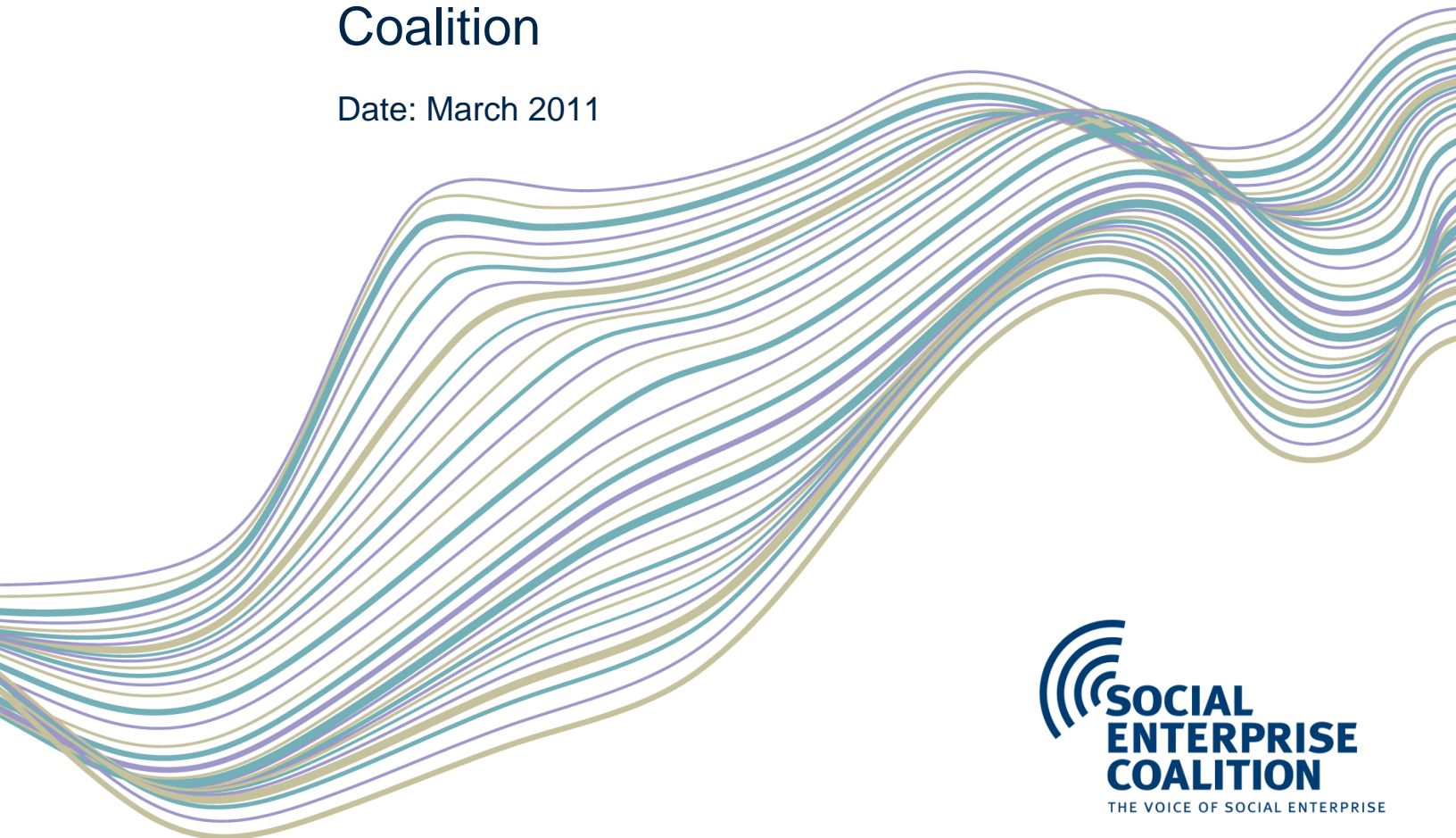


Capacitybuilders: National Knowledge Management Programme

Final Report on the National Learning
Projects from the Social Enterprise
Coalition

Date: March 2011



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Final Report on the National Learning Projects

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2007, Capacitybuilders commissioned the Social Enterprise Coalition (SEC) to undertake research into the support priorities for social enterprises. The report highlighted the gaps in provision of support, and was used to structure the Capacitybuilders Social Enterprise Programme.

