

Toolkit

I want to make my incubator more inclusive, what now?

by LIAISE - Linking Incubation Actors for
Inclusive and Social Entrepreneurship

April 2022

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List of Abbreviations

EBN	European Business and Innovation Centre Network
EVPA	European Venture Philanthropy Association
EC	European Commission
LBT+	Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans and more
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and more
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Background

About this Toolkit

This Toolkit is a comprehensive collection of hands-on tools and methodologies for business support organisations aiming to make their incubation and other business support programmes more inclusive and accessible. The Toolkit is based on the experience and exchange among members of the Communities of Practice of the Better Incubation initiative.

It invites managers and contributors to incubation and other business support services to an honest analysis of their practices and gives them tools to go beyond the usual suspects as participants in their programmes.

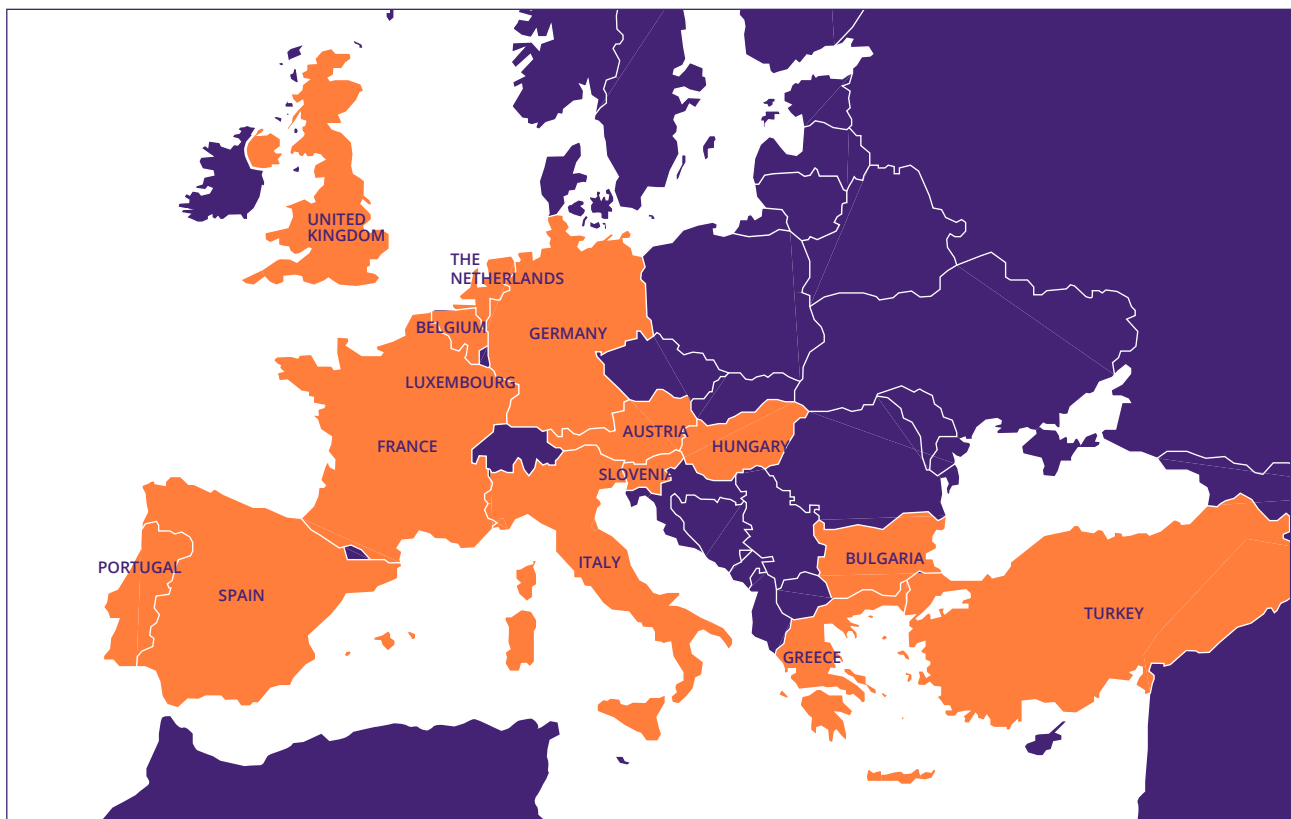
Being based on the experiences of the inclusive pilot programmes run within the Better Incubation framework, it is not an exhaustive list but offers itself as a starting point for all business support organisations to go beyond the status quo, i.e., mainstream entrepreneurship.

About Better Incubation

Better Incubation is a joint initiative of EBN, Impact Hub and EVPA to kickstart an “eco-systemic” change by bringing incubation and business support services closer to society as a whole and to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment as means to create jobs, develop skills, and give the unemployed and vulnerable an opportunity to fully participate in the economy and improve the inclusivity of our societies.

Better Incubation aims to enhance the inclusiveness of Business Support Organisations by stimulating a wider cultural change in the incubation ecosystem, therefore involving regional and EU stakeholders (investors, policymakers, social actors, Business Support Organisations) that can contribute to this paradigm shift.

Map of countries where Better Incubation pilots took place



How to use the Toolkit

The Toolkit is organised in line with the common steps of designing and running a business support programme. You can easily navigate these different steps below and jump directly to where you are at, or you can read from beginning to end to get a better grasp of the many facets and perspectives when it comes to inclusion and accessibility in incubation and business support. For each step, different tools are listed and you can pick out what best fits your reality.

Speaking of the steps of designing and implementing a business support programme: one important sug-

gestion this Toolkit makes is to add step 2: Removing barriers to processes of developing and running business support programmes. Transforming your spaces and offerings to be more inclusive is not a one-time moment. It needs to happen throughout the programme cycle. However, having accessibility as a step just like “designing the programme” or “selecting participants” highlights the importance of gaining awareness about barriers that people may face in accessing programmes. This approach resonates with a wider mission of the Better Incubation project of placing incubators as catalysts in the entrepreneurship ecosystems and thus allowing them to go beyond their intermediary role.

Why inclusive incubation

As remarked by the EC and the OECD, inclusive entrepreneurship is an integral part of inclusive growth. As such, business creation by people from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups (e.g. women, youth, seniors, immigrants, people with disabilities) helps generate jobs, thereby fighting social and financial exclusion while stimulating economic growth. Evidence shows that entrepreneurs from these groups are, on average, less likely to operate high-growth firms because they lack the skills, networks, and access to finance needed for growth. At the same time, they are also less likely to express motivation to grow their own business.

Similarly, social enterprises are longstanding agents of inclusive growth and have proved remarkably resilient in the face of economic adversity.

By design, social enterprises address socio-economic challenges in innovative ways and engage citizens to become part of the solution.

