

GUIDANCE, DOCUMENT

The Good Practice Guide

For incubator spaces and co-working hubs

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Preface

In January 2019, the Welsh Government published an Approach to Supporting Entrepreneurial Women in Wales, which aims to outline how business support organisations can adopt a more gender-focused approach to the delivery of their services. This approach was developed under the guidance of an Expert Panel of individuals drawn from the public, private, voluntary and Education sectors. A Good Practice Guide was published to support the delivery of this approach, which contains practical advice on how to review and introduce a more gender focused approach to service delivery. In response to the recommendations of the Panel, Business Wales committed to produce a Good Practice guide for incubator and co working spaces. This Guide provides advice and suggestions on how to provide a more gender focused approach for those managing co-working spaces to encourage a more personalised approach for women participants.

Introduction

The Welsh Government commissioned the Innovation Centre for Enterprise, Caerphilly to produce the Good Practice guide and to conduct the research that underpinned the content of this Guide. The research conducted in order to produce this Guide was of a primary nature, collated through questionnaires, interviews and focus groups and yielded both quantitative and qualitative data.

How can incubator spaces and co-working hubs better support entrepreneurial women in Wales.

One answer is to apply a gender lens to these spaces to ensure that support services are as effective as possible, for everyone, from the onset. Understanding your target audience is key to knowing your customers. Business support services in Wales need to apply the same principle. We know that women often approach and

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carry out business activities differently to men, and this can be partly attributed to the unique barriers female entrepreneurs face. It is imperative that a different approach to business support delivery is implemented in order for women to derive equal benefit from engagement with incubator spaces and co-working hubs. This guide will set out key areas for enterprise hubs to consider and suggest practical actions to take in order to best support entrepreneurial women in Wales.

Outreach and Marketing Communications

Seeing businesses grow is important. However, it's also important to keep in context the importance of "knowing your customer". When communicating with potential or new members, it's vital to consider the role that aspects of communication such as language, tone of voice and perception play in engaging women with your services.

The way in which women view, receive and interpret marketing messages is often different to men. Our research found that women often underestimate their business development rate and entrepreneurial skills when compared to men, even when business growth is equal, due to factors such as imposter syndrome.

As a result, the outreach and marketing communications strategies aimed at women starting businesses must address this with encouragement and without the assumption that the target audience are already confident in their abilities. Role models play a large part in women's entrepreneurial journeys, and their use within marketing communication can help accelerate women's skills and confidence.⁶ Women also respond to marketing content differently. It was found that women respond more positively to a proactive approach to assessing their business support needs rather than an expectation that they will ask when they need specific support. It's important that this is taken into account when devising outreach and marketing campaigns.

Women were three times more likely than men to have conducted an internet search to find a co-working space than men. This suggests they have more intent to seek

out help. It's therefore essential that the online visibility and presence of the hubs and co-working spaces is appealing to women.

Practical tips

Use of Written Language

Consider reviewing your existing outreach and communications literature and media, looking out for particular words which may carry a gender bias. This may include your website, social media platforms, emails and newsletters, as well as your printed materials (leaflets, banners etc.).

Communication

A friendly, approachable tone of voice and open body language with appropriate use of colloquialisms should be used. This is more appealing and will let individuals know you are speaking directly to them.

Online Presence

Ensure your website, social media, and online presence is easily accessible and appealing to women in terms of language, tone and ability to contact you.

Direct Consultation

When sending out marketing communications, actively ask members what they want or need from you. This could be in the form of a poll or survey, or just by simply asking members or potential members what they would like.

Sharing Success Stories and Women's Journeys

Sharing success stories, as well as the 'ups and downs' of entrepreneurial life is a key way to utilise the role model effect in your marketing communications, enabling those without an official role model to still be inspired by successful women.

Amazing! So many helpful people who work around you, and are willing to help you with any issues that arise when starting your own business.

Female Founders at a Welsh ICE International Women's Day event

Hub environment/Location

The environment in which any activity takes place plays a role in the level of success of the activity. The same is true for businesses starting up. New and growing businesses within an enterprise hub were found to have a 16% higher survival rate over three years, compared to average. It's therefore essential to ensure these enterprise hubs are equally equipped to facilitate the growth of both female and male founded businesses.

Inductions are a key part of establishing strong feelings of belonging and feeling welcome amongst female members, however not all new members are able to attend inductions at the start of their journeys. Coupled with the finding that women are less likely to ask for what they need, it was identified that this caused a delay in newer female members getting the most out of being in the hub environment.