The Capacitybuilders three year Social Enterprise programme (2008-11) comes to an end in March 2011. The aim was to build up business support in terms of resources, knowledge and support for social enterprises across the nine English regions.

The Coalition has been contributing to this Capacitybuilders programme by running the **National Knowledge Management Programme (NKMP)**.

1.1 What did the National Knowledge Management Programme set out to achieve?

The National Knowledge Management Programme focused on the development of systems, services, and importantly a capacity for “Knowledge Management” – this capacity will help not only infrastructure support bodies, but also social enterprises themselves to get the information they need to make better decisions and identify opportunities to sell services or products.

Knowledge Management is about learning from what we know by effectively sharing information and best practice. It means getting the right information to the right people at the right time. It is also about helping individuals and organisations to create and share knowledge and act upon information in ways that will measurably improve their performance.

The National Knowledge Management Programme aimed to promote this concept of Knowledge Management in the social enterprise sector; making it aware of and able to make good use of, the collective knowledge that exists.

The objectives were to:

1. Design and build a knowledge management framework and develop a portfolio of Knowledge Management tools which is accessible to existing and emerging social enterprises, infrastructure support bodies and other networks.
2. Embed Knowledge Management principles in the movement through the creation of a social enterprise knowledge exchange network.
3. Identify, capture and disseminate knowledge about good/best practice social enterprise support products and services across the third sector.

1.2 What were the processes for achieving these objectives?

The National Knowledge Management Programme was supported and delivered by SEC in partnership with the nine English regional social enterprise bodies in a newly created network called the Social Enterprise Knowledge Exchange (SEKE). Each of the nine regions identified a 'National Learning Project' (NLP) which would focus on a specific area of business support. SEC would then collect and disseminate learning from this selection of the business support projects, to create a cohesive portfolio to be used as a template for testing approaches to Knowledge Management and business development.

The National Learning Projects (NLPs):

Trading Know-how project - Social Enterprise West Midlands

- aimed to gather and share good practice from social enterprises around the region.

The Social Enterprise Mark – RISE (South West)

- aimed to develop the Social Enterprise Mark into the national brand for Social Enterprise.

Micro Coaches - Social Enterprise East of England

- aimed to further develop in the region, a tested and structured programme of peer-to-peer business skills transfer.

Catalyzing Consortia - Selnet (Lancashire) and Social Enterprise North West.

- aimed to help social enterprises form consortium and secure contracts.

Selling Added Value project - Social Enterprise Support Centre (Yorkshire and Humber)

- aimed to further develop a Social Return on Investment (SROI) impact assessment training course.

Outcome Assessment for Social Enterprise (OASES) - Social Enterprise London

- aimed to help social enterprises decide which impact assessment tool is most suitable for their business.

SEASON - Co-operatives South East, ESSEN and the SE²Partnership

- aimed to improve support in the South East through the creation, establishment and development of a regional network for social advisors.

Multiplying Social Change - Social Enterprise East Midlands

- aimed to establish a repeatable process for regional infrastructure bodies, so that they can play a profitable role in taking social enterprises to the marketplace.

Growing Social Enterprises - North East Social Enterprise Partnership

- aimed to base the learning on opportunities for developing and growing social enterprises.

2. REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

The NKMP set out a range of outputs and activities in order to achieve the objectives in 1.1 above. The following is a list of how SEC has met these objectives.

i) Identify, capture and disseminate knowledge about good/best practice social enterprise support products and services across the third sector.

SEC achieved this objective by:

- Creating an area on the SEC website for knowledge sharing
- Collecting information on all programme activities from regions
- Raising awareness of the National Learning Projects, through activities such as Voice10 (SEC annual social enterprise conference, through the BASIS programme, and KNMP national event)
- Developing a Communications strategy, involving newsletters, website, case studies, interviews, and social media
- Identifying and evaluating the National Learning Projects
- Feeding into/contributing to regional consultation events

ii) Embed knowledge management principles in the movement through the creation of a social enterprise knowledge exchange network.

