Coop4Equality

Handbook

Implementing peer to peer learning mechanisms among social entrepreneurs

This handbook is part of a series that aims to equip social entrepreneurs, organizations, and stakeholders with practical strategies for integrating gender awareness into their work. By fostering a gender-inclusive mindset, we can drive positive change and sustainable growth

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Handbook number 4

Handbook overview

Introduction

This is a set of 5 handbooks on gender mainstreaming and peer-learning methodologies to help Social Entrepreneurship (SE) stakeholders foster more gender-inclusive local and European ecosystems. These handbooks provide practical tools and methodologies for embedding a gender perspective in SE practices. They will remain freely accessible and available in German, Greek, Romanian, Portuguese and French.

These handbooks are part of the Cooperation for a Gender-Equal Social Economy (Coop4Equality) project, funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ programme Running until July 2026, this project aims to enhance the role of women and gender minorities in the European social economy, fostering gender inclusivity, sustainable growth, and equal opportunities.

Project Partners:
- Empow'Her Global, France
- Nova SBE Leadership for Impact Knowledge Center, Portugal
- Fundația Ashoka, Romania
- Pranado gGmbH, Germany
- Digital Leadership Institute, Belgium
- Stimmuli for Social Change, Greece

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This is handbook number 4. Apart from this handbook you may find information about the remaining 4 handbooks:

1 **Sustainably creating a gender-aware mindset in the social entrepreneurship field**

This handbook aims to empower social entrepreneurs with practical strategies to develop a gender-aware mindset, fostering inclusivity and equity in their ventures. By addressing key mindset shifts and providing actionable tools, it equips readers to overcome barriers and create lasting social impact.

2 **Reinforcing empathy-based methodologies in social entrepreneurship**

The purpose of this handbook is to provide a resource for social entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations, and all those interested in using empathy as a foundation for developing solutions to social problems.

3 **Self-assessing the gender approach when teaching and doing social entrepreneurship**

This handbook aims at supporting and guiding members of support structures and social entrepreneurs with a specific self-diagnostic tool, as case study, and further equip them a 3-stage methodological approach, useful tips, questions and key performance indicators (at external & internal level) that can facilitate them to analyze and self-assess their progress on gender lens integration within their project or initiative

4 **Implementing peer to peer & co-development mechanisms among social entrepreneurs**

This handbook introduces two impactful methodologies designed to foster support and growth among women entrepreneurs: cross mentoring and co-design sessions.

5 **Bringing out a gender-inclusive model of high-growth and scalable social enterprises**

This handbook equips readers with the necessary tools to critically reflect on various aspects of scaling, including the decision to scale, the reasons for scaling, and the methods of scaling. It encourages readers to reflect upon and implement gender-inclusive practices in their own social enterprises.

Summary

**Handbook 4: Implementing peer to peer & co-development mechanisms among social entrepreneurs**

This handbook introduces two impactful methodologies designed to foster support and growth among women entrepreneurs: cross mentoring and co-design sessions.

Cross mentoring pairs entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and skill sets, enabling them to learn from one another and provide mutual guidance. This approach not only enriches individual perspectives but also helps the entrepreneur to break out of isolation and gain new competencies.

Co-design sessions harness collective intelligence, allowing participants to address their own challenges through the insights of their peers. This methodology creates safe spaces for entrepreneurs to share their challenges and gain from the reflection and diverse viewpoints of its peers.

Throughout this handbook, you will find a comprehensive case study illustrating the benefits of cross mentoring, alongside a detailed step-by-step guide on effectively implementing co-design sessions. By engaging with these methodologies, you will not only enhance your community based practices but also contribute to a supportive network of female leaders.
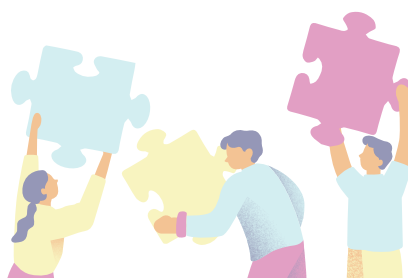
Introduction

Undoubtedly, the intersection of gender equality and social entrepreneurship is a dynamic and evolving process, holding tremendous potential for creating long-term positive and sustainable change to women' personal and professional development. However, in order to build a more equitable and supportive environment for women entrepreneurs a multifaceted approach is required to address existing challenges (from limited financial opportunities to unequal access to resources and insufficient cooperation with other initiatives), hindering their development within the social entrepreneurship ecosystem (Rajgor, 2024). Several studies and reports put emphasis on the importance of targeted joint initiatives and community support through mentorship and networking opportunities for women entrepreneurs to overcome critical challenges. According to the findings of a European study conducted by Empow'her in 2019, **cross-mentoring** and **peer-learning** between female entrepreneurs seem to mitigate the fear and lack of confidence that women feel when resorting to external funding or attempting their own venture.