Overall, there is evidence (OECD/EU, 2019) that business incubators and business accelerators can be effective supports for new and growing businesses, and evaluations suggest similar results can be achieved in business incubators that focus on supporting entrepreneurs from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups. The keys to success for these initiatives include offering strong pre-incubation services, building strong linkages with mainstream business support providers and investors, delivering support in flexible modules, and ensuring incubator staff are trained to support the targeted entrepreneurs (OECD/EU, 2019).

The 5 groups in focus

The Better Incubation programme explores best practices, challenges and opportunities when it comes to including 5 groups into entrepreneurial spaces. For each group, the project brings together business support organisations, experts and entrepreneurs belonging to those groups in Communities of Practice that meet once a month during one year. The research, experimentation, validation and harvesting of knowledge of these Communities of Practice is at the core of the content made available in this document.

The five Communities of Practice focus on the following five target groups:



Women

The European business and entrepreneurship ecosystem is far from being diverse and inclusive. According to the OECD report (2017), women were half as likely as men to be self-employed (9.9% vs. 17.8%), while the share of women who started their own business only increased by 2%. This gap can be explained by deep structural imbalances against female business founders, such as lack of access to finance, low opportunity perception regarding entrepreneurship among women, lack of role models or competing demands on time, with a double burden on home and work responsibilities for women. The Community of Practice for Women meets every month to discuss and learn from the existing best practices and explore new ways to address these challenges that individual female entrepreneurs face.



Migrants and refugees

In 2020, the number of refugees and asylum seekers in Europe increased to an unprecedented 23 million (Eurostat, 2021). However, their participation rate in the labour market is on average lower than that of the native population (73.3% vs. 57.6%). Entrepreneurship therefore represents a great opportunity for refugees and other migrants to rebuild their lives and contribute to the economy and society in their new home country. Their entrepreneurial potential is often thwarted by multiple cultural, social and economic barriers resulting in isolation, limited access to financial capital or challenges in establishing a customer's network (OECD, 2019). Relevant business support services can help address these challenges, but it needs to be accompanied by a change of mindset in the sector to better reflect on the real needs of migrant entrepreneurs.



Youth

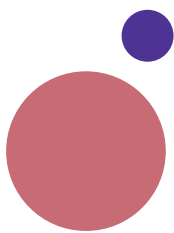
Youth unemployment represents one of the major social and economic challenges in Europe, with more than 16.5% of them being unemployed in 2018 (Eurostat, 2018). Moreover, being a young person (20-34 years old) who is not in education, employment or training (NEET) can lead to marginalisation from society and can have long-term negative effects on the life prospects. In response to the challenges the youth encounters when searching for jobs, entrepreneurship offers an alternative pathway to economic self-sufficiency.

Despite the enthusiasm for self-employment, relatively few young people are engaged in entrepreneurship. Only 6.5% of working youth (20-29 years old) in the European Union (EU) were self-employed in 2018, facing greater obstacles to business creation than older generations. These difficulties stem from market and institutional failures, including lack of role models and professional connections, negative concepts about their entrepreneurial skills, or limited access to investment opportunities (OECD, 2021). Critical success conditions can be provided by training and incubation programmes targeted at the youth to nurture their entrepreneurial attitudes and skills.



Seniors

With the ongoing demographic change and the ageing population in Europe, supporting entrepreneurial skills and becoming self-employed could be considered as innovative ways for middle-aged group workers (50+) to continue their professional activity (OECD, 2019). Like all entrepreneurs, older people face certain barriers when starting a business. These include difficulties with mastering digital skills, health issues or social isolation. Economic sustainability of the businesses established by senior entrepreneurs is often not the primary goal in these undertakings, and they seem to have more socially oriented goals. These demographic changes also affect business incubation support services because a new growing client group is emerging.



People with disabilities

It is estimated that 16% of the working age population in the EU has some form of a permanent or temporary disability. The complexity of this group stems from the fact that disabilities are extremely diverse and are not fixed characteristic of individuals (OECD, 2014). People with disabilities face many barriers in the labour market, and employer discrimination is frequently reported. Self-employment can facilitate their entry into the labour market with higher flexibility in terms of workload, work schedule and location. The traditional business support programmes are rarely targeting people with disabilities. Business support organisations should ensure that their entire process and information meet the universal accessibility requirements, which will allow people with disabilities to participate on equal terms with others.

Tools for...





TOOLS FOR

Designing inclusive support programmes

Consider before starting

“Nothing About Us Without Us”, a term that originated in disability activism in the 1990s, nicely applies also to creating inclusive incubation programmes. It loosely means that no policy or other decisions that directly affect a certain group (of often underrepresented people) should be made without the direct involvement of that same group. For incubation programmes, that means that whenever you design for a specific group, make sure you design it with representatives of that same group or in partnership with an organisation that works directly with it and can bring in their experience.

Groups like people with disabilities or migrants and refugees are careful in getting involved in initiatives of organisations they are not yet familiar with due to past experiences of investing their time, knowledge and resources without getting any actual benefit in return. They might doubt that what you have to offer is really in line with their desires and that you will stick around long enough to listen and understand their needs. Way too often, these communities have seen empty promises. So when approaching any underrepresented group - especially one you are not part of - be aware of your intentions and actions. The following points can be a useful guideline:

- **Your commitment to making your work inclusive should be long-term and not just for one specific programme.**
- **You should be willing to really listen, leaving your preconceived ideas of what you think that group needs aside.**
- **Check if your intention is really to create an inclusive offer for this group and not increase your own benefit or status.**
- **It is helpful to have in the organisation ethical standards (in written) about how to deal with and work with these groups.**
- **Think about your level of knowledge and experience with the groups you are hoping to approach.**
- **Reflecting on who you are and what you (can) represent for members of this community and then think about an inclusive language that you can use to approach them. It might be useful to find someone in your team or network who has more experience with this group you want to work with to be the one to reach out.**

Empathy interviews

Empathising is the first step of the Human-Centred Design journey. Whenever creating, it's crucial to define the challenges you are hoping to address with your solution and try to truly understand these challenges.

For that reason, even if you are affected by these challenges yourself, you need to go out and connect with other people affected by it as well, so as to learn from and with them. Empathy interviews can help you with that. So, if you're hoping to bring more people with a certain background to your programme, reach out and listen before you even get started with your design.

