Northside Partnership

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
2018 - 2022

LDC NAME: Northside Partnership

LOT NO: 2.3

TITLE OF CASE STUDY: Social Enterprise Community of Practice

THEMATIC AREA: Collaboration

TARGET GROUP: Social Enterprise's

BACKGROUND

As part of the Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF) Action Plan for 2018, the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) invited grant applications from Local Development Companies to provide additional Training and Mentoring Supports for Social Enterprises. Rather than submit individual tenders it was agreed that six Dublin based partnerships would collaborate and submit a joint tender to the Dormant Accounts fund. It was felt that by working together we could deliver a superior quality of supports to Social Enterprises in the region and utilise a broad range of skills from individuals in each partnership. This was the first joint initiative with all six partnerships.

As a result, Social Enterprise Community of Practice consortium (SECOP) was formed. The six organisations making up SECOP are, Northside Partnership, Dublin South City Partnership, Dublin Northwest Partnership, Ballyfermot Chapelizod Partnership, Dublin Inner City Community Co-operative and Empower Local Development Company.

In December 2019 the SECOP consortium was awarded €90,159 through the Dormant Accounts Fund to carry out training and mentoring for Social Enterprises in Dublin.

PURPOSE OF THE INITIATIVE - SOCIAL ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

All SECOP members are embedded in their local area. They share a common philosophy and approach to their work which is supported through SICAP funding; prioritising local needs and using community development methods to support Social Enterprise activity.

The purpose of this initiative was to build on existing delivery and offer a higher level of support to Social Enterprises across the Dublin region by providing mentoring supports to Social Enterprises in their identified areas of need.

ORIGINS OF THIS INITIATIVE

At the time of application, under SICAP, consortium members collectively supported 44 trading Social Enterprises. Additionally, they supported 588 community organisations many of whom had the potential to identify as a Social Enterprise or develop social enterprise activity.

Each consortium member had pre-existing relationships with trading Social Enterprises and experience delivering Social Enterprise supports prior to this initiative under Goal 1 of SICAP. For example, Dublin Inner City Co-operative has supported Inner City Enterprises and the Dublin City Social Enterprise Awards since 2015, and Northside Partnership were the initiators of the award-winning Social Enterprise Speedpak.

In supporting the development of this initiative each consortium partner nominated a staff member, with experience in supporting Social Enterprises, to the SECOP Implementation Group. In the main these staff members were funded or partially funded through SICAP. Though members of the Implementation Group had not formally worked together previously, the group quickly established a strong working relationship and put in place shared processes and ways of working. Initially the group met weekly to plan the implementation of the programme, and throughout programme delivery, to review progress, deliver updates and address any risks or issues that arose.

In managing the programme, Ballyfermot Chapelizod Partnership contributed a Co-ordinator to lead on programme implementation, while Northside Partnership took the role of financial lead. All six organisations, under SICAP, committed considerable expertise, experience, relationships, and staff-time to ensure the programme's success. In January 2020, SECOP undertook the mentor and mentee recruitment process.

The CEO's of SECOP's six member organisations formed an Oversight Group to direct and evaluate the work of the project throughout the planning and implementation stages and a formal Memorandum of Understanding was agreed across all six organisations in supporting the initiative.

PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS

Invitations to register for SECOP were offered to all Social Enterprises registered under SICAP supports, in addition to this, pre-start-ups and start up Social Enterprises were invited to register. The registration allowed Social Enterprises to identify their key areas of need which informed and supported the consortium in their selection of required mentors and to determine in demand skill sets.

Social Enterprises that benefited from this programme support work with a broad selection of target groups offering a variety of solutions to a range of social issues. A sample of the target groups worked with by participating Social Enterprises, include people with disabilities, those in recovery from addiction, long-term unemployed, people affected by homelessness, new communities, lone parents, people who are neurodiverse, such as those on the autism spectrum, and their families, members of the Traveller community, person/people with a criminal past, older people, and young people.

A sample of the services offered by these organisations included management of community facilities, training and education, community radio, enterprise centres, childcare and early learning services, job creation (examples include a bike upcycling, sales and repair shop, and a walking tour company), mental health support services, support services for older people, environmental programmes, community arts projects, and more.

What unified the organisations was that they all support communities experiencing disadvantage, are based within SICAP funded geographic areas and focus their activities on social benefit in their geographic area.

In total, eighty Social Enterprises registered for the programme. Of those eighty, sixty-three Social Enterprises engaged in a minimum of one hour's mentorship, fifty-eight Social Enterprises engaged in three or more hours with eighteen engaging with thirty or more hours of mentorship. Arising from this engagement, twelve participating Social Enterprises produced a promotional video for their organisation.

