

CASE STUDY

The 'Growing your Social Enterprise' Summer School: a successful and replicable model of support from the West Midlands.

The Trading Know-how project

Sharing knowledge and good practice is fundamentally important for the development of the social enterprise sector as it allows social enterprises to learn from each other; transferring valuable expertise through the movement as they do so.

As part of the Capacitybuilders' funded [Social Enterprise Programme](#), [Social Enterprise West Midlands \(SEWM\)](#) is delivering the Trading Know-how project which aims to gather and share good practice from the region. The project involves five streams of activity: **a portfolio of flagship social enterprises; awareness raising study visits to social enterprises; the creation of online resources for social enterprises; the delivery of good practice forums on key subjects; and the design and delivery of an innovative summer school.**

All five streams are delivering great results, but the 2009 'Growing your Social Enterprise' summer school proved a particular success and is a great example of how a successful idea can be shared and replicated across the movement.

The initial idea of a summer school

The concept of a summer school was not an original component of the Trading Know-how project. The suggestion was first made in March 2009 after SEWM ran its first trade fair which identified the need for a vehicle by which established social enterprises in the region could meet to share knowledge and receive further training. There were numerous programmes in existence for start-up social enterprises, but less so for established ones wanting to grow and develop their organisations. SEWM therefore made the decision to fill this support gap and Capacitybuilders soon agreed it as a worthy addition to the project.

Designing the 'Growing your Social Enterprise' programme



Designing the summer school programme was the first key challenge of the project. This was something very different to anything the team at SEWM had organised before.

They therefore called on the expertise of a trusted contact who had assisted them with previous work: Professor Kiran Trehan from Lancaster University. Professor Trehan had great experience and worked with SEWM over a 4-month period to carefully design and plan a programme that would meet the values, needs and expectations of experienced social enterprise leaders.

Once complete, the programme was designed as a 2-day residential, structured around four key themes: marketing; strategies for growth; financing growth; and leading change. These were underpinned by an action learning, peer support approach – a proven model in the sector¹.

¹ Vision21 2003, new economics foundation, September 2006

Alongside the programme design, SEWM had also researched and identified a highly suitable location: Woodland Grange Conference and Training Centre in Leamington Spa. The conference centre was experienced in hosting business residentials and would therefore perfectly suit the professional nature of the summer school.

Preparation and delivery



The event had been designed with established social enterprises in mind, and it was therefore important to raise awareness of the summer school amongst this group and ensure sufficient sign-up was achieved. SEWM therefore invested time in targeted marketing; aided by their strong relationships with members and local networks who assisted by spreading the word and recommending potential delegates.

Through Capacitybuilders' funding, SEWM were able to subsidise the cost of the summer school by over 70%, bringing the delegate cost down to just £200 per head. This presented excellent value for money and a worthy investment for delegates.

On the 29 September 2009, all efforts paid off as 27 delegates from a wide range of social enterprises arrived in Leamington Spa for the 2-day event. As well as keynote speeches from Guy Olenslager (Sales Director, The Phone Coop, winner of Best Social Enterprise 2008, Enterprising Solutions Awards), Stan Crawford (Managing Director, Sherwood Energy Village, winner of Enterprising Britain 2008), and Oliver Nymbhu (Chief Executive, Caret – a leadership development consultancy), the 2-day event included a programme of masterclass and a selection of peer to peer learning exchanges – all expertly facilitated by Professor Trehan and a team of experienced social enterprise practitioners.

As SEWM explain, initial feedback from the delegates was very promising: "it was a great success and exceeded everyone's expectations. We were being asked to repeat it before the first one was even over!"

The impact of the summer school

The formal evaluation of the summer school mirrored the early, encouraging comments and examples such as the following clearly identify its lasting impact and value: "After attending, I completely overhauled our business plan, which has made us more focused on priorities for growth." (Denise Taylor, Education for Conservation); "I found the entire experience of the summer school enriching both professionally and personally and it has definitely had a positive impact on business processes, thinking and decision making for us since." (Charlotte Light, Enta).

SEWM was very pleased with the feedback received and proud of the support service they had provided. In particular, the day confirmed their beliefs in the value of peer learning; identified the importance of social enterprises "working on the business, not just in the business"; and provided a vehicle by which established social enterprises could connect with each other.

The summer school has also had a lasting and valuable impact on SEWM: "The summer school was an innovative programme and attracted a lot of interest within the sector. The event has enabled us to strengthen our relationship and understanding of social enterprises operating at this level, building our reputation and credibility in terms of delivering high value and useful programmes" (Ranjit Bansal, Project Manager).



Running a summer school – SEWM’s advice

- Determine your vision and objectives for the event – have a strong simple theme
- Remember it is a development programme, not a conference: limit plenary sessions and build in plenty of peer learning and networking opportunities
- Source inspirational speakers from a mixture of sectors and industries – take time to discuss your objectives with them
- Be clear about the target audience - don’t compromise on this to make up numbers
- Select a venue which reinforces the quality and value of what you are offering
- Make sure you have a sufficient budget to run the event
- Insist that delegates attend the full duration of the summer school – they will miss out on the true benefits otherwise
- Consider a follow-up event two months after the summer school – to maintain the delegates’ enthusiasm and activity levels

Sharing a successful concept with the wider movement

The success of the summer school was recognised by the wider movement and other support bodies were interested in running similar events.

Sharing this knowledge would enable many more established social enterprises to benefit and so SEWM happily shared their newfound expertise and experience. As a consequence a summer school has now successfully been delivered in the South West.

This great example of sharing knowledge effectively to improve the business support landscape is something the Capacitybuilders’ National Knowledge Management programme (delivered by the Social Enterprise Coalition) aims to further promote and facilitate.

The 2010 Summer School

The success of the 2009 summer school clearly identified an appetite for the event and so informed the decision to run a second.

Building on the key learning from last year, SEWM has spent the last 4-months busily making the necessary preparations for the 2010 summer school; once again taking place on the 29-30 September and at the same venue.

The theme of the 2010 summer school is ‘Developing your Social Enterprise’; a choice based on the fact that many 2009 delegates commented that the summer school had been an effective personal and organisational development experience. SEWM therefore decided to take this notion and develop it further, resulting in a 2010 programme that focuses on four specific themes: leading change, organisational development, strategic development, and executive development.

Interest in the summer school has been high and it is hoped that it will prove just as successful as the first.

The future

SEWM’s vision for the summer school is to make it an annual event; a respected and valued support service for established social enterprises. With continued success, the summer school also has the potential to develop further in content, format and geographical location – supporting many more established social enterprises to grow and thrive.



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