SEC achieved this objective by:

- Establishing the Social Enterprise Knowledge Exchange (SEKE) and terms of reference
- Designing the brand and marketing materials for SEKE
- Setting up a SEKE project room for members to share information and communicate
- Arranging and facilitating SEKE meetings / conference calls / programme updates
- Raising awareness raising of the NKMP through SEKE
- Organising the National learning event/seminar for the learning projects

iii) Design and build a knowledge management framework and develop a portfolio of KM tools which is accessible to existing and emerging social enterprises, infrastructure support bodies and other networks.

SEC achieved this objective by:

- Consulting with the wider third sector through events and online
- Identifying existing KM good practice
- Developing an equality proofing tool (linking to the SEC BAME programme)
- Developing the KM programme specification
- Building a KM infrastructure and a suite of KM tools and templates
- Presenting key KM findings to Capacitybuilders and the wider third sector to share learning

3. REVIEW OF SEKE

The Social Enterprise Knowledge Exchange is a community of practice, where the chief executives of the regional social enterprise support bodies come together to share good practice and insight. SEKE has convened in both face to face and virtual meetings, and was successfully used as the forum to design and agree on the portfolio of National Learning Projects. SEKE has continued to review the progress of the National Knowledge Management Programme, and used meetings as a basis for exchange of learning and the promotion of ideas and results of the projects.

SEKE has provided a platform for wider discussions on the social enterprise sector, beyond the NKMP itself, enabling regional leaders to share ideas on the future development, achievements and challenges affecting social enterprises. Changes to funding and support structures will create further opportunities for joint working between the regions, so it is important that these bodies work together, for the benefit of their regions, as well as the nation-wide social enterprise sector.

4. REVIEW OF THE NINE NATIONAL LEARNING PROJECTS

4.1 Social Enterprise Mark

The Social Enterprise Mark project was managed by the regional social enterprise support body for the South West, RISE, and aimed to develop the Social Enterprise Mark into a national brand. The Social Enterprise Mark was designed to serve as a label to tell consumers when they were purchasing a product or service from a social enterprise and to help social enterprises promote their values-led business to consumers. The Mark was pioneered in the South West, was then launched nationally in February 2010, and now has an increasing national profile.

In the development of the national brand, RISE and SEC established a new joint venture company, the Social Enterprise Mark CIC (SEMCO), to manage and develop the new Social Enterprise Mark. There are now over 370 Mark holders, with many more in the application process. The Mark will continue beyond the end of the Capacitybuilders funded project as the brand develops. SEMCO are now targeting the general public and private sector; starting to campaign wider to help the mark truly succeed nationally.

KEY LEARNING

- Working in a joint venture company partnership can be challenging - There was a six-month period of establishing what each organization, RISE and SEC, was doing and responsible for, and a new culture of working had to be established.
- When creating a joint venture company, it is important to identify clear roles and responsibilities through a formal business plan -This proved essential for SEMCO in building relations, enabling a smooth flow of activity and maintaining momentum.

- Effective communication channels are key to building trust, good working relationships and a strong culture for the new company - SEMCO ensured they kept the regions informed of progress and work. Their open communications strategy has prevented any competition arising between membership organisations.
- Joint venture companies need clear direction and strong management – SEMCO realised it needed one manager who was solely responsible, and who could make decisions very quickly, creating a clear line of management. A strong board was instrumental in providing advice when the company started up.

4.2 Multiplying Social Change

Through the Multiplying Social Change project, Social Enterprise East Midlands, SEEM, aimed to establish a model and process for regional infrastructure bodies looking to play a profitable role in taking social enterprises to the marketplace, as well as creating more sustainable business for themselves. The process includes prospecting, screening, and analysing the value and market position of social enterprise models and then facilitating their development through replication and/or joint venture.

The project saw tools generated to support the process for identifying viable business opportunities, contributing to SEEM's sustainability beyond current public funding; a Business Opportunity Analysis and a Social Enterprise Stage Gate tool. The BOA reports on SEEM's progress developing the strategy, business and governance model for a SEEM trading entity, and includes recommendations of a robust governance process for business development. This governance process is the Social Enterprise Stage Gate Process. It details a number of review stages to minimise risk and manage costs during the development of a business idea.