Mentors

In establishing the programme's panel of mentors, the six consortium members worked together to carefully select and recruit a pool of thirty-eight highly qualified candidates. Mentors were selected from within each of the consortium's members' existing pools of mentors and their wider networks.

Each mentor brought with them subject matter expertise and experience in one or more areas of need identified by participating Social Enterprises. They were selected by SECOP for their experience and expertise in their field, their understanding of the context in which a Social Enterprise operates, and their proven effectiveness as a mentor.

The breadth and depth of expertise within the mentor pool (made possible by the collaborative nature of the initiative) was a critical component of the programme's success. It allowed participating organisations to access niche support to address their highest priority needs. Such specific support could not have been made possible had SECOP members operated in isolation.

Programme Implementation and Adaption in response to Covid-19

Mentor-Mentee Matching Process

In February 2020 mentees and mentors were invited to a 'Meet the Mentor' event in Smithfield, Dublin. This event was designed to ensure that mentees had input into selecting the most appropriate mentor for their organisation following completion of their needs analysis at the point of registration. The event was an opportunity for mentors and mentees to meet, to identify partnerships where the needs and ambitions of a Social Enterprise for the programme met the skills and experience of a mentor, and to assess fit.

Following the event, the Implementation Group met for a series of workshops to collate all the information submitted by mentees, and pair each Social Enterprise with three mentors, informed by the needs assessment and mentor preferences each mentee had submitted.

Adapting in response to Covid-19

In March 2020 Covid-19 restrictions were introduced. These changes affected more than just the roll-out of the programme; they impacted many participating Social Enterprises, the communities they work with, and indeed all individuals involved. A number of the Social Enterprises shifted into crisis-mode; with priorities moving from long-term development to survival. The programme which had been scheduled to run for just six months could not continue in its original form.

The implementation group worked hard during this time to assess the evolving needs of the Social Enterprises and identify the most effective pathways to support participants through an adapted programme. The group's close relationships within the communities in which they work allowed them to rapidly reassess requirements and work with participants 'where they were at'. Their operational flexibility meant they could act quickly.

Some of the original activities (face to face events) that could not be delivered effectively online were removed. Flexible one-to-one mentoring was identified as one of the most effective supports SE-COP could continue to provide during this time, sessions were moved online, and the number of hours of mentoring allocated was increased.

Social Enterprises were informed that their original needs-assessment was not binding, and they were invited to re-assess priorities and use the available supports to meet needs as they stood on an ongoing basis. Members of the Implementation Group offered ongoing support and feedback to Social Enterprises throughout this period, making adjustments to mentor-mentee pairings to provide specific expertise, and allocating additional hours as required.

The programme duration was extended so that mentoring could continue until February 2021. With the extension of the programme those Social Enterprises, who were struggling initially with the pandemic and day to day operations, were able to avail of the mentoring at a later stage, affording them time to identify and reassess their needs based on the immediate issues they now faced. In addition to the mentoring, Social Enterprises were offered the opportunity to create a video for their website which would not have been achievable in the original time frame.

Topics covered within Mentorship Programme

- Social Enterprise were matched with mentors and benefitted from the following expertise;
- Marketing such as developing social media strategies, press releases and brand awareness
- Web-design and optimisation,
- Financial modelling, VAT returns, tendering and procurement and developing funding proposals
- Governance and Strategic supports- such as risk assessments, governance work, social impact measurement and feasibility studies
- Developing processes and standard operational procedures
- Creating new networks
- Adapting to Covid-19
- Building resilience and support

OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

The average number of mentor hours received by participating Social Enterprises was 17.7, the median was 14, this was spread across an average of 2.9 mentors per Social Enterprise.

- 5 Local Development Companies and the Dublin City Co-operative, all implementing SICAP formed, a Community of Practice to work together and pool resources for the first time.
- 80 Social Enterprises registered, 63 engaged in a minimum of one hour's mentorship, 58 engaged in 3 or more hours.
- 38 mentors participated
- 1,113 hours of one-to-one mentorship delivered.
- 8 webinars delivered by 7 trainers, lasting 2-2.5 hours each.

The following direct quotes from programme participants illustrate the value they placed on this particular type of support and the benefits it afforded them. The comments also give an insight into the quality of the mentor panel; their understanding, and their capacity for 'providing really helpful solutions straight away.

> **it was very helpful as a Social Enterprise to get expertise that normally would be prohibitively expensive** *(Social Enterprise 1)*

> **if you have an expert working with you one to one for up to nine hours, that's when you make real progress** *(Social Enterprise 2)*

> **I absolutely value the power of mentorship** *(Social Enterprise 3)*

> **I think they are being extremely progressive in offering supports like this, we were extremely happy with the support** *(Social Enterprise 4)*

> **I wouldn't have had a clue where to start. And it has given me something to focus on, to create a launch and a date. It's been great** *(Social Enterprise 5)*

> **The one-to-one allows for that vulnerability and to really support people through resistance, which was usually about them having a lack of knowledge, understanding or experience** *(Social Enterprise 6)*

PROGRAMME IMPACT AND PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

A full evaluation was carried out of SECOP with participants and mentors to measure impact and identify key strengths and areas for improvement.