Based on the identified needs and trends, the present handbook aims at offering inspiration and guidance for peer to peer learning strategies, by introducing **two impactful methodologies** designed to foster support and growth among women social entrepreneurs, specifically: the **cross mentoring methodology** and the **co-design methodology**. By engaging with these methodologies, you will not only enhance your community based practices but also contribute to a supportive network of female leaders. Here is an overview of the selected methodologies:

- **Cross mentoring** pairs entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and skill sets, enabling them to learn from one another and provide mutual guidance. This approach not only enriches individual perspectives but also helps the entrepreneur to break out of isolation and gain new competencies.

- **Co-design** sessions harness collective intelligence, allowing participants to address their own challenges through the insights of their peers. This methodology creates safe spaces for entrepreneurs to share their challenges and gain from the reflection and diverse viewpoints of its peers.

The present handbook starts with key concepts related to cross-mentoring, peer learning and co-design and next it focuses on the objectives of cross-mentoring methodology and main steps of setting up cross-mentoring sessions. Moreover, the handbook presents a comprehensive case study that focuses on two success stories of two entrepreneurs as beneficiaries of the incubation program SEGIE at Empow'Her. The last chapters of the handbook are dedicated to the meaning of co-design and a step by step guide and useful tips to effectively implementing co-design sessions.

Finally, at the end of the handbook an annex with inspiring icebreaker activities is provided for facilitating the first sessions of the cross-mentoring meetings and a second annex of a case study of a co-design session that will help to illustrate the process.

Key concepts

- **Peer to peer support:** is defined as a type of social support that involves individuals providing assistance to one another on an equal footing (Wiki Freedom, n.d.).

- **Peer learning:** refers to the practice of involving individuals with similar levels of expertise or knowledge gathering to exchange insights and learn reciprocally from each other (Quick Campus, 2024).
  - An additional definition of peer learning: 'An educational practice and interactional framework that promotes learning through collaboration among peers' (ScienceDirect, 2010).

- **Cross-mentoring:** refers to a practice in which two people offer each other guidance and support in their respective areas of experience or interest (San Juan, 2023).

- **Community building:** the process of 'creating and nurturing connections, relationships, and a sense of belonging among individuals within a specific group or locality' (Justin Welsh, 2024).

- **Co-design:** Co-design is a collective intelligence methodology that enables each individual to solve their own challenges and problems by benefiting from the perspective and experience of others. The aim of co-design is to create learning communities to perfect one's practices, based on real-life situations, and benefiting from a multiplicity of viewpoints and a structured reflection process.

The cross-mentoring methodology

Cross-mentoring involves pairing entrepreneurs from different backgrounds, experiences, and skill sets, for them to learn from each other and provide mutual support and guidance.
This format can be very useful to include right at the beginning of a support program. The mentoring can then live on simply by the work of the entrepreneurs paired !

Objective 1:

Help entrepreneurs gain new skills, perspectives, and insights

Objective 2:

Allow entrepreneurs to use their background and previous experiences to help their peers

Objective 3:

Foster a learning and collaborative dynamic

Know what you are getting into

➕ Reinforcement of mutual support within a cohort
➕ Enhancement of personal expertise
➕ Breaks entrepreneurs from their feeling of isolation

❌ Only works if both partners are committed
❌ If one person of a pairing is not committed or stops the programme, this affects their partner

→ **provide alternative pairings to the partner who remains**

Matching process

Who are the entrepreneurs?
Gather the expertises and skills of the entrepreneurs from an application form

Make the pairs!
Consider entrepreneur's backgrounds, experiences, skills, and goals when pairing them

Introduce the pairs and share with them mentoring techniques !
Organize a group session to introduce the entrepreneurs to mentoring techniques: active listening and constructive feedback and give them tips to help start conversations

➡ **The most important is to match entrepreneur with complementary skill sets and diverse perspectives within each pair.**

The cross-mentoring methodology

Setting up the first session

The first session should be dedicated to setting personal and pair goals for the duration of the program

Structure:
1. Icebreaker: *share icebreakers with the entrepreneurs so they can use them during their first meeting. See* *Annex 1*
2. Background and expectations for the cross-mentoring format
3. Identify the goal of the cross-mentoring for each entrepreneur
4. Set specific objectives
5. Fill the goal setting chart per entrepreneur

Goal setting chart
As both entrepreneurs will act as mentors and mentees, you can provide them both with the following chart during the first session.