SEEM is now trading as part of two new joint venture businesses it helped to create, with a third in progress. The first is the **Northamptonshire Enterprising Skills Agency CIC** (trading as 3E) which is run in partnership with the University of Northampton Business School and provides a 'job shop' for NEETs (those not in employment, education or training), redundant professionals and unemployed graduates. The second is **Responsible Futures (UK) Ltd**, run in partnership with Hill Holt Wood, TREES, STRIDE, and Sherwood Energy Village.

The future financial climate will require support organizations to be more enterprising themselves, analyzing new ideas and moving into different arenas, and this project helped to clarify such thinking and create opportunities for Social Enterprise East Midlands.

KEY LEARNING

- It is a major change for representative bodies to become trading businesses themselves. This takes a large amount of resources and steering, support from the board and other partners, as well as vision and an entrepreneurial mindset.
- When looking at the viability of business opportunities, consider the impact and fit with the organisation's values, focus, skill set and ability.
- When making operational and business changes in an organization, it is often difficult and time-consuming to get key documents and decisions through a board. Directors need to be responsive and must be able to take rapid decisions in the changing marketplace.

- Replicating social enterprise business models is not easy - each area has specific needs/customers/situations. The P3 model that has been so successful in London was not directly replicable in East Midlands, so regional changes were made to create a better fit for the organization and beneficiaries.

4.3 Outcome Assessment for Social Enterprise (OASES)

The OASES project was managed by Social Enterprise London, SEL, and aimed to help social enterprises decide which impact assessment tool was most suitable for their business, through the production of a decision-making framework. Initial research showed that there were few tools in helping social enterprises navigate the Impact Assessment landscape. The success of this project has been in demystifying the impact assessment landscape - OASES has presented a variety of tools and supporting information, as well as a training course for social enterprises to work through and choose tools according to their specific situation and requirements, gaining the knowledge and skills to assess and articulate social outcomes, especially useful when bidding for contracts.

The diagnostic tool and accompanying training programme has been tried and tested, with 100 social enterprises participants attending the course so far. The OASES training is continuing under SEL, with the training very popular with social enterprises, as well as business advisors. Discussions are in place about the expansion of the tool and training, with future partnerships between SEL and other national and international organizations in progress.

KEY LEARNING

- When developing a new tool or programme, ensure extensive research and consultation takes place before the project commences. By doing this, the initial objectives of the project were realistic and have therefore been achieved, as well as ensuring that the programme was appropriate to the organisation and clients.
- When developing training courses, it is important to recognise that participants need differing levels of support and engagement - throughout the project, some of the participants attended awareness-raising introductory sessions, while others received more in-depth support or specifically tailored consultancy.
- With assessment tools and programmes, it is important to take into consideration how learning will be measured and assessed. SEL are currently surveying participants on how they've used the information learnt for bidding for contracts, and how social enterprises have included Impact Assessment information in their businesses.

4.4 Catalyzing Consortia

Delivered by the Social Enterprise Lancashire Network, Selnet, the Catalyzing Consortia project sought to identify procurement opportunities, assess and evaluate what would be required to form successful consortia, and to open the door for social enterprise to engage with a wider range of organizations.

The project carefully selected a panel of five experts, known as the Consortia Advice Team (CAT), to advise and support social enterprises through the various stages of consortium creation and contract tendering; from legal advice to sales and marketing. The project also enabled the creation of the Opportunities North West website. This is a valuable tool for emerging consortia and those looking to explore this concept, as it provides regular updates on tenders, opportunities to join existing partnerships and case studies on successful bids. Through the project, 19 North West social enterprise consortia were created and supported towards becoming sustainable, long-term partnerships.

Consortia building is a hot topic (alongside mergers and other partnership working) and interest remains high for more information and assistance. The project will not continue in its current format beyond the end of Capacitybuilders funding, although some of the CAT team will continue to meet with social enterprise consortia on a voluntary basis, now that the relationships have been established. Social Enterprise North West is taking over the Opportunities North West website, which will continue as the legacy of the project, and will be used in a self-directed way by social enterprises wishing to source information and support for consortia building.

