- Few (if any) local mentors or support institutions.
- No access to seed funding or knowledge of grant opportunities.

These challenges can discourage young learners from even trying or significantly delay their engagement in entrepreneurship.

Gender equality and NEET youth inclusion

The entrepreneurial space must be inclusive. In rural areas, gender stereotypes may be more deeply rooted. For example, young women may receive less encouragement to take initiative or engage in entrepreneurship. At the same time, NEET youth (Not in Employment, Education or Training) are a particularly vulnerable target group. They oftentimes lack direction, confidence or support networks. A social enterprise incubator can provide a safe and motivating space where these young people can regain a sense of purpose, develop life skills and take steps toward active participation.

Additional Note:

To build effective incubation programmes, you must understand the local context. Each region may face unique challenges and only through close collaboration with young people and community stakeholders can meaningful and accessible solutions be designed. Psychological aspects, including the fear of failure, low self-esteem and a lack of prior support, should also be acknowledged and addressed through mentoring and confidence-building activities.

3. Guidance on structuring and designing incubators, including mentoring initiatives

Purpose:

This chapter provides guidance on designing the structure, content and process of a social enterprise incubator. It outlines practical approaches to developing programme formats, defining incubation stages, integrating mentoring, building relevant learning content and selecting participants. Emphasis is placed on creating a clear yet adaptable structure that supports diverse youth in rural contexts, particularly those in VET pathways.

Key Aspects:

Incubator model: format, stages, and duration

A well-structured incubator provides clarity and progression while remaining flexible to accommodate participants with different experience levels and needs.

Incubators may follow a cohort-based model, where a group starts and finishes together over a fixed period (e.g., 12 weeks), or an open-enrolment model, with ongoing intake and modular progression. Each model has advantages depending on resources and target group readiness.

Typical stages of a cohort-based incubator may include:

1. Inspiration and idea generation: introductory sessions to raise awareness of social issues, identify community needs and encourage entrepreneurial thinking.
2. Knowledge and skills building: workshops, peer learning and expert inputs on topics such as business planning, market validation, impact models and sustainability.
3. Prototyping and testing: hands-on development and testing of ideas through minimal viable products (MVPs), community pilots or simulations.
4. Showcasing and transition: pitch events, feedback panels, or demo days that help participants connect with next-step opportunities like funding or partnerships.

The duration may range from 8 to 24 weeks, depending on the depth of engagement and resources available.

Scheduling should take into account rural accessibility, participant availability and seasonal considerations (e.g., academic calendars or farming cycles).

Mentoring structure and engagement process

Mentoring adds personalised support, real-life insight and confidence-building to the incubation journey. A strong mentoring structure ensures that participants are not only informed but also guided and encouraged.

Mentors may be recruited from local businesses, social entrepreneurs, educators, or professionals with relevant expertise. A good match between mentor and mentee is critical and may be based on shared interests, goals, or experience.

Mentoring formats may include:
One-on-one sessions, allowing individual attention and personalised advice;

- Group mentoring, supporting shared learning and community building among participants.
- Rotating or topic-specific mentoring, where mentees meet multiple mentors across the programme.

It is recommended to formalise the relationship through a written agreement, outlining:

- The scope and purpose of mentoring.
- Meeting frequency and duration.
- Confidentiality and communication expectations.
- Agreed learning objectives or focus areas.

Mentoring also supports soft skill development (communication, confidence, leadership), which is particularly valuable for VET learners transitioning into entrepreneurship.

Learning modules, workshops, and prototyping

A key learning component is so important to ensure participants build the knowledge and skills required to implement their ideas effectively and sustainably.

Suggested topics include:

- Understanding social entrepreneurship and hybrid business models.
- Legal and organisational forms suited for social enterprises.
- Community engagement and co-design principles.
- Circular economy practices and sustainability.
- Budgeting, pricing, and financial planning.
- Branding, storytelling, and communication for impact.
- Monitoring and evaluating social impact.

Theoretical input should be complemented by practical workshops, collaborative activities and real-life case studies. Allowing participants to test their ideas early through prototyping exercises builds confidence, highlights risks and accelerates learning. Prototyping methods may vary from low-cost community pilots to mock presentations or product demos.

Partnering with local makerspaces, training centres or NGOs can offer participants access to tools, space or networks to support hands-on development.

Participant selection, profiles, and support mechanisms

Participant selection criteria should be inclusive, ensuring that young people from diverse backgrounds and abilities can take part. Prior business experience should not be a requirement; motivation, openness to learn and community orientation are stronger indicators of success.

Selection processes may involve:

- An open call with simple application forms.
- Nominations from VET institutions or youth workers.
- Short interviews or motivation statements.

Participants may include students, recent graduates, NEET youth or young people already involved in community projects.

Support mechanisms to ensure retention and success can include:

- Orientation sessions and a clear onboarding process.
- Mentoring and peer-to-peer circles.
- Regular check-ins with programme coordinators.
- Emotional and motivational support through reflection or coaching.
- Flexible access to learning materials and follow-up resources.

Tailored support is particularly important in rural areas, where infrastructure or confidence levels may be lower. A well-supported participant is more likely to stay engaged, take risks, and move toward implementation.

Annex 1: Mentoring Agreement Template

A mentoring agreement template is included with this chapter (see section 13. Attachments, below). This template is included to support the development of transparent and structured mentoring relationships.

4. Overview of legal and regulatory aspects relevant to incubators

Purpose:

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the legal and regulatory considerations involved in establishing and implementing a social enterprise incubator. It covers suitable legal forms for social enterprises, compliance with national and EU legislation, recommended agreement types and the importance of personal data protection under GDPR.

Key Aspects:

Legal forms for social enterprises

Legal definitions and registration options for social enterprises vary across countries. In some countries, the status "social enterprise" is formally recognised and regulated, while in others, social initiatives are registered as associations, foundations, cooperatives or commercial entities with a social mission.