How to do it

- 1. Reflect on what your main question is.** Maybe this would be something along the lines of: "Why aren't more people in this community entrepreneurs?" or "Why do people of this community not attend our events or programmes?". Always be careful not to make assumptions in your questions.
- 2. Identify and invite interviewees,** making it very clear why and on what terms you would like to interview them. Be aware that some marginalised communities are wary of such requests as they have often been used in a tokenized way.
- 3. Create a set of questions.** Here are the questions of empathy interviews that the Business Support Organisations participating in the Better Incubation used:
 - a. How do you identify yourself? What social groups do you belong to or identify with?
 - b. Are there moments or situations in your daily life when you notice that you don't have the same access to certain opportunities as other people? If so, why does that happen? Can you tell me about your entrepreneurship journey/experience?
 - c. Do you think you have access to valuable information about business or entrepreneurial support services? If so, how? If not, why?
 - d. What would you say are the main barriers you face or have faced in that journey of being or trying to be an entrepreneur?
 - e. Have you ever been in a situation where these barriers were removed? If so, could you tell me about it? If not, would you have suggestions on how they could be removed?
- 4. Conduct the interviews.** For that, you need a curious mind and openness to listen. Don't come into the interview with preconceived ideas, don't interrupt or correct the people you are interviewing. Pay attention to your body language, try not to show any judgement about what's being said. It's helpful to encourage interviewees to tell stories. Following up with "why" questions can also help you to dig deeper into the challenges.

5. **Reflect on the learnings.** Try to make sense of the answers received from different interviewees. Look for patterns and also analyse non-verbal aspects (when did people pause, hesitate, etc.). A good tool for this can be “affinity mapping”.
-

Insights

“The empathy interviews really helped us to connect with those who later became our participants. At first, they were reluctant because often they have given information and supported initiatives without having received anything in return.”

EU|BIC Coventry University
CU Social Enterprise CIC
UK (Migrants & Refugees)

“We ran some interviews to know more about the challenges that they are facing, the barriers. With these interviews we worked with our partner asking ourselves what kind of programme they needed. Based on what was said during these interviews, our decision was to run a new programme about how to gain leadership skills and confidence.”

EU|BIC Laval Mayenne
Technopole
France (Women)

Learn more

- [Empathy interview Guide \(Board of Innovation\)](#)
- [Empathy Interviews \(Learning Forward\)](#)
- [Interview \(IDEO\)](#)
- [Affinity Mapping \(Design and Innovation\)](#)

TOOL

Co-creation with organisations in the field

There are many organisations out there that know much more about the communities that you are hoping to include within your business support offering. Co-creation is all about bringing these organisations or actors to the table to help you design meaningful programmes and offerings.

Besides helping you better understand the needs, barriers and priorities of the people you are hoping to include, these organisations can also support you in building trust with potential entrepreneurs. Sometimes, organisations can even support you in the delivery phase through infrastructure, services or know-how that is crucial to help these entrepreneurs succeed.

How to do it

- 1. Identify the right organisations.** Look at associations and other representative organisations of the target group(s). Ask yourself: who is working with the communities? These can be public or non-profit organisations, for example.
- 2. Identify and invite interviewees.** Start with an open conversation about what you are hoping to do and listen to how this resonates and connects with the work the organisation is doing and their current objectives. It's always great to look for a win-win situation in which they can also benefit from working with you.
- 3. Co-design programme.** Many tools can be used for co-creation. A very useful tool can be the journey map that helps to identify the step-by-step touchpoints a participant will have with the programme / organisations. Make sure to map barriers and challenges that could occur at all stages.
- 4. Translate findings into a draft programme.** As you start developing the programme further, make sure to keep in touch with the organisation and update about the development of the project. That will make it easier to make the relationship sustainable and receive support also for recruitment and delivery of the programme.

Insights

“We already had a network established with an association and a public body working with migrants. We invited them to co-design the programme and they helped us later also to find the right participants from within their network. They have a big database which was really useful.”

**Impact Hub
Reggio Emilia**
Italy (Migrants &
Refugees)

“For the high school students we try to involve their teachers as much as possible, because it's a bit more complicated. Some are in their last year in high school, dealing with a lot of pressure in choosing university, etc. So we need that person on the inside to support the process a bit and just see if everything's on track. We created a common folders repository to upload files to exchange information. The group was relatively small, so I had the chance to truly find the best possible way to suit this particular audience.”

**EU|BIC Ruse Chamber
of Commerce and
Industry**
Bulgaria (Youth)

“I felt it was really important for us to co-create and test the programme with people. We did a pilot of the programme with a mixed group of underrepresented participants. The pilot helped us make sure we got it right and were using the right tools, and then we applied that to the actual programme with the migrants and refugees.”

**U|BIC Coventry
University CU Social
Enterprise CIC**
UK (Migrants &
Refugees)

Learn more

- [Journey Map \(sdt\)](#)
- [Design Sprint Methodology \(Design Sprints\)](#)
- [DYI Toolkit \(Nesta\)](#)
- [Responsible Innovation Toolkit \(Compass\)](#)



Personas

Participants in incubation programmes want to be heard and seen. That is especially the case for those participants who might be in doubt if the programme “is for them”. Indeed, many of the business support organisations participating in the pilots run within the Better Incubation initiative reported having encountered this challenge of potential participants being reluctant to sign up, doubting if the programme had been created for them.

A way to approach this and better understand the expectations, needs and barriers of participants of an underrepresented background is the creation of Personas. Personas are fictional profiles of entrepreneurs that represent the target audience for whom you are designing a programme. These Personas should include characteristics such as demographics, personal responsibilities, legal status, educational background, etc. In other words, Personas are different from your target group as such as they are specific. Rather than talking about “young people”, you will start talking about Tom, Jai or Mariana and their very specific story and reality.

How to do it

- 1. Collect information.** Use interviews and other research techniques to gather as much information as possible about your target group. While qualitative information is important, make sure you also have a good understanding of the quantitative side (statistics, survey results, etc.)
- 2. Summarise information into archetypical personas.** Look at common traits in your data as well as unique traits. The personas you create should be representative but also have their unique characteristics and backstory. Give each persona a name, hobbies, an educational or occupational background, etc. Use different personas to represent different traits present in your target audience.
- 3. Use these personas to design your programme.** Keep the personas always in mind in the design process. Ask yourself: Would this work for Mariana? What about Jai? These personas can be great starting points to discuss adding extra support elements to your programme.

Insights

"We thought that the approach was easy: you have an interpreter, the deaf people, you have the workshop, and that's done. But then we've learned, first, that there are different approaches for deaf people and for hard of hearing people and their different categories. This specific approach means the use (or not) of sign language, the use (or not) of cochlear implant, the channels of communication, etc. The second learning was that sign languages are not the same. I thought that sign language speakers in Italy, the UK and Slovenia would understand each other, but it's not true, they are totally different sign languages and there are dialects in the country too. So when you choose your lectures or those who are involved you have to know which kind of sign language they use. Then it was also very important to think about how to translate the entrepreneurial and startup vocabulary, which has a lot of specific wordings, into sign language. So all of this means that you have to work closely with the interpreters."