Our research has also demonstrated that in order to carry out productive work, women often need a quieter space to work from as well as specific support in how to get the best out of co-working. Our research has shown that generally women used the co-working spaces for activities including networking and building business relationships, as well as genuine friendships. This highlights the need to ensure co-working spaces are attuned to meeting those needs as well as offering "quiet" spaces when required to ensure a balanced approach.

Flexibility has been highlighted in research numerous times as a key factor linked to women's abilities to start and grow businesses. The Alison Rose Review found that 46% of females cited flexibility (in the context of family support) as an important or very important factor, compared to just 33% of males. There is a clear

disproportionate level of care responsibilities in terms of both childcare and elderly care, with the majority statistically more likely to fall upon women. As a business support service, there are ways in which this can be taken into account and balanced. Childcare in particular is a large barrier to entry when it comes to starting and growing businesses, attributed more heavily to women than men.

When asked whether the physical location of the hub presented any challenges, 20% of women cited a lack of good public transport, long distances from home, parking issues around school drop off times, and not being close enough to amenities. Although not unique to women, women cited these problems more often.

Following on from the challenges presented by the physical location of the hubs, online locations were also discussed. Considering over 40% of women found a hub via an online search compared to just 30% of men, making sure the online environment is optimised is essential. Findings from the focus group discussion further supported this, where women agreed that being part of an online group was beneficial and there was no judgement: “The [online] group is a form of support”... “No-one is judging you”. The lack of judgement from the online community was also apparent when respondents were asked about staying motivated, as online tutoring and support was mentioned as a response as opposed to face to-face tutoring.

Practical tips

Flexibility where Possible

Highlight the flexible options you have available whether that relates to membership packages, prices, or opening days/times.

Children on Site Policy At times, members may need to bring children into the workplace briefly, however they may be unsure what the policy on this issue is. Clearly display your ‘children on site’ policy and communicate to your members so

that they know their rights and responsibilities.

Quieter Spaces

If possible, allocate a room or area for quieter working and clearly communicate that this area is to be used for quiet work.

Welcome/Induction Pack

Provide a welcome pack as an accompaniment and summary of the induction. Key topics to include in the induction pack may include: a map, opening times, important phone numbers, etiquette, guide to co-working, staff member 'who's who' with photos, mentors, FAQs etc. as well as a tour of the facilities. Aim to ensure the tour covers all areas including a quieter area, meeting spots, and canteen if available.

There should also be an option for a virtual induction, either live and available at a variety of days and times, or pre-recorded which includes all the information a face to face induction would, including a virtual tour, and the opportunity to ask questions and give feedback. Effort should be made to make introductions to key staff during the tour. Ensure the welcome pack is also available digitally.

Guide to Co-Working

Provide a guide to co-working including: why co-work, the benefits of co-working, and how to co-work effectively, to support those members who are new to the concept.

Location

Whilst it may not be possible to move the co-working hub, ensure transport routes and amenities are clearly presented. If considering opening a new hub, ensure there is adequate parking, well lit surroundings, transport links, and amenities close by. Consider ways in which members might virtually attend the hub to co work.

Online Elements

Create an online hub community group for hub members to join. Consider hosting topical posts for members to talk about and network online. Post about online mentoring, tutoring and support, opportunities in the online group or even make use of the online group's in-built mentoring system.

It's difficult to put your finger on it but there is a feeling of support and that you can do anything - as others have done exactly that.

Accessing funding

Access to funding was referenced as the number one barrier faced by women when starting a business. Whilst in isolation, this issue wasn't exclusive to women, however, on further examination, we can see that women launch businesses with 53% less capital than men, whilst only 1% of venture funding is given to an all-female led team. We also found that women tend to be more risk averse than men when it comes to accessing and accepting traditional finance, but more likely to benefit from innovative funding sources including crowdfunding. 83% of our female respondents felt that being a member of a hub would benefit them in terms of raising investment through crowdfunding.

There is evidence that increasing the awareness and level at which women are able to access funding will increase their ability to successfully grow and run their businesses. Research carried out by the Federation of Small Businesses in 2018 found that best practice from the US - a country which tops the list of women's performance in entrepreneurship - states that ensuring there is equal access to finance for both women and men, increasing awareness of sources of finance, and encouraging more women to associate with, or join angel networks were key factors in achieving their number one position.