- ✓ *For more information on this, be sure to check the information in Module 3 from the Online Social Entrepreneurship Modules, where different legal structures are presented from the Rural Impact partner countries, namely: Bulgaria, Croatia, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal and Romania.*

It is important to:

- Understand which legal forms are available and most appropriate for a given initiative.
- Consider tax regimes, governance structures and the ability to attract donations or investments.
- Provide participants with basic information about the registration process and legal implications of each model.

Organisers may also consider inviting legal experts to provide workshops or one-on-one consultations during the incubation process.

Compliance with national and EU legislation

The incubator must operate in accordance with the applicable legal framework. This includes compliance with:

- National laws concerning business activity, employment, taxation and education.
- Rules for administering financial support (e.g., microgrants, stipends, training allowances).

- National regulations if the incubator is managed by or within an NGO with public benefit status.
- EU-level requirements for transparency, equality, anti-corruption and competition.

When public or EU funding is involved (e.g., through Erasmus+ or other programmes), specific conditions may apply regarding procurement, reporting, and conflict of interest policies.

Agreement formats with mentors, partners and participants

To ensure clear, transparent and professional collaboration, it is recommended to use written agreements with all involved parties. These may include:

- Mentoring agreements defining the roles, frequency of meetings and confidentiality rules.
- Partnership agreements between organisations contributing to the incubator, such as VET institutions, NGOs or businesses.
- Participation agreements or codes of conduct that outline the responsibilities and expectations of programme participants.

Such documents not only ensure shared understanding and accountability, but also provide a reference in case of misunderstandings, delays or role conflicts.

Personal data protection (GDPR)

Throughout the incubation process, personal data is collected and used, including participant names, contact details, evaluations and photographs. Compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is of paramount importance.

This includes:

- Informing participants about which data is collected and for what purposes.
- Processing only the data that is necessary and relevant.
- Obtaining clear consent, especially for photographs or communication materials.
- Providing a designated point of contact for data protection questions.

Organisers must also ensure secure storage of data, define retention periods and limit access to authorised individuals. Responsible data management builds trust and protects the dignity and rights of all involved.

5. Best practices for financial planning, fundraising and resource allocation to sustain the operations of incubators

Purpose:

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an in-depth overview of how to build a financially sustainable incubator. It focuses on planning, budgeting and managing financial resources in a way that supports the full incubation process: from design and implementation to long-term continuity. This chapter also outlines potential funding models, cost categories, grant schemes and resource distribution strategies, with the aim of providing incubator organisers with practical tools and adaptable models.

Key Aspects:

Financial planning and budget structure

A strong financial foundation begins with a realistic and well-structured budget. The plan should outline all direct and indirect costs related to incubator operations, including personnel, training materials, space rental, mentor support, communications, events and administration. It should also include buffer funds for unexpected needs.

Essential elements of a sound financial plan include:

- A clear structure with cost categories and timeline.
- Unit costs (e.g. per participant or per training module).
- Cash flow planning, including timing of income and expenses.
- Regular monitoring, adjustment mechanisms and accountability.

Example: a monthly cash flow sheet can help track and compare planned vs. actual spending and maintain financial health throughout the programme.

Allocating resources across key incubator functions

Resources should be distributed strategically to ensure quality delivery of all programme components. Typical budget areas include:

- Training and workshops – facilitator fees, learning materials, venues.
- Mentoring support – mentor compensation, onboarding, travel.
- Participant support – microgrants, transport reimbursement, tech access.
- Communication – promotion, graphic design, outreach campaigns.
- Administration and coordination – project management, financial reporting, platform hosting.

Each incubator may adjust this distribution based on its delivery model. For example, digital incubators may have lower venue costs but higher tech and content creation needs.

Fundraising strategies and multi-channel financing models

To avoid relying solely on one funding source, incubator organisers are encouraged to develop diversified financing models, which may include:

- Public funding: Erasmus+, national or local government support.
- Private sector contributions: sponsorships, donations, in-kind support.
- Educational partners: VET institutions may offer space, staff or resources.
- Symbolic participant fees: small contributions to enhance ownership.
- Complementary projects: aligned initiatives that share goals (e.g., digital skills, NEET youth support).

Diversified fundraising not only increases sustainability but also builds stronger ties with the ecosystem. Clear communication of the incubator's social value is important in building such partnerships.

Microgrants and mentor compensation

Microgrants are an effective tool to encourage early-stage idea development and prototyping. A recommended approach includes:

- Modest funding amounts (e.g. €100–500 per team).
- A simple application and reporting process.
- Milestone-based release of funds, e.g., after a pitch or idea validation.

For mentors, recognition and basic compensation are important. While many mentors are willing to volunteer, covering transport, offering a small honorarium or presenting a formal certificate of appreciation shows respect and promotes long-term engagement.

Annex 2 - Budget Planner Template

This template is included in section 13. Attachments below. This is a practical template to accompany this chapter to help teams to:

- Structure detailed budgets across cost areas.
- Plan and monitor cash flow.
- Adapt the model for local or national funding systems.

The template can be used digitally (Excel, Google Sheets) and is suitable for collaborative budgeting across partner organisations.

6. Sustainability and continuity planning

Purpose:

This chapter provides strategic guidance on how to ensure the continuation and long-term impact of a social enterprise incubator beyond the project's official duration. It outlines sustainability models, community involvement practices, alumni engagement, the use of digital tools and pathways to transform the incubator into a permanent support platform for young people.

Key Aspects:

Sustainability planning after the end of the project

A clear continuity plan should be developed already during the project implementation. It should define:

- how the incubator will continue after the initial funding ends.
- which individuals or organisations will take responsibility.
- potential long-term funding sources (e.g. local grants, corporate donations, national co-financing).
- how to maintain developed materials, networks, and tools.

Such a plan will help to build trust among stakeholders and lay the foundation for institutionalising the incubator.

Ensuring community involvement

A sustainable incubator is not a closed structure, but one embedded in the local context. Key elements include:

- involving local entrepreneurs and professionals as mentors or event speakers.
- collaborating with municipalities and educational institutions.
- engaging community members in idea evaluation, prototyping, or feedback.
- maintaining transparent communication about the incubator's outcomes and impact.