**EU|BIC Inkubator
Sežana**
Slovenia (People with
Disabilities)

"It became clear to us that the main challenge for migrant entrepreneurs was to get a visa to be able to stay here. That made us speed up with everything, because they had a timeline for that, which is being profitable and generating income in one year. This timeline is very short, since there are many things that need to be done before the business starts being profitable."

EU|BIC BIC Euronova
Spain (Migrants &
Refugees)

"We can say that our biggest challenge was the lack of a specialised person in the target group to accompany. The target group People with Disabilities is very wide and needs specific social and psychological accompaniment, and the people in the team had very limited knowledge of their needs. It would have been good to have specialised assistance on communication and time management, someone to act as a bridge between the team and the participants or to smoothen the process of understanding each other."

**EU|BIC Entreprene.
WAPI**
Belgium (People with
Disabilities)

Learn more

→ [Persona \(Board of Innovation\)](#)

→ [How to use personas for digital learning design \(Digital Learning Institute\)](#)



TOOL

Flexible modular design

There is no one-size-fits-all business development support. The more you embrace that, the better and more inclusive your incubation and business support programmes will be. Reaching groups that are underrepresented in entrepreneurial spaces requires you to embrace that each entrepreneur has a different background, experience level, and different needs and expectations. A modular approach in which you divide all parts of the programme into independent units allows to better customise content and adapt the programme more effectively to specific needs or realities.

How to do it

- 1. Map key outcomes & learnings.** Think about 3-5 key things that you want your participants to walk away with.
- 2. Define blocks.** Take those key outcomes and map out what you would like participants to take away from / build in this part of the programme. It might be useful to create a minimal and an advanced possible outcome.
- 3. Build your programme in a way that allows different journeys in reaching these outcomes.** Design group (workshops, talks, etc.) and individual (mentoring, 1on1, homework, etc.) activities in a way that allows participants to complete modules at their own pace and adapt to their own reality - taking into consideration virtual and in-person options. Of course, it is also very powerful to bring people together in synchronous moments, so it's all about finding a good balance.

Insights

“The three teams we worked with were really different. **It didn't make sense to implement the same content with all of them.** For some teams, we had to start at the beginning, for others, it was more about going into depth.”

Impact Hub Reggio Emilia
Italy (Migrants & Refugees)

“Time commitment was a big challenge. This group is usually in school or working as well, so it is difficult to have everyone available on a specific day and time, maybe somebody is working, or studying, or class is running overtime. For sure we don't have the funding to have a workshop twice a week, so one thing we were able to do was **recording the sessions** and then sending it to them afterwards. I also had **1on1 calls** with them whenever they felt that they needed it, where I could try to explain more in depth.”

Impact Hub King's Cross
UK (Youth)

“One very important building block is **1on1 mentoring**, which gives the programme a lot of flexibility, because the mentors are briefed from us that they had to adapt to the context of the participants. So they can do the mentorings in the evenings, in the mornings, online, offline, so it's quite flexible. And then we have **childcare support** for other workshops. So whenever the people come to the workshops, the ones that don't have support from the government can bring their children and we organise childcare support.”

Impact Hub Munich
Germany (Women)

Learn more

- [Modular Course Design \(Wiley Education Services\)](#)
- [Modularity \(Inside Higher Ed\)](#)



TOOLS FOR Removing barriers

Consider before starting

If done well, your programme design process will have helped you identify several barriers that might keep people from underrepresented groups to apply and / or participate in your programme. It's fundamental to dedicate time specifically to remove these barriers. Yet, keep in mind that inclusion and accessibility are tasks that are ongoing throughout the cycle of your programmes.

The barriers keeping people from starting a business and / or accessing support in their entrepreneurial journey can be economic, legal, social, digital, physical or they can be barriers linked to discrimination, to health or disabilities, to skills and education, etc.

It is important that you reflect on how much or how little you know about these barriers and how much your experience, in terms of the access you and the team around you have, might differ from the access people you are hoping to bring to your incubator have. In that sense, addressing barriers requires gaining awareness of one's privileges.

Privilege is often defined as the unearned advantages, power and rights given to people who belong to certain social groups. Depending on their social class and other factors, people with disabilities tend to be less privileged than non-disabled people, women tend to have less privilege than men, immigrants usually have less privilege than non-immigrant communities, etc. Understanding privilege helps us get closer to understanding and dismantling barriers.

TOOL

Analyse application data

Do you know who is applying to your programmes? And, more importantly, who is not applying? Getting a good understanding of who you are able to reach and who is not being reached can be a starting point to identifying some of the barriers that are preventing people from accessing your services.

How to do it

- 1. Gather data.** Start by going through the applications you received in past programmes.
- 2. Organise.** Now organise that information according to some metrics such as gender, age, citizenship status, ability status, etc. You might realise that you do not have sufficient information in some of these areas - which can be a good starting point to reconsider your application forms.
- 3. Generate insights.** From the data you managed to gather and organise, ask yourself:
 - a. Which groups are overrepresented?
 - b. Which groups are present in applications, but not in the programmes themselves? (i.e. don't get selected)
 - c. Which groups are not present among applications?
 - d. Etc.

If, for privacy reasons, you no longer have their information, you can also analyse the kind of questions you ask and start collecting more data, which you can store anonymously. If in doubt, consult the [GDPR - Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679](#) on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data.

Insights

"In Impact Hub Budapest we have programmes for young people, but they are usually coming from good high schools or universities, or they studied abroad, etc. And our participants from this pilot, they would never consider themselves as a possible participant for these kinds of programmes. They are easily intimidated because even when we don't require that participants speak English, there is a lot of material in English and all that. It's not easy. And that's why **I wanted to make a pilot for a different target** than we used to work before."

Impact Hub Budapest
Hungary (Youth)

"The recruitment has been quite hard, we didn't receive many applications. There are psychological obstacles, because most people with disabilities think that they are not able to bear the responsibility of a company. Or there are social and cultural obstacles given to the fact that people without disabilities think that someone who is not able to walk is neither able to be an entrepreneur. And also I think the society itself doesn't support, **doesn't push this category of people to risk and to launch a company.**"

Impact Hub Milan
Italy (People with Disabilities)

"In the scouting phase we created a Typeform with different kinds of **questions we wanted to measure**, like their age, about the brand register, what is the project about, how many years does it have, how many people are working on the project, all of these. And then **we made a study about all the candidates we received.**"

Impact Hub Madrid
Spain (Seniors)

Learn more

- [Data on diversity in the workplace: what is diversity data and how to collect it? \(EW Group\)](#)
- [Diversity Data \(UK Research and Innovation\)](#)
- [How to Get the Diversity Data You Need](#)

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

To be able to join your programme, participants need to first be able to access information about it. You need to make sure your team (especially anyone working with content and web development) knows how to make content accessible. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines are a good place to start working on this.

“Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 cover a wide range of recommendations for making Web content more accessible. Following these guidelines will make content accessible to a wider range of people with disabilities, including blindness and low vision, deafness and hearing loss, learning disabilities, cognitive limitations, limited movement, speech disabilities, photosensitivity and combinations of these. Following these guidelines will also often make your Web content more usable to users in general.” (W3C)

How to do it

There are different aspects to consider when making your website and documents more accessible. A starting point are the four core principles of web accessibility:

- 1. Perceivable.** Information and user interface components must be created in a way that allows people to perceive them through the senses (sight, sound or touch) they use to access information. In practical terms it means, for example, that you need to make sure to include Alt Text for images, for blind people and visually impaired people who use a screen reader to navigate content. Another example is contrast and choice of colours. Guidelines help you to make content accessible for people who are colour blind or have low contrast sensitivity. Among other things, also remember that offering text transcripts for audio elements of websites ensures that content is accessible to users who are deaf or hearing impaired.
- 2. Operable.** The user interface also needs to enable any user to navigate, no matter what assisted technology they might use. For example, people having difficulties with fine motor control can use a keyboard instead of a mouse as do blind and visually impaired people.
- 3. Understandable.** Navigating your website should be clear and intuitive. Be intentional about menu items, titles and make text content readable (which includes allowing for users to increase text size!).
- 4. Robust.** Build your website so it can be used even as technology advances, for example better assisted technologies like screen readers.

Insights

“Doing the programme online helped immensely, I think it's what made everything much easier. We had already been working on making the website accessible and for the programme we could tap into different digital tools. For example, with a blind person, I could **send the tools beforehand**, so that he could go through them and tell me what he couldn't understand. Or we could have the chat that he could put the **audio descriptions** without everybody else listening to that. We also did not have any challenge with including people with mobility disabilities when offering the programme online.”

Impact Hub Athens
Greece (People with Disabilities)

“We had to learn a lot about how to **change our language and the way we communicate in general**. For example, it was very important to describe the programme in a way that it doesn't have this startup language, a mix of German and English. And we also worked on making our website more **accessible in terms of how it looks**, how it appears when they look on the homepage. That's something which required a lot of work on our side, in terms of design, to actually reflect the context of the people we are hoping to reach instead of just making a copy of a website we created for another programme. I think that helped.”

Impact Hub Munch
Germany (Women)

Learn more

- [WCAG 2.0 \(W3C\)](#)
- [Write good alt text to describe images \(Harvard University\)](#)
- [Colour Blindness Simulator](#)
- [Easy Reading](#)



TOOL

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Training

As addressed earlier, barriers are not just economic, legal, or physical. The pilots run with the Better Incubation initiative showcased the importance of addressing invisible barriers linked to lack of privilege and (often as a result thereof) psychological barriers such as self-doubt. Besides, underrepresented groups often suffer from microaggressions in spaces where they are the minority. Such microaggressions could be:

- Questions about one's legitimacy to be in a certain place (being asked what one is doing here, being mistaken for cleaning staff, being told they are probably in the wrong place...)
- Sexist, ageist, ableist or racist jokes
- Well-intended but offensive compliments (for example, telling a person with a disability: "The way you are dealing with your disability is so inspiring!" or telling a senior: "I'm impressed, didn't expect you to know what TikTok is...")
- Repeatedly mispronouncing someone's name even after being corrected multiple times
- Etc.

Often, microaggressions are linked to implicit biases that you carry around. These biases are a natural shortcut of your brain (like when you need to define which fruit to buy and avoid those with brown patches) and are acquired throughout your life without you being aware - through the media and your socialisation. The problem is that people are not fruit. And yet, your brain applies the same kind of shortcuts when you judge people, making you jump to discriminatory and harmful conclusions. This is especially complicated when it comes to the way underrepresented groups are treated because of the biased information stored about them. For example, people with disabilities are mostly shown in the media as passive receivers of charity or their stories are told as "inspiration" of someone overcoming their hardship, rather than adequately portraying human differences. That leaves its marks in your subconscious and leads to harmful biases.

To gain awareness of such biases, it is important that your team is trained in understanding important concepts such as privilege, barriers and in understanding and tackling their own biases.

How to do it

- 1. Understand everyone has work to do.** Nobody is safe when it comes to biases. So, the first step is understanding that and not judging ourselves for it.
- 2. Get buy-in.** Research clearly shows that equity, diversity, and inclusion trainings only work if staff are actually committed¹. So, discuss the need for this with your team and try to get everyone's buy-in.
- 3. Call the experts.** Although there is a lot you can do and reflect on by yourself and with your team, it's best if you call upon experts to do training with your team that can push you towards exploring your own privileges and biases. Make sure your training also touches upon inclusive language.
- 4. Put things on paper.** Create a clear set of norms related to diversity and inclusion or write down guiding principles within the organisation. That should also include topics like equity-informed hiring and promotion mechanisms.
- 5. Transform your ecosystem.** It's important that your commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion doesn't just stay within your team. Start mapping out how you can transform the wider ecosystem you are embedded in.

Insights

"We had a mentoring pool with mentors that we knew already and we tried to make the best match. We also gave the mentors an introduction about the group of young people they would work with. Also, **the mentoring pool was very diverse**: we had men and women, younger and older. And it worked very well. I can see these relationships lasting beyond the training. They are gonna meet afterwards and support the participants, so it was very useful."

Impact Hub Budapest
Hungary (Youth)

"We took into consideration the specificities of the target group from the beginning, adapting tools, briefing the trainers about their backgrounds, but with the English expression it was hard. For the seniors **there are too many jargons when you go into the entrepreneurial world**, like "value creation", "pitch", all of these little words, and we tried to avoid them. Even though the trainers were well briefed, they kept using some of these words automatically."

Impact Hub Budapest
Hungary (Youth)

Learn more

- [What to know about microaggressions \(Health Matters\)](#)
- [Creating a Diversity and Inclusion Training Program \(Business News Daily\)](#)





TOOLS FOR Scouting for and selecting diverse participants

3

Consider before starting

It's crucial that you dedicate enough time to the scouting and selection phase to ensure that you will reach the participants you'd like to have in the programme. It's not enough to just say: "we are looking for female participants or participants who are 50+", you need to actively work on reaching these target groups.

Besides ensuring accessibility of your communication materials, you need to ensure that your communication is representative of the people you'd like to include. Think about photos or illustrations, examples, your team, mentors and other folks displayed. People need to see themselves in these pictures to feel like this is a space they will feel safe and comfortable in.

If you do a good job in the scouting phase, you will later be able to select from a pool of diverse participants that are part of the groups you would like to have within your programme. Once you're able to bring a certain group, such as seniors for example, to your space and programmes and make them feel comfortable, scouting will get much easier in the future.