A common theme, repeatedly emphasised in the feedback, was the value that Social Enterprises place on targeted one-to-one mentorship from a subject matter expert.

When asked if they would recommend this programme to another Social Enterprise, 88% of survey respondents said they would be 'Very Likely' to recommend the programme, with the remaining 12% responding they would be 'likely' or 'somewhat likely'. None of the respondents selected the remaining options; 'neither likely nor unlikely', 'somewhat unlikely', 'unlikely', 'very unlikely'.

When asked if there were any areas in which the programme could be improved, a number of respondents (primarily mentors) shared that some more structure around the programme's parameters and the provision of clear definitions of success would be welcomed. Some suggested it would be useful to ensure both mentors and mentees received more information in advance of each engagement; including a briefing around what was in and out of scope and more detailed biographies on mentor and mentee.

In any pilot programme, particularly one delivered during an unprecedent global pandemic, there will be learnings around programme management and administration. Specifically, areas for improvement were needed in the administration, whilst members of the implementation group held responsibility for various aspects of administration, the overall information was not visible to the group as a whole. whilst faced with challenges throughout the pandemic, improved ways of working were identified and the use of technology and cloud-based systems were created to overcome this issue.

SICAP CONTRIBUTION

The programme benefited from extensive project implementation and administration support from the implementation group, who are predominately supported and funded via SICAP. Without this level of input from the implementation group the programme would not have been created and our Social Enterprises would not have benefited from all the supports. A direct result of this programme is that Social Enterprises that had not registered under SICAP have done so since the implementation of the programme. As the Dormant Account funding was for a limited duration, Social Enterprises that have now registered under SICAP have access to continuous supports available from each partnership. The Consortium are continuing to work together, having successfully secured funding for SECOP Phase 2.

GOAL	SICAP INDICATOR	OUTCOMES
G1 - 5:1	Social Enterprise supports	• Quality supports are in place for the development of a social enterprise framework • Models of best practice are being developed • Enhanced innovation and creativity through the establishment of social enterprise network • Reduced risk of failure at the start-up stage • Increased expertise among social entrepreneurs

CONCLUSION

From speaking in detail with Social Enterprise, mentors, and members of the Implementation and Oversight group it is clear that this programme, was a resoundingly successful initiative that offered real value to its recipients.

Locally embedded organisations and Social Enterprises play a vital role in the delivery of social and local services. Previous research has found that small organisations play a critical role in sustaining a healthy ecosystem of service providers. Specifically, they are recognised as builders and nurturers of social networks, having the ability to reach 'the hardest to reach'; and providing greater flexibility and responsiveness to service users (Hunter & Cox, 2016). In a recent study, Dayson, Baker and Rees (2018) examined the value of smaller charities in the United Kingdom from three angles: service offer, approaches and position within local communities. Their findings reaffirmed the evidence that small organisations demonstrate local embeddedness, nimbleness, local network facilitation and local legitimacy (often referred to as a social licence to operate). It must be noted that some Social Enterprises at a local level, had previously advised that they were working in isolation and that there was a lack of knowledge of other operating Social Enterprises both locally and regionally. By working together, the six Local Development Companies enabled connections between social enterprises and brokered relationships with experts in their fields via their mentors.

Since the completion of this programme in March 2021 some social enterprises have continued to work with their mentors and connected with other Social Enterprises working in a similar field. This networking will be nurtured with the ongoing supports of the implementation group. The collaborative approach will be a new way of working for a number of individual Social Enterprises and not one that they may have considered before. Through the ongoing SICAP supports that each Local Development Company has access to, we can provide ongoing training and mentoring in the areas of partnership working and the key benefits that will bring, for example, they will be able to deliver more with their funding by collaborating with other social enterprises and utilising a wider range of skills/expertise. Secondly, they will actively avoid duplication of services in the community.

These outcomes could not have been achieved if the collaboration of all six Local Development companies, funded via SICAP did not occur. The combined knowledge, skill set and access to a broad skill set of mentors enabled strong supports for Dublin based Social Enterprises.

Having reviewed all the feedback received from our evaluation the consortium has continued to work together and have been successful in securing funding for our Phase 2 programme. Part of this next phase will focus on developing networks and building capacity. One key focus for the implementation group is to broker partnership working between Social Enterprises that will support them in developing their business, diversifying their offer and supporting growth within the network of regional social enterprises.

The Phase 2 programme commences in October 2021.