Community involvement strengthens ownership and support for the incubator's continued existence.

Alumni networks, continuous training and digitalisation

To maintain long-term relationships with programme graduates, it is recommended to:

- create an alumni network for experience sharing, mentoring and community events.
- organise follow-up training or thematic masterclasses to deepen learning.

- provide a digital environment (e.g., a Slack channel, Moodle platform, or newsletter) where resources, opportunities, and updates are accessible.

Digitalisation makes support more continuous, scalable and accessible beyond the local area.

Transforming the incubator into a long-term platform

If the incubator proves effective and impactful, it may be transformed into a permanent support structure, for example:

- by integrating it into a VET curriculum or programme.
- embedding it in municipal or regional youth entrepreneurship strategies.
- establishing it as an independent structure (e.g. NGO, cooperative, or social business).

Such a transformation helps attract stable funding, expand the target audience and enhance service quality.

7. Engaging incubators, entrepreneurs and support agencies

Introduction

The previous chapters have outlined the purpose, structure and operational foundations of a social enterprise incubator within the Rural Impact framework. Having established what these incubators are, how they function and the conditions that support their sustainability, attention now turns to the people and partnerships that make them work in practice. A social enterprise incubator succeeds long-term through the relationships it develops with existing incubators, entrepreneurs, public bodies and community networks. The success of such collaboration depends on a shared vision for rural innovation and collective commitment to nurturing new social enterprises.

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce how to engage incubators, entrepreneurs and support agencies in a way that builds a collaborative ecosystem around rural social entrepreneurship. It considers why engagement matters, who should be involved and how these relationships can be structured to ensure relevance, continuity, and shared ownership of outcomes.

Key Aspects

Why Stakeholder Engagement Matters

Stakeholder engagement is the foundation for any sustainable incubator model. In rural contexts, where resources may be dispersed and opportunities limited, cooperation across different sectors provides both access to expertise as well as legitimacy and visibility. When public authorities, private organisations and community groups work alongside incubators, they strengthen the local innovation system. This creates a culture of cooperation that supports the broader development of the rural economy.

Stakeholder collaboration also brings complementary perspectives. Existing incubators can share operational experience; entrepreneurs contribute fresh insights and lived examples of resilience; while public employment services, NGOs, and chambers of commerce add strategic reach and institutional stability. This collaboration can help incubators to remain responsive to community needs and market realities.

Types of Stakeholders to Engage

The process of engagement should reflect the diversity of the local context. Stakeholders may include:

- Existing incubators and accelerators that can offer mentoring and partnership opportunities.
- Early-stage or experienced entrepreneurs who can share their journeys with new participants.
- VET professionals who bridge the learning and practice gap.
- Public or semi-public bodies like employment services or local development agencies that provide access to funding, regulation and networks.
- Civil society organisations and local champions are equally important, as they bring trust and community credibility to the initiative.

Methods of Engagement

Engagement should begin early in the incubator's planning phase and continue throughout its implementation. It can take many forms, from informal meetings and focus groups to more structured cooperation mechanisms like advisory boards or steering committees. Inviting experienced entrepreneurs to act as mentors, guest speakers or panellists during key events helps connect learning with practice. Similarly, collaboration with public institutions may take the form of data sharing, policy consultation, or co-hosted events that give visibility to youth-led social enterprises.

Regular communication is of paramount importance to maintain engagement. Sharing progress updates, inviting feedback and recognising stakeholder contributions nurtures long-term collaboration. In this way, the incubator becomes part of a dynamic local ecosystem rather than a standalone project.

Annex 3 - Stakeholder Mapping Template

The Stakeholder Mapping Template is included with this chapter (See section 13. Attachments, Annex 3). This is a practical tool for identifying and analysing potential partners. It helps incubator coordinators assess the level of influence, interest, and potential contribution of each stakeholder. Those with high influence and high interest may be prioritised as strategic partners, while others can be engaged through targeted actions such as information sessions or collaborative workshops. The template also supports reflection on whether all relevant voices are represented, including those of underrepresented groups such as young people, women or NEET learners in rural areas. The template can be completed collaboratively during project planning and reviewed periodically to reflect evolving partnerships.

8. Establishing partnerships with local organisations and VET institutions

Introduction

As just mentioned in Chapter 7, successful social enterprise incubators are grounded in collaboration. The strength of an incubator in a rural context depends on how well it connects with the organisations, institutions and people that already form part of the local ecosystem. These partnerships bring together different capacities and insights, creating a shared environment where social entrepreneurship can take root and grow. Following the discussion on stakeholder engagement in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on how to build and maintain meaningful partnerships with local organisations and VET institutions.

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to offer practical guidance on developing and maintaining partnerships that bring value to both the incubator and its surrounding community. It considers how alliances with local organisations, training providers and educational centres can enhance the learning experience, support sustainability and strengthen the impact of social enterprises developed through the incubator.

Key Aspects

Strategic importance of local alliances

Partnerships are not only about cooperation; they are about trust and shared purpose. In rural areas, where personal networks and local identity hold strong influence, these relationships become a very important source of credibility and continuity.

Local organisations bring unique strengths. Development agencies and NGOs tend to have a deep understanding of community needs and social challenges, while local businesses contribute market knowledge and potential routes to sustainability. VET institutions and training centres add an important learning dimension, connecting entrepreneurial development with formal and non-formal education pathways. These alliances as a whole can create a supportive ecosystem that benefits both learners and local economies.

Approaches to partnership development

Developing partnerships begins with a shared understanding of objectives. Before formal agreements are established, it is important to engage in open dialogue with potential partners to identify mutual interests and complementary resources. This early stage of cooperation often sets the tone for long-term collaboration.

Formal arrangements such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) can help clarify roles and expectations. These may define commitments around co-delivery of workshops, use of facilities, or mutual support in community outreach, etc. However, partnership development can also evolve through less formal methods such as co-hosted events, participation in local festivals or shared initiatives that respond to regional challenges.