Whilst the statistics for Gross Value Added for majority owned women businesses in Wales has increased from 5.95% in 2012 to 7.24% in 2015, there are ways in which we can facilitate this increase further. The language used when addressing the issue of funding is of huge importance. Women respond more positively to language with less pressure attached to it as opposed to intimidating language, and in fact may not notice opportunities for funding at all if they are not presented in the correct way. For example, our research showed that men were 25% more likely to see communications around funding opportunities than women, suggesting the communications appeal to men but not women.

Practical Tips

Language

Review funding materials and consider amendment of the language used. For example, using “financial support with growing your business” over “funding”, and “sharing your idea” over “pitching”.

Communication of Funding Opportunities

Consider actively linking start-up businesses with appropriate and relevant opportunities and funding sources rather than only sending communication about the funding opportunities.

I have now met lots of like-minded women. I currently have access to a funded workspace and I have been signposted to lots of new funding opportunities that I wasn't previously aware of.

Sarah Sutton, female founder at a Welsh ICE networking event in Treorchy, Rhondda

Mentoring

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In the 2019 Welsh Government Good Practice Guide, it was identified that women favour a mentoring and coaching service over a traditional consultancy approach when it comes to business support.

Our research found that women strongly value the mentoring opportunities that come with the hub membership when compared to men, with women being four times as likely to highlight its value. This is supported by findings from The Alison Rose Review which suggested that, while women are less likely than men to know other entrepreneurs or have access to role models or mentors, however they are the most likely to benefit from them.

Our research also found that women hugely benefited from structured mentoring in terms of financial growth in addition to support with personal development skills which are key in driving a business forward. When directly asked “What could we do to help reduce your struggles further”, answers included “more mentoring opportunities”. However, it was found that whilst structured mentoring is beneficial for female business owners, it’s also important to recognise that mentoring can happen naturally for example in the form of role models, and often this type of mentoring yields stronger, longer lasting results. 93% of women cited that learning from other people’s experiences would help to support their own personal growth, suggesting that an easier or wider availability of role models or softer mentoring schemes would be beneficial.

Practical Tips

Mentoring

Programmes Offer a mentoring programme within your community. Aim to match businesses and mentors based on their individual and specific needs.

Encourage Natural Mentoring

Identify willing experts within your community and share their success stories so they can act as role models and natural/soft mentors.

Promote Role Models and Positive Stories

Celebrate the successes of members regularly including any positive stories, achievements and press. Share these celebrations within the network and community via social media, internal forums, and communications.

The greatest benefit is in terms of business skills from mentoring scheme

Francesca Irving (Lunax Digital Marketing), delivering a 5 to 9 Club workshop, in Aberdare

Networking

There is a body of trusted research that suggests that women network in a different way to men. Our research found that 50% of women reported seeing events as a chance to network as well as learn whereas males more commonly networked in a more official manner. The concept of women being the 'heart of the community' is reflected through the findings of the research. Women are more likely to form close relationships with those within their communities and, in fact class their business peers and colleagues as friends more often than men do. The support networks formed often then breed natural mentor/mentee relationships as described in the mentoring section.

In comparison, men appear to demonstrate looser, more geographically spread networks, which are more information rich as a result. Both forms of networks carry positives, but the type of network a business owner has will impact on the growth a business can achieve and findings show that men find it easier than women to grow their business on the back of their networks.

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It has also been found that women tend to startup in business with different skills and experience than men. This can include limited management experience, resulting in fewer business contacts during the start-up phase. (RBS Group, 2013).

Our research found that women were much more likely to have over 60% of their professional network made up of hub members, than men. This highlights that membership at a co-working hub is even more beneficial for females than males when contributing to an overall professional network.

This demonstrates the opportunity that co-working spaces offer to women – to enrich their networks by finding both emotional and ‘professional’ support within a community of business owners of all genders, who actively engage in peer to peer learning and casual mentoring on a daily basis. These communities inspire innovation and a sense of shared purpose.

Practical Tips

Conversation Starting

Consider a dedicated ‘conversation’ time such as a lunch time or break times to allow people to converse and network without feeling like they are disturbing anyone. Dedicated lunch areas or tables can also be used to facilitate this. Virtual coffee breaks should be arranged for those attending the hub remotely.

Facilitate or promote events

Women often network more effectively through non-networking based events such as learning events. If possible, consider setting up your own events based on the needs of the women in your community, or, if that’s not possible, ensure you are promoting relevant events through your communications.