TOOL

Community mapping



When scouting, it can be challenging to find people that fit your desired audience for the programme. Community mapping can be a tool to figure out how to best reach these people. Community mapping can help you identify individuals and organisations that can support you in getting the message out there. This includes organisations such as associations, NGOs, social service entities and social businesses, among others. They will have the know-how to best reach the target audience. As mentioned before, you might encounter some resistance at first when reaching out, so it's important to establish relationships slowly.

How to do it

- 1. Define the focus.** Start by clearly defining which group you'd like to focus on with your programme or which underrepresented group(s) you'd like to attract to your services.
- 2. Discover important members.** Now it's time to research organisations and individuals in your community that work with the audience you are hoping to reach with your programme. For each person or organisation, try to define their role. It can be helpful to contact organisations at this stage, hear about their work and ask them about other members of the community that you might not yet be aware of.
- 3. Create connections.** Which organisations are connected with others? What individuals work hand in hand with other members? Try putting on paper how this community works.
- 4. Identify your entry points.** The map can help you identify entry points and connections that you can use to reach the people you placed in the middle. Is there anyone on the map that is already part of your network? Can you approach anyone who works directly with any of the players you listed? Use the map to get connected to as many organisations and people on the map as possible and ask for their help in spreading the word about the programme you are promoting. Always stay open to feedback when reaching out to these organisations and seek their advice whenever possible, this way you can start building trust and long-term relationships.

Insights

“Recruiting was not easy and working with the partner organisation worked really well. First, we just tried to look for participants on our own, but it wasn't easy to get in touch with schools. So we decided to **work closely together with the partner organisation**, who is working with young people who grew up in foster care. It was easier to have a contact closer to the participants and who can give them encouragement.”

Impact Hub Budapest
Hungary (Youth)

“We **directly contacted a lot of associations dealing with different kinds of disabilities**. In Impact Hub we have quite a good network, because in the past we supported or collaborated with other entrepreneurs and other startups dealing with disabilities - both created by people with disabilities or aiming at helping people with disabilities. So, there was a lot of word of mouth.”

Impact Hub Milan
Italy (People with Disabilities)

“Since we're working with vulnerable groups, like the people who have been unemployed for a long time, **we always had an intermediary**. So, we were looking for NGOs, social entities but also a specific type of organisation here in Portugal that works with vulnerable people. We got in touch with them looking for potential beneficiaries for the course and highlighting that seniors were the target group. We also contacted social entities who are directly working with senior people. And then when we identified the participants, we also asked if they had any friends they would also like to bring in. Lastly, we tapped into our database of alumni from other projects from Impact Hub, filtered by age, and then we e-mailed them.”

Impact Hub Lisbon
Portugal (Seniors)

Learn more

- [Define your Audience \(Ideo.org Design Kit\)](#)
- [Ecosystem mapping \(Board of Innovation\)](#)
- [Ecosystem Map \(Strategy Tools\)](#)

TOOL

Channels mapping



An important question to ask yourself in the scouting phase is: how to reach the people you'd like to have in your programme. What are the communication channels they use? In what online spaces can they be found?, etc. The more you can go into depth with this, the better. It's not just about saying that the social media that young people most use is TikTok, or that seniors are more likely to be found on Facebook. You also need to figure out how these groups use those platforms. In other words, it's all about trying to find out where your focus audience is and how they communicate with other people and organisations.

How to do it

- 1. Draw up a list of marketing channels, try to make it as diverse as possible:** from traditional media to different social media channels.
- 2. For each channel, try figuring out to what extent and how your audience uses these channels, being as specific as possible.** For some audiences such as seniors, you might find available data, but it might be good to do some extra research through interviews or surveys. You can ask yourself and your team questions like:
 - a. What topic, identity or affinity related groups is the audience part of on social media channels?
 - b. What profiles and companies do they follow?
 - c. Which are the newspapers, blogs, and other such channels that this audience uses?
 - d. Etc.
- 3. With your map at hand, you can use social media and other channels much more effectively,** knowing in more detail where your audience is.

Once you have mapped out the way your audience consumes information and communicates with others, you can think beyond that by reflecting on "places" (off- and on-line) where you think your audience might gather and where you could reach them.

Insights

“Along the whole process **we tried to give them visibility, by sending several press releases**. Since we belong to the regional government, we used the regional government means to get to the media. So, we sent a press release about the pilot and Better Incubation, and the media loved the project. They were calling us from the radio programmes to ask for interviews. **It was a domino effect**. In total there were **eight appearances of the project in the different media** channels, radio, written press, digital press.”

EU|BIC CEEI Aragon
Spain (Seniors)

“**Having Arabic-speaking colleagues on board** allowed us to get on to some private groups on Facebook and LinkedIn, of migrant entrepreneurs, or Syrian entrepreneurs, or Arabic speakers and entrepreneurs, that were looking for this type of opportunity. There were also some WhatsApp groups where they kind of connected with each other. So in the end, the platforms are the same as usual. But we tried to get to channels that otherwise would have been impossible to reach due to language barriers.”

Impact Hub Istanbul
Turkey (Migrants & Refugees)

Learn more

→ [Using Social Media to Engage Participants \(US Department of Health and Human Services\)](#)

Equity-informed selection



An equity-informed selection process means having practices in place that allow you to adopt an equity lens in the process of selecting which participants will be included in the programme. This means that besides comparing participants according to business-related criteria, you are also assessing/addressing inequities, especially those linked to multiple discrimination.

Selection processes for programmes are often unquestioned yet can hold different types of biases that favour certain groups of people - i.e. male, white, able-bodied, young and well-educated people with European citizenship. To address these dynamics, you need to actively try to understand why certain groups might have an easier time filling out the application form in a way that appeals to juries and selection committees and what barriers there might exist for underrepresented groups.

How to do it

Here's a set of questions you can ask yourself and your team to get the conversation on equity-informed selection started:

- **Who oversees selection?**
- **How diverse is that group of people?**
- **Who is not represented in the selection process?**

At this point, it's important that you have done your homework on preparing your team to deal with your own biases and gain awareness of your privileges. It's also important that you diversify your decision panel or jury and include people from the underrepresented groups that you are hoping to attract. That is a rather simple yet very effective way of making your selection processes more inclusive. Representation is also crucial whenever there is a pitching or interview process.

Furthermore, ask yourself and your team:

- **What do we ask from applicants?**

- **Is all of that information necessary?**
- **What questions or tasks might put the bar too high for some people?**
- **How much work is the application?**
- **How could we reduce the workload?**

Good practices for inclusive application forms include a reduced focus on formal qualifications and increased focus on skills and mindset. It's also important that you use gender-neutral language as to not discourage applications from women and non-binary people. You should also eliminate jargon and English terms (unless the form is in English, of course) from your application forms, as to avoid people feeling intimidated or not understanding what is asked of them.