Partnerships should be viewed as living arrangements that adapt to changing needs. Regular review meetings and informal check-ins help ensure that collaboration remains productive and that partners feel valued and heard.

VET-specific collaboration opportunities

VET institutions are key partners in building a bridge between the worlds of education and business. Collaboration with these institutions allows learners to apply their technical skills within real social entrepreneurship contexts, while also gaining new perspectives on business and community impact.

Partnerships can take many forms, including:

- Co-developing learning materials or curricula that integrate social entrepreneurship principles into vocational training programmes.
- Organising guest lectures or workshops where social entrepreneurs share their experiences and provide insight into practical challenges.
- Creating joint project-based learning opportunities, where students work in teams to address community issues through innovative ideas.
- Arranging placements or internships within existing social enterprises, enabling learners to gain first-hand experience of mission-driven business models.

These collaborations can create a continuous learning loop between theory (education) and practice (business) and can help to ensure that vocational training remains relevant to the realities of modern rural life.

Tips for sustained engagement

- ✓ Sustaining partnerships over time requires consistent communication, shared evaluation and mutual recognition.
- ✓ Establishing a few clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), including the number of joint initiatives implemented or the level of participant engagement, can help maintain focus and accountability.
- ✓ Regular meetings, whether quarterly or biannual, provide opportunities to reflect on progress and plan future activities together.
- ✓ Defining roles early on, including who leads communications, who coordinates events, and who manages participant follow-up, etc. prevents duplication and confusion.

- ✓ Embedding the partnership into the governance structure of the incubator, including through a joint advisory committee or steering group, can also strengthen commitment and continuity.

Partnerships should be viewed as an ongoing dialogue rather than a fixed arrangement. When local organisations and VET institutions feel ownership of the incubator's progress, they can be supported to become advocates for its sustainability long after project funding has ended.

9. Assessing the impact of the incubator

Introduction

Measuring the impact of a social incubator can allow organisers to understand how the incubator is performing and how it is contributing to social and economic development in rural areas. Impact assessment provides clarity, accountability and an evidence base for improvement. It also strengthens trust among funders, partners and participants by showing that the work being done is meaningful and measurable.

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to outline how impact can be assessed in both qualitative and quantitative terms, using a structured yet flexible approach. It introduces key tools and concepts that help incubator teams capture learning, track change and demonstrate value to the wider community and policy stakeholders.

Key Aspects

Why impact matters

Assessing impact is an important part of ensuring that an incubator delivers on its mission. This process helps to validate the time, resources and effort invested, while also highlighting areas where the approach can evolve. For rural incubators, demonstrating impact can also help to attract new participants, partners and potential funders. It also provides insight into how entrepreneurship contributes to addressing local challenges (from youth unemployment to social inclusion and environmental sustainability, for example).

Understanding impact involves reflecting on how individuals' knowledge, skills, attitudes and opportunities have changed over time, and how their enterprises have contributed to the community.

Designing an Impact Assessment Framework

An effective framework begins with a clear logic of change, i.e., a visual or written model that shows how activities lead to intended results. Widely used approaches include the Theory of Change or Logic Model, which links inputs, activities, outcomes and long-term impact.

- Inputs refer to the resources invested, such as funding, staff time and facilities.
- Activities are what the incubator delivers including workshops, mentoring, networking events and prototype testing.
- Outcomes describe the immediate effects of these activities, including increased skills, confidence or networks among participants.

- Impact represents the broader, longer-term changes, like the creation of sustainable enterprises, employment and community development.

Each stage should include clear indicators, which are measurable signs that demonstrate progress or change.

✓ You can read more about both models at the following links, or in Module 10 of the Social Entrepreneurship Online Modules developed as part of the Rural Impact project:
  - Theory of Change (NPC): https://www.thinknpc.org/about-npc/expertise/theory-of-change/
  - Logic Model Template: https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/resources/practical-tools/logic-model-template
  - Logic Models vs Theories of Change: https://cere.olemiss.edu/logic-models-vs-theories-of-change/

When using these models, the combination of qualitative and quantitative data provides a more complete picture of success. These types of data are described in more detail in the next section.

Quantitative tools

Quantitative tools allow incubator teams to track measurable aspects of performance. Common examples include:

- Number of participants enrolled and completing the programme.
- Number of new social enterprises launched, or business plans developed.
- Employment or self-employment rates among graduates.
- Level of financial sustainability achieved by supported enterprises.
- Amount of funding or investment secured through partnerships.

Regular surveys conducted at the start and end of the programme can measure changes in entrepreneurial knowledge, confidence and motivation. Tracking these indicators across multiple cohorts can also help to capture longer-term trends and outcomes.

Qualitative tools

While numbers tell part of the story, qualitative tools help to capture the human dimension of change. Interviews, focus groups and reflective journals are all examples of qualitative data collection, and they allow participants to describe their experiences, challenges and personal growth. Case studies are particularly valuable, as they illustrate how individual journeys contribute to collective outcomes.

Qualitative data also captures the knock-on effects that may not be immediately visible in statistics, such as improved community cohesion, increased local collaboration or the inspiration provided to younger generations. Incorporating these stories into reports and presentations brings the incubator's impact to life.

Annex 4 – Impact Assessment Matrix

An Impact Assessment Matrix included below in section 13. Attachments, in Annex 4. This Matrix provides a simple structure for connecting actions to results. It encourages teams to think about what success looks like, how it will be measured and who will take responsibility for monitoring progress. The matrix can be adapted for use at different stages (from pilot testing to full-scale implementation) and can be reviewed periodically to ensure continuous learning and improvement. The matrix can be adapted for local contexts and used as a shared monitoring tool across partners to support evidence-based decision-making.