KEY LEARNING

- Consortia need time to develop, for common understanding and trusting relationships to form and strengthen between partners – ideally, this project would have been extended to provide tailored, intensive support for longer, working alongside consortia as they grow, as well as just in the beginning stages.
- Working in partnership with local support bodies provides regional organisations with access to social enterprises in the area and promotes the work of consortia – partnering with local groups promoted the work of consortia more widely than Selnet could have achieved on their own.
- A group of experts can offer a variety of skills and knowledge to support consortia, rather than a single advisor with a particular focus – each member of the CAT offered a different speciality, and often called on their colleagues for knowledge sharing and advice.

4.5 Trading Know-how

The Trading Know-how project was managed by Social Enterprise West Midlands, SEWM, and aimed to gather and share good practice from around the region through five strands of work; by running a social enterprise Summer School, highlighting and supporting Flagship Social Enterprises, organizing Structured Study Visits, facilitating Good Practice Forums, and producing Online Resources, making available an extensive library of resources and materials to the social enterprise sector, wider stakeholders and partners.

Since the project began, a total of 70 social enterprises have benefitted from the five strands of work; reporting improvements in skills, knowledge, collaborative working and business opportunities. SEWM have been able to establish strong relationships with local social enterprises, business leaders, advisers and experts - SEWM are now seen as more than just a strategy and policy organisation through the collaborative nature of this project. Social

enterprises have benefited from joint working with one another as well as connections with experts and advisers.

The work strands have provided great benefits to social enterprises and SEWM, but they will be reliant on organizations paying to participate in order to continue in the future. SEWM are currently considering how the elements of the project can be included in their business activities, with the website and online resources remaining as the legacy of the project.

KEY LEARNING

- It is often difficult for local/regional projects to make a splash nationally – social enterprises and projects have to be well-known and marketed locally first.
- Ensure support projects do meet local demands - basing projects on consultation results will increase interest and participation. If, in the early stages of a project, there is not a sense that people want to continue, it is better to allocate resources to where they could have the most impact instead.
- It is better to plug resources into sustainable projects - online resources can now stay on the SEWM website, despite the overall funding for the project finishing.

4.6 Selling Added Value

The Selling Added Value project was run in the Yorkshire and Humber region and was delivered by the Social Enterprise Support Centre. The project developed an impact assessment training course to explore and explain the Social Return on Investment (SROI) process with social enterprises and infrastructure support agencies. The programme aimed to develop the knowledge and skills of enterprises, business coaches and advisors in assessing and sharing information on their social impact, and to increase the volume and value of tenders being won by social enterprises.

Selling Added Value used best practice in setting indicators to help social enterprises map the added value and impact that they achieve directly against targets set by procurement officers and commissioners. Bringing together commissioners, practitioners, and providers, ensures there is a better idea of what everyone is looking for.

Throughout the project, eight courses were run, with over 70 social enterprises trained and impact maps produced. Three infrastructure support organisations were recruited, and three business coaches trained in the Selling added Value Course and how to deliver it across the region.

Selling Added Value will be continuing as a training course, and the long term vision is for more funders and commissioners to recognise the real social value of social enterprises, rather than the cost of a service. The successful achievement of key outcomes should be the focus, with more emphasis on joined up thinking and multiple beneficial outcomes.

KEY LEARNING

- When considering social impact, small social enterprises often underplay what they do, and take for granted their added benefits to the community. Selling Added Value enabled them to identify and capitalise on that.
- When offering training courses, it is important to attract the right audience. Free training does not necessarily attract organisations that were well enough established to benefit from the approach. Revising the recruitment process, reducing the course duration to a day and introducing a charge improved the quality of organisations participating and will help the programme become self-sustaining into the future.
- Having multiple staff attend training courses helps to embed the learning within the organisation, and means it is more likely to be utilized. It is often difficult for small businesses to commit several staff to attend training, especially if it was spread over a couple of days. Shortening the course helped to combat this.

4.7 The SEASON Project

Delivered by Co-operatives South East, ESSEN and the SE²Partnership, this project aimed to improve business support in the South East through the establishment and development of a regional network for social enterprise advisors. Through the network, advisers have been able to share best practice, address hot topics and undertake relevant training and professional development.