Finally, ask yourself and your team:

- **What criteria do we use for selection? Make sure to also list things such as "grammar" or "design" if that influences the decision at all.**
- **Which criteria might be biased towards certain groups of people?**

- **Do lesser privileged people (with no degree, limited time availability, who don't speak English, etc.) have the same chance as others to be selected?**

As much as possible, you should do a screening process that allows you to be as neutral as possible. Otherwise, you might fall into what is called "similar-to-me" bias. It leads people to select those candidates that are the most similar to them - without being aware of it. Rubrics - in which you rate different criteria for all candidates, can be a good approach. There are also digital solutions that allow to curb selection biases.

Insights

"When we select the participants, we always **prioritize people facing multiple discriminating factors**. So we have people with migration background. We have people that face additional care loads, maybe some have children with disabilities, or take care of their moms or dads or elderly, and I think we had in the first cycle someone with mental mental challenges. So on top of this woman and mother, we also prioritized other discrimination factors."

Impact Hub Munich
Germany (Women)

"Six of our participants were coming from foster care and one was coming from a very poor and disadvantaged background in the countryside. And today they are aged between 17 and 25 and only one was below 18. From the background that they all came from, they have never had the chance to learn about entrepreneurship because it has never been a choice for them to be an entrepreneur or to think about it. And in fact the programme is not about them starting a business right after the course, it's rather about **establishing a network and raising awareness that it's a possible career path** for them and if they want they can start being an entrepreneur later on."

Impact Hub Budapest
Hungary (Youth)

Learn more

- **RE-Tool: Racial Equity in the Panel Process (Jerome Foundation)**
- **6 Best Practices to Creating Inclusive and Equitable Interview Processes (Harvard Business School)**
- **Gender Inclusive Recruitment and Selection: A Workbook for Clean Energy Incubators (ICF)**





TOOLS FOR

Delivering the right programme support

4

Consider before starting

One of the key questions discussed among participants of the Communities of Practice that built the basis for the Better Incubation project was if, in terms of inclusion, it was better to create a cohort specifically for a certain group of underrepresented participants or if it was better to include these participants into a mixed cohort.

There's no simple answer to that question. Many of the pilot projects benefited from being able to tailor their programme to the specific needs of the participants. Yet, as one of the pilot programme managers pointed out, no one is ever just one thing. Creating a mixed and diverse cohort will allow participants to connect and identify with each other through different identity traits and interests. Think about a female migrant entrepreneur: she will benefit from having other people with migrant background in the cohort who can relate to some of her experiences, but she might also feel the need to connect with other female entrepreneurs, etc.

Needs assessment



It would be presumptuous of anyone to think they know exactly what participants need from a programme. This is especially true for members of underrepresented groups who might have specific needs when it comes to the support and content offered within the programme. The straightforward answer of “it might make sense to ask the participants what they need” makes sense here and can be done in the form of a needs assessment.

How to do it

You can conduct your needs assessment through interviews, a survey or through a diagnosis tool. It's important to cover some important questions within it:

- **What do participants need to learn to establish, stabilise or grow their businesses?**
- **How familiar are participants with the methods used in your incubator (workshops, mentoring, peer-to-peer sessions, etc.)? Which methods would they feel most comfortable with?**
- **In what areas might participants have different levels of experience?**
- **What experts do you have available to develop the programme content?**
- **What experts are available to deliver the programme? Where might you have gaps?**
- **What might you consider regarding the workload and attendance? What competing priorities do participants have?**
- **What barriers might the participants encounter, keeping them from fully participating?**
- **Etc.**

Once analysis is done, get feedback and discuss results with your target groups and other stakeholders identified during the mapping.

Insights

“Different people and projects have different needs - for one of our participants the coworking space was hugely beneficial, to have a professional setting, but for another, who is in the restaurant business, the workspace wasn't necessary, what was essential was the business model canvas, for example. Our programme and tools **identify weaknesses and opportunities**. And with each one we have to spend different amounts of time in different areas - we don't know and can't predict where we'll have to spend more time with each one but as we progress, we find time in different environments. I think it would be hard to cut any of the tools out for future projects, because having access to all these tools and having the possibility to pick them up when needed is a good thing.”

EU|BIC BIC Euronova
Spain (Migrants & Refugees)

“When we had our first meeting with the association of deaf people, we invited ten deaf people to attend. It was a video conference, and we had an interpreter and a typing secretary who was subtitling what was being said. We presented our work as a regular business incubator, but we also explained what we wanted to achieve, our plan and expected outcomes, then we conducted an **interview session**. Before the meeting we sent them the **questionnaire** we had prepared, so during the interview sessions we got the answers. It was very educational for us, and now we are analysing the responses to then integrate this feedback into our next steps.”

EU|BIC Inkubator Sežana
Slovenia (People with Disabilities)

“One difference from this pilot and other programmes we have organised in the past is that it was the first time we tried to design **the acceleration programme together with the startups** and not before. We didn't present a definite pilot to the startups, we co-designed it with them. For the mentoring, we **listened about their needs** and the situation of their projects, and **then we went to find professionals** of our community or mentors who could help them in each context. For example, we had as a mentor a woman business angel from Milan and the co-owner of our Impact Hub, who is a professor and consultant on intellectual properties.”

Impact Hub Reggio Emilia
Italy (Migrants & Refugees)

Learn more

- [Training Needs Assessments: 3 Frameworks that Go Beyond Cookie-Cutter Advice \(Eduflow\)](#)
- [Conducting Needs Assessments to Inform Instructional Design Practices and Decisions \(Edtech Books\)](#)



Business model basics



Removing barriers of access to entrepreneurship programmes might mean that not everyone arrives with the same level of knowledge and experience in the field. Some of your participants might be newcomers to entrepreneurship, while others have had former experiences in practice, but never worked on the theory. Here's where a thorough, yet flexible business model curriculum can be helpful. Tools like the Lean Startup and Business Model Canvas can be a great starting point and can easily be adapted to specific needs.

How to do it

It makes sense for you to use the business modelling approach that you usually apply in your programmes. If you don't have preferences or are unsure what to use, the business model canvas is certainly a good starting point. To apply that tool properly to your cohort, you can use the following questions as guidance:

- **What (maybe different) experience levels in business modelling do my participants have? (you might want to run a needs assessment to find out about that).**
- **Are there any accessibility or language barriers that could make the use of the tool challenging for any of the participants? How could I adapt the tool accordingly?**

- **What's the depth of the programme, and what are the needs of the participants? You might want to focus on only some parts of the business model (canvas).**
- **How can you use examples and make the theory of the business model as practical as possible?**
- **Would it be useful for participants to fill out the canvas with support from a mentor?**

Once you start using the tool, you will find out who needs more attention in what area and what additional tools you can bring to the group, for example the value proposition map or the empathy map.