10. Promoting sustainable practices in social enterprises

Introduction

Sustainability is at the heart of social entrepreneurship. For many rural enterprises, it is not just an ethical choice but a practical one, shaped by limited resources, close-knit communities and a strong connection to the natural environment. A social enterprise incubator can guide young entrepreneurs to see sustainability as a mindset that shapes everyday decisions: from sourcing materials to engaging customers and designing long-term strategies.

This chapter introduces how sustainability can be integrated into the learning and practice of social enterprise development. It encourages participants to think creatively about how their ventures can protect the environment, strengthen community ties, and contribute to a more circular rural economy.

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how incubators can promote sustainable thinking and practice among participants. It considers the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability and offers practical tools and examples that can inspire young entrepreneurs to embed responsible approaches in their business models.

Key Aspects

Sustainability in rural social enterprise

Rural areas often face complex challenges, including depopulation, limited employment opportunities and reduced access to public services. Despite these challenges, they are also places of remarkable potential. The natural environment, local knowledge and sense of community provide fertile ground for innovative social businesses that value both people and the planet.

In this context, sustainability is more than environmental care; it is about resilience and self-reliance. A sustainable social enterprise supports circular local economies, reduces waste and reinvests value back into the community. Whether it is a cooperative producing eco-friendly crafts, a repair café re-purposing waste materials and developing local skills or a digital platform connecting rural producers to markets, each initiative contributes to a culture of shared responsibility and resourcefulness.

Principles of circular economy and green thinking

Introducing the concept of the circular economy helps participants to understand how materials, products and processes can be designed to minimise waste and maximise value. The circular model challenges the traditional 'take, make, dispose' pattern and encourages reuse, repair and regeneration.

In the context of social enterprises, green thinking can include:

- Using recycled or locally sourced materials.
- Designing products with a long lifespan or the possibility of reuse.
- Reducing energy consumption and carbon emissions.
- Choosing ethical suppliers and transparent production methods.
- Encouraging shared ownership, exchange, and collaboration within the community.

These principles remind entrepreneurs that innovation and responsibility can go hand in hand, especially when environmental action also creates local employment and community pride.

Practical Tools for Participants

To help participants to translate sustainable principles into action, incubators can introduce a variety of hands-on tools and reflective exercises:

- Sustainability Canvas – a simplified framework that helps entrepreneurs to visualise how environmental and social values intersect with business strategy.
- Carbon Footprint Calculator – an accessible digital tool that measures emissions linked to business activities and identifies areas for improvement.
- Local Resource Mapping – an activity where participants identify what can be reused, shared or repurposed within their community, highlighting opportunities for collaboration and circular practices.
- Sustainable Procurement Checklist – a guide for selecting suppliers and materials based on transparency, local impact and environmental responsibility.

These tools can be incorporated into workshops, mentoring sessions or prototype testing, helping participants to see sustainability as an ongoing process rather than a fixed goal.

Good Practice Examples

Showcasing successful rural enterprises that have embedded sustainability in their operations can be highly motivating. Examples may include:

- A youth-led social enterprise turning agricultural by-products into biodegradable packaging.
- A rural repair hub that brings together craftspeople, students and retired professionals to reduce waste and build community.

- A cooperative using renewable energy to power local food production while providing affordable access to fresh produce.

Such examples demonstrate that sustainable thinking can generate innovation, attract community support and enhance resilience. They also provide relatable role models for young entrepreneurs seeking to make a difference in their own regions.

Additional Note:

Integrating sustainability into social enterprise incubation can strengthen both the incubator's environmental responsibility and long-term viability. When young people learn to design ventures that balance economic goals with ecological and social impact, they contribute to a culture of care and innovation that benefits the whole community. Rural areas, with their strong traditions of cooperation and resourcefulness, are ideal places to show that sustainable entrepreneurship is both possible and also deeply rewarding.

11. Promoting the incubators to attract participants and support

Introduction

A social enterprise incubator achieves its purpose only when people know about it, understand its value and feel motivated to participate. Promotion is therefore much more than publicity; it is about building relationships, raising awareness and inspiring action.

For rural incubators, communication plays a special part in connecting isolated communities, engaging young people who may feel distant from opportunity and encouraging local institutions to take part. Effective promotion requires authenticity and creativity. It involves sharing real stories, using channels that resonate with the audience and maintaining a consistent presence that reflects the incubator's values of inclusion, sustainability and social innovation.

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how an incubator can communicate its mission and activities in a way that attracts participants, partners and supporters. It outlines strategies for identifying key audiences, developing meaningful messages and selecting communication channels suited to rural and educational contexts.

Key Aspects

Identifying key audiences

Understanding who the incubator wants to reach is the foundation of every communication strategy. Each audience has different motivations, expectations and preferred ways of receiving information.

- Young people and VET learners represent the primary audience. They tend to be curious, digitally connected and eager to see opportunities that link learning with purpose.
- Educators can act as key multipliers, helping identify potential participants and embedding the incubator's activities into existing educational pathways.
- Community organisations and local authorities can provide venues, networks and credibility.
- Funders and policymakers are key to long-term sustainability, as they connect the incubator to broader development strategies.
- Local media and online influencers help reach wider audiences and bring visibility to success stories.

Mapping these audiences can help the incubator teams to tailor their approach and choose communication formats that feel relevant and accessible.

Fine-tuning the message

The most effective communication highlights what the incubator means for the people involved, as well as what the incubator actually offers and delivers. This is because messages that include personal stories and authentic testimonials resonate more strongly with audiences, especially those who are engaged online who may not have any prior connection to the incubator or the local community. As such, we would recommend that messages are framed around opportunity, creativity and community transformation.

A consistent visual and verbal identity also helps to reinforce credibility, authenticity and recognition. Using clear language and relatable imagery can help to make sure inclusivity, especially for audiences who may not be familiar with the concept of social entrepreneurship or with the local community. Spend some time on this step before rushing to posting; your message and how it is presented is very important in engaging your intended audience.