The SEASON network ran a number of events and seminars for its members, delivered by a number of industry experts. The social enterprise advisors that make up the network have been granted access to continued professional development (CPD) opportunities through the seminars and great feedback has been received: an interim evaluation identified that 100% of participating advisors felt the network was meeting all, or a proportion, of their needs. A website is planned for launch in February 2011 which will allow advisors to communicate with each other, upload resources and share information, and will host a directory of advisors across the region.

A consultation is currently out with the membership to map a vision for the future, with a view for the SEASON network will continue beyond the end of the project, aiming to become self-funded, led and maintained by the advisors themselves

KEY LEARNING

- In light of impending spending cuts and the possible effects on physical support bodies, virtual networks and resources such as this could become a key aspect of the social enterprise business support landscape.
- Funding timeframes can sometimes constrain the organic growth of a project. Network development often occurs slowly as relationships are built, and consideration needs to be made for this process.
- When subcontracting work out, ensure there is full understanding and buy-in to the project. Shared responsibility will create wider ownership of the project, but it is important that the person who leads has enough capacity to commit to the project.

- Encouraging a culture of DIY within a network helps to create sustainability for the future – the project looked to foster self-help, and enable advisors to organise their own meetings and maximise connections.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Alongside the key learning from each of the NLPs, a number of common challenges and insights were highlighted by the regions. To ensure knowledge sharing occurs, and to avoid the learnings from the NKMP being lost, these insights need to be disseminated and made available to support organizations and regional bodies looking to replicate elements of the business support projects with local social enterprises.

Some common insights are listed below:

Awareness – There may be a lack of awareness of the development tools available, especially amongst newer or smaller enterprises, and the interest or demand for information can be variable across areas/regions. This challenge requires intensive awareness-raising and promotional activities. Working in partnership with the support of local organisations will help to increase participation, target specific social enterprises, and establish ongoing local relationships.

Variation – Social Enterprises are as varied as the issues they address and the products or services they provide. It is important therefore to ensure that information and support is suitable for all types of organisations within the social enterprise sector, and that a range of materials/services is available which a variety of users will find applicable to their particular circumstances and area of work.

Accessibility - Ensuring that support or training workshops are accessible to organisations in all areas by organising events in various different locations and at different times of day. The size and scale of an organisation may limit the time or finances available for training and development, so workshops and courses should be held in conjunction with information freely available or accessible over a short time period.

Rural areas presented problems in a number of the projects because of the perceived difficulty of engaging social enterprises there. Resources are needed to get to hard to reach places, and there is a need to use local leaders/people to spread the word in rural areas.

Time pressures – Taking time away from “the business” to invest in development and attend learning and training events amidst the demands of the day to day running of a business can be difficult for already overstretched social enterprises, and may seem counterintuitive. This is especially true for small or new businesses, who often have low staff numbers, or may be championed only by a single person. It is important that social enterprises are encouraged to see the long-term benefits of the tools or training available.

Partnership working – It is essential to identify the correct partners when looking to work alongside social enterprise for a limited period, when entering into a formal relationship in order to replicate a business through franchising or licensing, or when seeking tenders from commissioning bodies.

Working with others who share the commitment, vision, and common objectives will ensure the social values of the enterprise are upheld. Sharing information and learning with other social enterprises and networks can help to determine likeminded individuals or enterprises, and establish relationships build on shared objectives. Working closely with commissioners and funders to assess their objectives, and maintaining regular communication will ensure both parties are satisfied with the contractual arrangements.

Projects take a long time to germinate and develop, especially if they involve partnership working, such as consortia building. Funders and managers must accommodate the appropriate timescale for maturity into project plans. Some NLPs found the timescale of the NKMP too short, and a longer programme would naturally have allowed for greater growth towards sustainability after the completion of the funded projects.

The Social Enterprise Coalition is the UK's national body for social enterprise. The Social Enterprise Coalition represents a wide range of social enterprises, regional and national support networks and other related organisations. As well as showcasing the benefits of social enterprise, and sharing best practice we work closely with our members to inform national policy.

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