Mentor's name:	Mentee's name:
Current situation:	
Overall goal: *What do I want to learn from my mentor? How will I use what I learn from my mentor for my project? Are my priorities result-led (ex. setting my semester calendar) or skill-led (ex. enhancing my time-management skills)*	**Specific goals:** *Set SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound)* 1. 2. 3.
Check-ins: *every month/every two weeks*	
Form of contact: *online/on site*	

The cross-mentoring methodology

Setting up the outline of the cross-mentoring sessions

In order to help the entrepreneurs apprehend their meetings and to help them get to grips with the format you can suggest guidelines for their meetings. However this should simply be indicative. The entrepreneurs can decide together how they want to hold their sessions and you can encourage them to do so to make these their own.

Proposal for a cross-mentoring session process

1. **Check-in from last session**
- If you had set specific goals in the last session, review the progress and difficulties the mentee might have faced.

2. **Current challenges**
- Discuss the challenges the mentee is facing at the moment. The mentor can provide insights, advice, and suggestions based on their own experiences.

3. **Knowledge exchange and skill building**
- The mentee asks questions and seek guidance on specific areas they want to develop. Both mentor and mentee share insights, skills and knowledge.

4. **Action planning**
- Set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals for the mentee to work one for the next session.

5. **Next steps**
- Set the date and time for the next meeting.

6. **Feedback**
- Share any remarks on ways of improving the dynamic of the cross-mentoring.

Case study - cross-mentoring success story !

To illustrate the positive impact of the cross-mentoring format here is a testimonial of two entrepreneurs who took part in this format during the incubation program SEGIE at Empow'Her.

Here are both **Typhaine Pinteau and Julie Lassus's feedback as a cross-mentoring pair**

Typhaine Pinteau
Her project **Polarity Women**
is a gender-focused HR consultancy
Business.

Julie Lassus
Her project **Gyliana, women's health**
offers innovative health education services,
through the promotion of pelvic health from
 an early age.

1. What do you gain from the cross-mentoring format?

Typhaine: *Cross-mentoring is extremely rewarding, because as well as training, it gives you the chance to talk regularly with your pair. This gives you ongoing support, as well as a fresh, outside perspective on your project. For example, Julie and I arrange to spend an hour together every week, which gives us constant and constructive feedback.*

Julie: *Whatever our career path, cross-mentoring is above all a human exchange. It offers an outside perspective on our challenges, while creating bonds and enabling us to share both our successes and our doubts. You grow from it, with the feeling that you're never alone. 'Alone we go faster, together we go further'.*

2. How does this format complement a support programme?

Typhaine: *This format is a perfect complement to a support programme. The support modules provide a theoretical basis that we can develop further on our own. Cross-mentoring, on the other hand, allows us to revisit these concepts, discuss our progress and tackle the points we've been working on, while benefiting from our partner's point of view.*

Case study - cross-mentoring success story !

Julie: *It encourages the co-construction of solutions and broadens our vision through the exchange of experience. Entrepreneurship often means doing it alone, so mentoring means you don't have to isolate yourself and you can regularly challenge yourself to move forward more serenely.*

3. Can you give us an example of a challenge you've tackled through cross-mentoring? And how did this format help you overcome this obstacle?

Typhaine: *This summer, I didn't want to take any time off because I'm running the business on my own. My cross mentoring partner has supported me by making me understand the importance of resting so that I can be more productive in the autumn. Thanks to her encouragement, I was able to switch off and take a week's holiday. On a professional level, for example, I'm organising an event and she is also helping me to structure my schedule by setting dates so that I can move forward efficiently.*

Julie: *Thanks to Typhaine, I've learnt to stay focused and prioritise my actions so that I don't lose focus. I've discovered new opportunities and set deadlines to keep me on track. Each session is an opportunity to take stock of our progress and our state of mind. This helps me to step back and plan concrete actions.*

4. Do you have any advice for people who are want to start cross-mentoring?

Typhaine: *Take the time to get to know your partner.*
Set up times in advance for meetings to maintain a regular rhythm.
Support each other in your projects.
Communicate frequently to stay connected.
Share as many opportunities and resources as possible, because you don't have the same network, which can enrich your exchanges.