Channels and tactics

Reaching audiences in rural areas requires a mix of traditional and digital methods. Some may prefer online channels, while others rely on face-to-face interaction or local media. A blended communication approach ensures that no group is left out. You should include the following in your strategy:

- Digital media:
    - Social platforms like Instagram, Facebook and TikTok are effective for engaging young audiences. Short videos, testimonials and interactive challenges can create interest and a sense of connection.
- Local media:
    - Radio stations, community newspapers and regional magazines remain trusted sources of information in rural contexts. Interviews or feature stories can highlight the human side of entrepreneurship.
- Educational channels:
    - Posters and flyers displayed in VET institutions, libraries or youth centres can reach those who may not follow digital campaigns.
- Events and open days:
    - Hosting introductory sessions, innovation workshops or idea cafés allows potential participants to experience the incubator environment directly and meet mentors or alumni.

Internal promotion and ambassadorship

Incubator participants can be its best advocates. Encouraging them to share their experiences through short testimonials, blog entries or social media takeovers adds authenticity and strengthens the incubator's reputation. Former participants can also act as mentors or local ambassadors, connecting with peers and motivating new applicants.

Maintaining active communication with alumni helps the incubator sustain a living network of changemakers who continue to contribute to its visibility and credibility.

Monitoring outreach success

Tracking communication effectiveness can help incubator teams to learn what works best. Metrics might include the number of applications received, social media engagement rates, attendance at events or media coverage. Feedback from participants and partners can also help to capture and analyse whether messages are reaching the intended audiences and whether the incubator's story is understood in the way it was intended. Regular reflection on outreach success allows teams to adapt strategies, refine messages and strengthen their connection with the community.

Additional Note:

Remember that promotion is essentially about storytelling, trust and belonging. When people see themselves reflected in the incubator's message, they are more likely to participate and to champion its work. Through authentic communication, rural incubators can inspire young people to act on their ideas and help communities to recognise the potential of social entrepreneurship as a pathway to local renewal.

12. Hosting networking events to foster community and peer support

Introduction

Community is the cornerstone of social entrepreneurship. While individual determination is important, most successful ideas grow within networks of encouragement, collaboration and shared learning. For rural social enterprise incubators, creating these networks is especially meaningful. They will allow young entrepreneurs to feel connected, exchange experience and find professional support in regions where opportunities for peer interaction can be limited.

Networking events can provide spaces where participants can share stories, celebrate progress and form partnerships that continue after the life of the incubator. This chapter covers how such events can be planned and delivered to strengthen relationships and build a lasting sense of community among participants and partners.

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to guide incubator organisers in developing and hosting events that promote connections between young social entrepreneurs, mentors and community stakeholders. It highlights the benefits of peer networking; describes event formats suited to rural contexts and introduces practical planning steps to ensure inclusive and meaningful experiences.

Key Aspects

Benefits of peer networking

Networking provides participants with a supportive environment where ideas can grow. Sharing experiences with others facing similar challenges helps normalise risk, build confidence and spark creativity. It also encourages a spirit of cooperation rather than competition: an attitude that is particularly valuable in social entrepreneurship, where collective impact often matters more than individual success.

For young people, networking events can also reduce feelings of isolation, especially in rural settings where peer groups may be geographically dispersed. Meeting others who are working on similar challenges reinforces the belief that change is possible and that collaboration can create stronger, more sustainable initiatives. Mentors, trainers and local leaders also benefit from these exchanges, gaining new perspectives and discovering emerging talent.

Event formats

There is no single formula for a successful networking event. What matters most is that participants feel comfortable, inspired and connected. Depending on resources and goals, events can range from informal gatherings to structured innovation sessions. Examples include:

- Ideation Sprints: Short, intensive sessions where participants form teams and develop creative solutions to a shared challenge.
- Rural Hackathons: Collaborative workshops that bring together participants from different disciplines to co-create social or environmental projects over one or two days.
- Pitch or 'Dragon's Den' Nights: Events where participants present their business ideas to a friendly panel of peers, mentors and potential partners, receiving constructive feedback and encouragement.
- Community Showcases: Public exhibitions or markets where social entrepreneurs can present their products or initiatives, connecting directly with local residents and organisations.
- Guest Speaker Panels: Discussions with experienced entrepreneurs or community leaders who share practical lessons and answer questions.

Each format offers an opportunity for interaction and learning while reinforcing the incubator's role as a hub of collaboration.

Planning essentials

Thoughtful planning can help to make sure that networking events are engaging and inclusive. The following steps can serve as a practical checklist:

- Define the purpose and outcomes: Be clear about what the event aims to achieve; whether that is idea sharing, partnership development or skill-building.
- Select an accessible venue: Choose a location that participants can easily reach, ensuring that transport, timing and facilities are suitable for diverse needs.
- Design for interaction: Structure the programme to encourage participation through small group activities, open discussions and informal networking moments.
- Invite a balanced mix of participants: Combine youth, mentors, educators and community actors to enrich perspectives and build inclusive dialogue.
- Provide incentives and visibility: Certificates, local media coverage or opportunities to present projects publicly can motivate engagement and recognition.
- Plan for follow-up: Collect participant feedback, share photos or highlights, and create online groups or mailing lists to keep connections alive.

Measuring Success

The impact of networking events can be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. Simple metrics like attendance numbers, new collaborations formed or follow-up meetings scheduled can offer insight into immediate success. Equally valuable are the personal stories that emerge (i.e., participants finding mentors, forming partnerships or discovering renewed confidence in their ideas). Documenting these outcomes can help to demonstrate the value of networking activities to funders and partners, and more importantly, inspire others to get involved in future initiatives.

Annex 5 - Networking Event Planning Template

The Networking Event Planning Template is provided with this chapter (see section 13. Attachments, Annex 5 below). This Template aims to support organisers in developing events step by step. It includes prompts for defining objectives, identifying audiences, preparing logistics and planning post-event actions. Completing the template as part of the preparation process will help to guarantee that events remain purposeful, inclusive and well-documented.

Using the template also promotes reflection and continuity. After the event, organisers can update it with notes, lessons learned and participant feedback.

