

CASE STUDY

The OASES project: the creation of an innovative decision making framework which enables social enterprises to choose the correct impact assessment tool.

Social Enterprise London and its work on impact assessment

Social Enterprise London (SEL) has a history of involvement with the principle of impact assessment. In 2004 it developed an innovative balance scorecard tool for the Social Enterprise Partnership's National Quality and Impact Measurement Programme. Then in 2006, it worked in partnership with the University of Brighton to develop the Social Impact Measurement for Local Economies (SIMPLE) approach. It therefore seemed apt in 2008, for SEL to deliver a project based on impact assessment as part of the Capacitybuilders' funded [Social Enterprise Programme](#); a programme which aims to improve the social enterprise business support landscape by developing key tools and services in each of the nine English regions.

The Outcome Assessment for Social Enterprises (OASES) project

SEL began the project by conducting a membership review to establish the level of understanding around impact assessment and to ascertain the exact support needs that existed. This review revealed varying levels of misunderstanding surrounding the concept of 'impact', as well as confusion around the many different tools available.

Through its previous work, SEL understood how important it was for social enterprises to understand impact and outcomes and be able to "demonstrate the value they deliver, especially in a climate where commissioners and funders would increasingly be focusing on these details of their work". They therefore designed a project which aimed to: raise awareness of impact assessment and its value; present social enterprises with a decision making framework that enabled them to choose the correct tool for them; and give social enterprises the opportunity to receive additional and ongoing support on this topic.

The project aimed to deliver these objectives through a series of training sessions throughout London, aiming to reach a wide range of social enterprises over the three year project.

Developing the decision making framework and designing the accompanying training programme



The decision making framework was designed and created by SEL in the early stages of the project. As SEL explains; "the quadrants of the framework describe four elements of an organisation: strategic planning, performance measurement, external outcomes and external impact. Once an organisation determines the area(s) they are keen to measure and report the value of, they are directed to the tools and methodologies suitable for their selection."

The framework is extremely comprehensive, including a wide range of measurables and assessment tools. SEL therefore needed to develop a suitable training programme to accompany it. This took careful consideration and planning and by summer 2009, a two-day intensive workshop had been designed, tested and was 'ready to go'.

SEL began to deliver the sessions in the autumn of 2009. They proved instantly popular; however a key issue was quickly identified.



A pre-cursor to the workshop was needed. For social enterprises to benefit from the new framework, they needed to first be aware of the concepts of 'impact' and 'outcomes' and the benefits of measuring them. SEL therefore designed an initial awareness raising workshop and began to deliver this alongside the framework specific sessions.

Over the next year, the training sessions were delivered across London in various different boroughs; a decision made by SEL to ensure that a wide range of social enterprises had access to the programme.

Another area of ongoing development was the provision of one-to-one support. Initial feedback from attendees had identified this as an important support need and so SEL reacted by ensuring that time was structured into subsequent sessions to allow for this.

Delivering a successful programme

So far on the project, eight awareness raising workshops and four training workshops have taken place, reaching over 100 social enterprise beneficiaries.

The course has proved highly popular with a permanent waiting list and positive feedback from those that attended: "It helped me to take the time to concentrate on my outcomes"; "the training session was very practical"; and "It was useful to develop indicators from outcomes".

The decision making framework and accompanying training package has achieved its objectives; SEL has delivered a support programme that successfully raises awareness of impact assessment and enables social enterprises to choose the most appropriate tool and apply this to demonstrate their value to potential funders and commissioners.

The future of the project

The project is due to come to an end in March 2011, however the project has great potential to be sustainable beyond this.

The decision making framework and accompanying training package is tried and tested, and there is a waiting list of interested social enterprises – a waiting list that although once was a challenge for the project is now proof of its value and potential.

By developing and delivering the training, SEL has increased its understanding of impact assessment and the wide range of assessment tools available - making it a key expert in the field. It is now keen to explore key collaborative partnerships which could see the programme continuing beyond March 2011.

SEL is also keen to present the framework to private and public sector commissioning bodies. It is hoped this will raise awareness of the range of impact assessment tools available and increase understanding and acceptance of them; preventing them from, unknowingly, adopting the use of single tools which are only suitable for a selection of social enterprises.

The decision making framework and accompanying training has great potential to expand nationally and will be a highly valuable business support tool as social enterprises increasingly compete for delivery contracts.

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