Julie: *I'd advise them to be willing to open up to each other and to commit fully to the exchanges. It's also important to set clear objectives and establish a relationship of trust from the outset. Regular and transparent communication is the key to getting the most out of this format. Be open to constructive criticism!*

The co-design methodology

Understanding co-design

Co-design is a **collective intelligence methodology** that enables each individual to **solve their own challenges and problems** by benefiting from the perspective and experience of others.

The aim of co-design is to **create learning communities to perfect one's practices**, based on real-life situations, and benefiting from a multiplicity of viewpoints and a structured reflection process.

LEARN to be more efficient by finding new ways of thinking and acting, learn to help and be helped

RELY on knowledge acquired through experience and practice, which cannot be formalized or taught.

CONSIDER your peers as experienced, committed individuals, part of a group where trust and solidarity prevail

REFLECT on actions, forcing oneself to take a step back and see things differently, with the help of peers.

What co-design is not :

Entrepreneurship training

The idea is not to train on a particular theme or share theoretical notions, but to **share practices and feedback**. There is no trainer, just a facilitator!

Individual support

It's not a coaching session for one entrepreneur, it's a moment of **collective** retreat that creates a sense of belonging and a dynamic of **mutual support.**

A networking event

The aim here is not to "network", but to **work collectively on the issues faced by each entrepreneur**, and identify solutions to meet their challenges.

The co-design methodology

Step by step guide for a co-design session

Before you start : Set a framework

Privacy **Kindness** **Sharing** **Commitment**

Essential rules

- Participants must be convinced that they can learn from each other
- Caring and mutual support are the basis for a well-functioning co-design group
- Participants must be committed to the process: it is based on solidarity and mutual support.

Understand the roles in a session

The problem bearer

- Introduces a problem she is facing
- Listens to the consultants' suggestions
- Commits to an action

The consultants

- Listen to the issues
- Provide a fresh perspective and feedback
- Suggest avenues of action by adopting a supportive posture

The facilitator

- Guarantees the methodology
- Frame the exchanges
- Keeps track on time
- Focuses on the process and not on the content

The co-design methodology

Focus on the facilitator's role

➕ Ensure that participants **understand the objectives** of co-design

➕ Maintain a framework of **trust**, **sharing** and **caring**

➕ Be the **time** and **methodology keeper**, indicating when to move on to the next step, and reminding the group of instructions if necessary.

❌ **Do not intervene on the content** of the exchanges, **do not pass judgment** on the issues or on the leads provided.

❌ Don't let one participant take up all the speaking time, **make sure everyone gets a chance to speak**

Focus on the problem bearer role

What problems can be proposed?

➕ Advice on a **practice**

➕ An opinion on a current **situation**, **challenge** or **issue**

➕ A **project** we want to develop

❌ Technical questions

❌ Requests for expertise

Examples of questions

- Should I choose between my two current targets?
- What process should I put in place to improve a particular aspect of my project?
- How do I manage my priorities? How do I manage stress?
- How do I prospect when I don't have a network?
- How can I stay motivated to communicate about my project on social media ?
- How can I successfully delegate to new members of my team?
- How can I organise an attractive crowdfunding campaign?
- How can we actively involve women and gender minorities in creation of my product?
- What commitments can I make to promote gender inclusion in my project whilst in my launching phase?

To find a real case study to inspire you see <u>Annex 2</u>

The co-design methodology

Structure of co-design sessions

Groups are made up of a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 8 people. Depending on the number of people, you can adapt the timings or the structure of the groups.
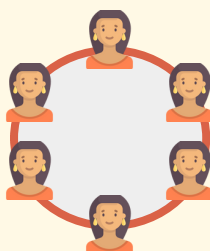
Option 1

If the group continues to consist of 7 or 8 people, you can divide it into 2 subgroups.
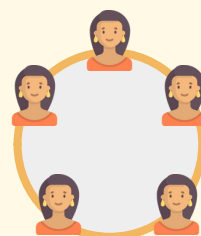In this option you will need 2 facilitators
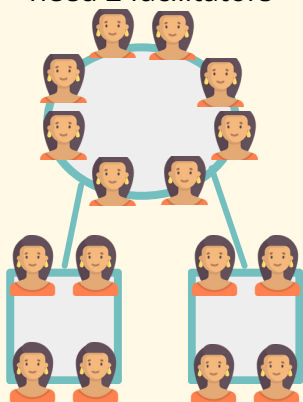
Option 2

When the group is composed of 6 people or less you keep the whole group but reduce the time per problem bearer.