13. Attachments

Annex 1 - Mentoring Agreement Template

Mentoring Agreement

for participation in the Social Enterprise Incubator Programme

This agreement outlines the terms of the mentoring relationship within the framework of a social enterprise incubator. It defines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of both parties in a supportive and structured collaboration.

1. Parties
This agreement is made between the following individuals:

Mentor:
Full name: ________________________________
Organisation (if applicable): ___________________
Email / Contact: ____________________________

Mentee:
Full name: ________________________________
Project name / Focus: _______________________
Email / Contact: ____________________________

The mentoring relationship is based on mutual trust, respect, and a shared commitment to the mentee's personal and professional development in the field of social entrepreneurship.

2. Duration of the Mentoring Relationship

The mentoring relationship shall begin on **(Start date: _________)** and shall end on **(End date: _________)**, covering the agreed duration of the incubation period.
The mentor and mentee agree to meet on a **(Meeting frequency: _________ (e.g. weekly, biweekly))** basis.

The preferred meeting format is **(Format: _________ (e.g. in-person, online, hybrid))**.

These arrangements may be reviewed and adjusted at any time by mutual agreement if circumstances or progress within the incubator require changes.

3. Role of the Mentor

The mentor plays a crucial role in the incubation process, acting as a trusted advisor, guide, and motivator throughout the mentee's development journey. Mentors are not expected to provide ready-made solutions, but rather to foster independent thinking, build confidence, and help mentees reflect on and shape their ideas.

A good mentoring relationship is built on **trust, consistency, and mutual respect**. The mentor brings valuable experience—whether in business, social impact, community work, or entrepreneurship—which helps the mentee navigate challenges and explore opportunities

Key responsibilities of the mentor include:

3.1. Offering advice and constructive feedback:

Mentors listen actively and ask thoughtful questions to challenge assumptions and inspire new perspectives. They help the mentee assess the feasibility of their idea, improve their planning, and avoid common pitfalls.

3.2. Encouraging self-reflection and confidence building:

Mentors empower mentees to take ownership of their own learning and development. By offering encouragement and honest feedback, mentors help mentees build resilience, stay motivated, and grow their self-belief as emerging social entrepreneurs.

3.3. Respecting the mentee's ideas and maintaining confidentiality:

A mentor must create a safe and supportive space where mentees feel free to share their thoughts, doubts, and goals. Confidentiality is essential to building trust, and mentors are expected to treat all discussions with discretion and professionalism.

Ultimately, the mentor's role is to walk alongside the mentee—providing perspective, inspiration, and accountability—as they develop and test their social enterprise idea.

4. Role of the Mentee

The mentee plays an active and central role in the mentoring relationship. While the mentor provides support and guidance, the responsibility for learning, reflection, and action ultimately lies with the mentee.

A successful mentoring experience depends on the mentee's willingness to take initiative, engage fully in the process, and make use of the mentor's time and insight. This requires not only motivation, but also openness, honesty, and commitment.

Key expectations for the mentee include:

4.1. Participating actively and preparing for meetings:
The mentee is expected to come to meetings on time, with clear questions, goals, or updates. Preparedness demonstrates respect for the mentor's involvement and helps make each session purposeful and productive.

4.2. Being open to feedback and willing to learn:
Mentoring works best when the mentee is open-minded and receptive to new ideas—even when feedback is challenging. A learning mindset allows the mentee to grow personally and professionally, and to explore new ways of thinking.

4.3. Communicating honestly about progress and challenges:
Open and honest communication helps build trust between the mentor and mentee. Sharing both successes and obstacles allows the mentor to offer more meaningful guidance and encourages mutual problem-solving.

4.4. Respecting the mentor's time and commitment:
The mentoring relationship is built on mutual respect. This includes being punctual, maintaining regular communication, and appreciating the mentor's voluntary contribution. Professional courtesy is essential.

Ultimately, the mentee is expected to take ownership of their development and use the mentoring relationship as a tool to explore, shape, and test their social enterprise idea with confidence and purpose.

5. Amendments and Termination
Either party may request to revise or terminate the agreement with appropriate notice. Any changes must be mutually agreed upon.

6. Signatures
This agreement is effective from the date of signing and is valid for the agreed duration of the mentoring relationship.

Mentor	**Mentee**
Name: ______________________________	Name: ______________________________
Signature: __________________________	Signature: __________________________
Date: _______________________________	Date: _______________________________

Annex 2 - Budget Planner Template

I. Planned Expenses				
Category	Details	Planned Amount (EUR)	Actual Amount (EUR)	Notes
Personnel Costs				
Mentor Compensation				
Training Materials				
Space & Equipment				
Communication & Outreach				
Events (e.g. Pitch Day)				
Microgrants for Participants				
Administrative Costs				
Other				
TOTAL		0	0	
II. Funding Sources				
Source	Estimated Amount (EUR)	Confirmed?	Notes	
Erasmus+ Project Funding				
Municipal Co-Funding				
Private Sponsorship / Donations				
VET Institution Contribution				
Participant Contributions				
Other NGOs / Foundations				
TOTAL	0			
III. Cash Flow Monitoring (by Month or Phase)				
Month / Phase	Planned Expenses	Actual Expenses	Remaining Budget	Comments
Month 1				
Month 2				
Month 3				
Month 4				
Month 5				
Month 6				

Annex 3 - Stakeholder Mapping Template

This table provides a framework for identifying and prioritising key actors who can contribute to the success of a social enterprise incubator. It can be completed during the planning phase or updated periodically as partnerships evolve. The aim is to gain a clear overview of who is involved, how they can contribute, and what level of engagement is appropriate.

Instructions for Use

- List relevant stakeholders within each group and adjust the categories to reflect the local context.
- Assess each stakeholder's influence and interest levels based on their capacity and motivation to support the incubator.
- Identify what they can contribute—knowledge, resources, networks, or visibility.
- Define how engagement will take place and assign responsibility for managing the relationship.
- Review and update the table regularly to reflect changing partnerships or emerging opportunities.