Language

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The use of appropriate language in networking event promotions is instrumental in attracting women to these events. Ensure that the language used is informal and approachable and consider swapping words such as “networking” for a more accurate and prescriptive description of the event, for example “Social Media Training Event”.

Social Media Networking Groups

If you haven’t already, establish an online networking group, for example, a Facebook group, for members of the hub. This group can be moderated by administrative staff, however you may find it works more effectively when self-regulated by the community members.

Facilitate or allow setup of individual groups

The benefits of networking are more prominent for women when there is a genuine, friendly relationship, therefore you should consider facilitating or allow groups to form and use free spaces when available. This can encourage natural networking to take place and for relationships to be built and flourish. Themed forums and virtual rooms should be introduced so as not to exclude those attending the hub virtually.

I wasn’t very good at networking, or confident with it, but I have got better as a result of being at the hub.

Business Support Events

It has been shown that women are more attracted to, and benefit greatly from learning based events, compared to other styles or topics of events. We know from the findings of the Alison Rose Review that women are less likely to believe they are equipped with the skills to start, run, or grow a business, so it’s not surprising to find how well received upskilling and learning based events have been. Our research confirms this with women directly asking for “more events” including learning-based

events and workshops.

We also found that women respond well when they are actively asked a question, rather than waiting for women to approach a hub with specific requests for what they need. Therefore the style and topics of business support events should be in the hands of the women attending. Being listened to and supported with their journey increases the feelings of confidence, increasing the chance of success.

The research shows that women are more likely to absorb the information provided to them at an event if they resonate with the person giving the information. Women are eager to learn, but don't appreciate feeling patronised, so being given advice from someone they don't feel an affinity with leads to negative feelings about the event. Subsequently this can have a knock on negative feeling associated with the event organiser.

Finally, 92.5% of women surveyed initially indicated that they would attend a women only event. Further discussions into this, however, indicated that, for some women, these can also feel intimidating. Women specifically asked for: "evening events", "events at different times" and events that "fit around childcare" as well as opportunities to attend events to learn about the experiences of other women, and events that involve an activity.

Practical Tips

Learning Based Events and Workshops

If possible, facilitate your own learning based events and workshops, taking into consideration the times and venues that are best suited for the women in your community. Ensure these are offered in a virtual format as well as face to face.

Ask Members What They Want

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Asking the female members of the community which topics they would like to be covered during the events or workshops, for example: marketing, finance, legal etc. and how they would like them to be delivered.

Run by Role Model

Aim for any workshops you facilitate to be run by someone who is not only an expert in their field, but a role model with a success story.

Timing

Arrange events at different times of the day including lunchtime and evening to allow for women's differing routines. Recognise that networking is often intimidating, if you run networking sessions ensure you have a "buddying" system for new-comers.

I've gained a lot of advice and information due to the events at the hub and we have been introduced to one member who wishes to work with us on a regular basis.

Kellie Baron, health and wellbeing coach, at a "5 to 9 Club" business support event

Monitoring Practice Delivery

To ensure that the practices described are carried out effectively and are in fact leading to a reduction to the barriers faced by women when they start, run, and grow their business, it is imperative that the delivery of these practices is monitored and analysed appropriately, segmenting by gender.

It is important to consider that in order to achieve the step forward that is needed, correct analysis needs to take place both before and after adaptation to practice delivery. Only then will a valid story be shown.

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By putting in place some simple measures, data collection and analysis by gender will become an easy but essential part of your process as a business support unit.

Practical Tips

Regular Questionnaires and Surveys

Carry out regular questionnaires and surveys to gather feedback from your members on whether they feel their needs are being met.

Staff Surveys and Training

Ensure your staff understand how their individual roles can impact the behaviour and feelings of female members or potential members, and offer training on the subject where needed.

Monitor Data for Events

Establish systems for monitoring gender based data including (but not limited to) marketing activities, event attendees, networking statistics, take up of mentor schemes etc.

When working from home I'd get the occasional feeling of failure because we wouldn't have a space to call 'our office' so this makes us feel more professional and feel like we are more appealing to potential clients.

Easy Language Swaps (Changes)

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| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Accounting | Bookkeeping and accounts |
| Pitching | Sharing your business idea, presenting, submitting your idea, gaining feedback. |
| Entrepreneur | Business owner, small business owner, freelancer, self-employed, those running a business. |
| Finances | Money |
| Funding/Investment | Raising money |
| Networking | 'Named' event |
| Masterclass | Workshop, event |

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