Option 3

When the group consist of 5 people or less, you keep the whole group but reduce the time per problem bearer.

Example of Co-design cycle for a 40 minute round

1. **Presentation of the problem or challenge - 5 minutes**
   a. *The problem bearer presents her problem, without interruption.*
2. **Clarification questions - 10 minutes**
   a. *The consultants ask the questions necessary to clarify the problem presented, without giving advice at this stage. If necessary, the "problem bearer reformulates her problem.*
3. **Introspection - 5 minutes**
   a. *The consultants share their impressions: how do the issues presented resonate with their own challenges? The challenged does not intervene.*
4. **Reactions, comments, suggestions - 15 minutes**
   a. *The "consultants" share feedback, ideas and actions to address the issue. The challenged does not intervene.*
5. **Summary - 5 minutes**
   a. *The problem bearer summarizes what she has taken away and commits to the first actions to be launched.*

The co-design methodology

Tips to promote and organize a co-design session

Promote

- Get a testimonial from someone who found either of the two methodologies helpful.
- Explain carefully what co-design is and its benefits - don't hesitate to give examples !
- Use easy to understand language on its purpose.

Organize

- Recruit a group of 4 to 8 participants, who do not necessarily know each other.
- Describe the structure and roles to the participants and the objectives of this methodology.
- Ensure that the participants are committed to taking part in the whole session.
- Identify the problem bearers, and ask them to prepare their problems in advance and to send them to you beforehand in order to validate their relevance to the context.

Facilitate

- Don't forget to set a safe and confidential environment at the beginning of the session.
- Make sure everyone understands the aim and structure of the co-design session.
- Don't hesitate to intervene if the participants are not respecting the steps of the cycle.
- Ask the participants to tell you at the end what they thought of the session !

References & further readings

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- Justin Welsh. (2024). Community Building.

- KMP+ House of Mentoring (2020).Cross-mentoring – what is it?

- Koumpis, A. & Moumtzi, V. (2009). The Challenge of Bringing User and Development Communities Together.

Further Reading:

- Module 2. Manage gender-inclusive communities of entrepreneurs (notion.so)

Annex 1

Ice breakers you could suggest to your entrepreneurs

In the first sessions of meeting the pair of entrepreneurs might not know where to begin. A way to break the ice and get the discussion flowing between the entrepreneurs is through the following short conversation starters

Rose, thorn, rose bud

The entrepreneurs each at a time present their rose, thorn and rose bud
- The rose represents what makes you happy or what drives you in this present moment
- The thorn represents the challenge you face at this moment
- The rose bud represents what you are looking forward to, the next blossoming project or idea in your near future

    This icebreaker helps to go straight to the point whilst using powerful visualisation to help entrepreneurs reflect and express their need for the session.

2 professional lies, 1 professional truth

1. Each entrepreneur shares two truths and one lie about their business or entrepreneurial journey.
2. The other person has to guess which statement is the lie.
3. After revealing the lie, they can briefly discuss the truths, leading to deeper conversation about their experiences and challenges.

    This exercise encourages sharing personal stories and can help them connect over their entrepreneurial journeys in a fun way!

Career Snapshop

1. Each entrepreneur takes a minute to share their current role, a recent success, and one lesson learned from a past challenge.
2. They can also mention one area where they're seeking advice or insight.

    This ice breaker sets a positive tone and opens the door for meaningful discussion on their respective journeys and current challenges.

Annex 2

Presentation of a case study of a co-design session

The founder of a all-volunteer nonprofit focused on equitable access to mentorship and tech careers is facing an issue.

She shares the following problem: with an all-volunteer (and remote!) team, it is difficult to ensure you're bringing on the right team members into the pool of experts. **How can we create a better process to ensure we get the right people and set them up for success once they're on board?**

Here is some of the advice that was provided by the "consultants" during this co-design session :

- Mandatory trainings for the volunteers,
- Signing a shared agreement at the begining of the partnership,
- Set in place a testing phase before giving them the role and making the parntership official

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