Stakeholder Group	**Example Organisations / Individuals**	**Level of Influence *(High / Medium / Low)***	**Level of Interest *(High / Medium / Low)***	**Potential Contribution to the Incubator**	**Proposed Engagement Method**	**Responsible Person / Organisation**
Existing Incubators / Accelerators	Regional innovation centres, university incubators, business hubs	High	High	Sharing good practice, co-hosting events, mentoring participants	Advisory role, knowledge exchange sessions	Incubator Manager
Entrepreneurs and Start-ups	Local social entrepreneurs, small business	Medium	High	Mentoring, storytelling, case study contributions	Guest talks, mentoring circles	Programme Coordinator

	owners, cooperatives					
VET Institutions and Professionals	VET schools, adult education centres, trainers	Medium	High	Linking learners to training opportunities, co-designing content	Workshops, joint projects	VET Liaison Officer
Public Sector and Development Agencies	Local municipalities, employment services, rural development agencies	High	Medium	Policy alignment, funding access, outreach support	Memoranda of Understanding, participation in steering committees	Lead Partner
Civil Society and NGOs	Youth organisations, social inclusion groups, community associations	Medium	High	Community mobilisation, inclusion of marginalised groups	Community events, focus groups	Community Engagement Officer
Private Sector and Chambers of Commerce	Local enterprises, business networks, chambers of commerce	High	Medium	Sponsorship, internships, market connections	Partnership agreements, networking events	Business Development Lead
Media and Communication Partners	Local radio, newspapers, influencers, online platforms	Low	Medium	Raising awareness, promoting events and success stories	Press releases, interviews, joint campaigns	Communications Officer

Annex 4 - Impact Assessment Matrix

Category	Example Indicators	Data Source / Method	Frequency of Measurement	Responsible Person / Partner
Inputs	Funding allocated, staff hours, mentor involvement, facilities used	Project records, budgets, attendance logs	Ongoing	Project Manager
Activities	Number of workshops delivered, mentoring sessions held, events organised	Programme reports, event feedback forms	Monthly	Programme Coordinator
Short-Term Outcomes	Increased entrepreneurial knowledge and confidence among participants	Pre- and post-programme surveys, self-assessments	Start and end of each cohort	Evaluation Officer
Medium-Term Outcomes	Number of social enterprises launched, partnerships established, new jobs created	Follow-up surveys, interviews, business registration data	6–12 months after completion	Impact Lead
Long-Term Impact	Economic resilience of rural areas, improved community services, enhanced inclusion	Case studies, stakeholder interviews, local statistics	Annual review	Steering Committee

Instructions for Use

- Define what success means for the incubator and set realistic indicators.
- Identify how information will be collected and who will manage the process.
- Balance quantitative indicators (numbers and percentages) with qualitative ones (stories and perceptions).
- Share findings with stakeholders to encourage collective reflection and continuous improvement.

Regular impact assessment ensures that the incubator remains accountable and responsive. It also provides a foundation for advocacy and funding, demonstrating that investment in social enterprise development leads to lasting rural transformation.

Annex 5 - Networking Event Planning Template

This template supports incubator organisers in planning and delivering community events that connect young social entrepreneurs, mentors, and local partners. It helps ensure that each event is purposeful, inclusive, and well-documented, encouraging long-term collaboration and learning.

Section	Guiding Questions / Details to Complete	Example / Notes
Event Title	What is the name of the event?	*Rural Impact Networking Café*
Event Purpose	What is the main goal of this event? (e.g., peer learning, idea exchange, partnership building)	*To connect local VET students and social entrepreneurs to explore community-based business ideas.*
Target Audience	Who is the event intended for? Consider age, experience level, and background.	*Young entrepreneurs, mentors, VET trainers, local NGOs.*
Expected Number of Participants	How many people are expected to attend?	*20–30 participants.*
Date and Time	When will the event take place? Consider accessibility and local schedules.	*15 March 2025, 10:00–14:00.*
Venue / Location	Where will it be held? Is the location accessible and appropriate for the target group?	*Community hall, local library, or outdoor co-working space.*
Format and Activities	What structure will the event follow? Include timing, sessions, and facilitation style.	*Welcome session → Icebreaker → Thematic discussion → Networking lunch → Pitch or idea-sharing session.*
Facilitators / Speakers	Who will lead sessions or provide inputs?	*Incubator coordinator, local entrepreneur, guest mentor.*
Resources and Materials Needed	What materials, equipment, or digital tools are required?	*Projector, name tags, flipcharts, participant feedback forms.*
Communication and Promotion	How will participants and partners be invited and informed?	*Social media announcement, direct invitations to VET schools and local partners.*
Incentives or Added Value	What will encourage participation and engagement?	*Certificates of participation, opportunity to present ideas, refreshments provided.*

Accessibility Considerations	Are there measures to ensure inclusivity for all participants?	*Venue is wheelchair accessible; materials provided in plain language; hybrid participation option if needed.*
Follow-Up Actions	What will happen after the event? How will connections be maintained?	*Collect contact details, create a shared online group, schedule a follow-up meeting.*
Evaluation	How will the success of the event be measured?	*Participant feedback, number of collaborations initiated, social media engagement.*
Responsible Person / Team	Who is responsible for coordination and follow-up?	*Event coordinator, communications officer.*

Instructions for Use

- Complete the table during the early planning phase and revisit it after the event for reflection and improvement.
- Use the “Example / Notes” column as inspiration, adapting details to local conditions and available resources.
- Collect participant feedback and document key learnings immediately after the event to inform future planning.
- Where possible, include photos, short testimonials, and media coverage in the event report to celebrate participation and visibility.

RURAL IMPACT

Harnessing the Potential of Youth Social Entrepreneurship for Rural Economies

VALMIERA DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

E.C.S.H. Escola de Ciências Sociais e Humanas

Constanta HUB

ACTA FOUNDATION

WeLearn

CALLIDUS

Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.
Project No: 2024-1-LV01-KA220-VET-000254680