Insights

“One very important thing for them was that we **presented them with lots of examples**. I showed them the Business Model Canvas, explained what they had to fill in and so on, and then they asked “Can you give us examples?”. I really spent some time Googling, finding different examples. Students are really used to sitting down, listening and repeating what the adults are telling them. They don't feel very comfortable expressing their opinions. So, we need to find ways to really provoke them because they may be timid, afraid or embarrassed to ask questions.”

EU|BIC Ruse Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bulgaria (Youth)

“What worked well was **putting a face to the canvas**. I've noticed some resistance, difficulties regarding them realising what exactly we are doing. So, we had conversations about their ideas, about **taking small steps towards the person next to them**, family, friends first, but actually do a real research, make real efforts, not just write something on paper because someone asks it from you. In one conversation the participant realised that he could find representatives of his audience right at home.”

EU|BIC Ruse Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bulgaria (Youth)

“I think the group sessions were good, because it was a safe space for them to really implement the tool. So we had them engaged for a period of time, half a day, for eight weeks consecutively. This meant that they could really focus, and they could really do it. It was a **mixture of the theory, then they'd go away and implement it, and then they'd come back and share their learning**. So, I think that was a good thing that just gave them that bit of headspace outside of the day to day, that they could just really focus and do it.”

EU|BIC Coventry University CU Social Enterprise CIC
UK (Migrants & Refugees)

Learn more

→ [The business model canvas \(strategizer\)](#)

→ [The Lean Startup \(Eric Ries\)](#)



Safer space



Underrepresented groups often have had experiences of systemic discrimination environments or have suffered from toxic environments or microaggressions. It is thus crucial that you work actively in transforming your incubators into safer spaces.

A safer space can be defined as “a supportive, non-threatening environment for everyone to participate fully”.

It is more accurate to write safeR spaces instead of “safe spaces” because it is not up to you to decide if a space is safe for someone just like you cannot simply turn off systemic oppressions and social exclusion mechanisms. All you can do is try to make the space safer.

How to do it

Consider the following points:

- **Physical safety:** No matter if physical or virtual, make sure the space itself is intentionally set to make people feel safe.
 - **Offline**, this can include ensuring physical safety and having clear protocols regarding COVID-19. Besides, in some cases it's important to provide financial support for transport to the location and to offer food during the event, as to overcome economic barriers.
 - **Online**, it's important to check if everyone has access to a stable internet and a quiet space where to attend the sessions. You also need to consider the kind of tools you use and if they allow for everyone to participate and express themselves.
- **Catering to different needs:** Creating a safer space also requires making your incubators fully accessible and catering to different needs. This can range from lactation rooms to quiet spaces and gender-neutral toilets.
- **Rules of engagement:** Have clear rules of engagement that participants of your programme are asked to agree to. You can also co-create such rules with participants. They should clearly outline, for example, that hurtful or discriminatory language is not acceptable and what consequences there are in such cases. You can also invite everyone to create an appropriate language guide together. Remember that not everybody knows of the other group members' needs.
- **Promote wellness:** Consider also that a space can support in reducing stress, so it's worth investing in plants, colours and decorations that promote wellness. Lighting also plays an important role in this aspect. In online programmes, duration, breaks and elements like music or relaxation exercises need to be considered.

Insights

“What worked well to make the space more welcoming was having a lot of ice breaking activities, presenting a lot of examples and asking a lot of questions. Trying to provoke them, because they tend to be shy sometimes. Especially the high school students, they don't feel very comfortable expressing their opinion. I've had to stress several times that here **there is no right or wrong answer, just a team working together on an idea.**”

EU|BIC Ruse Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bulgaria (Youth)

“During the workshop phones and computers weren't allowed. There wasn't a table and we were all seated in a circle. We did some exercises, also practised how to manage stress, how to breathe. There were only women in this programme, and at the end they said that it made them feel better. Because **they could talk about anything without judgement.** They said that they needed that space, they needed that time just to talk with someone who was there to listen to them.”

EU|BIC Laval Mayenne Technopole
France (Women)

“Creating a safe space for women has been an important topic in Impact Hub: **how do we train our trainers, or experts that we hire, to avoid them saying something inappropriate?** This is a grey area because - since we have such long-term relationships with a lot of trainers and experts - we kind of assume that they treat the entrepreneurs the way we do. The fact that we hired them for their specific expertise also intrinsically prevents us from telling them what to do. But it is something that we can talk about in terms of “how do we address this at Impact Hub?”. Talking to them afterwards, asking how we can make sure that doesn't happen... For this reason, I always try to have this safe space where everything is not really controlled by me, but at least there's this setting where I say: “Okay, we trust this person and hope you as a group can trust him or her as well.”

Impact Hub Amsterdam
Netherlands (Women)

Learn more

- [How We Created a Safe Space for Entrepreneurs This Summer \(Tino Chibebe\)](#)
- [Safer Space Safer People \(Museum of Impossible Forms\)](#)
- [15 Ways Your Organization Can Create A Safe Space In A Divisive World \(Forbes\)](#)
- [3 Ways Safe Spaces Foster Collaborative Entrepreneurship \(Ashoka\)](#)



TOOL

Onion principle and confidence building



Being part of an underrepresented group may mean that life has not necessarily been supporting the development of self-confidence. Research shows that women (especially those of colour) disproportionately suffer more from the imposter syndrome, feeling about oneself as a “fraud” and doubting one's abilities and accomplishments. Many of the pilots of the Better Incubation initiative showed just how important it is to foster participants' confidence within inclusive business support programmes.

The onion principle is a method that can be used to support entrepreneurs on approaching challenges and building their confidence.

How to do it

Besides focusing on the specific skills your participants will develop - from pitching to sales, see your incubation programme also as a process of supporting them to develop their confidence. You can do that by having them slowly stretch their confidence muscles.

Let's take the example of a sales training:

- **Start by asking participants to pitch their business to each other in small groups. The group can be a great sounding board and help each person grow their readiness to sell their business.**
- **Whatever questions or doubts come up at this stage might be a good time to discuss in 1on1 or mentoring meetings. This way, participants can get professional advice and gain more trust in their solution and the process of selling it.**

- **Once participants have a more solid approach, don't send them out into the world directly. If possible, use your incubator's community to give participants a still rather safe space to keep training and expand their confidence step by step.**
- **Once it's time to go beyond your organisation, help participants map out who they could start their sales pitches with and allow them to slowly challenge themselves more.**

The same approach can be applied to other areas and challenges. Rather than throwing your participants into the world feeling overwhelmed and not ready, you allow them to build up confidence one step at a time.

Insights

“When we started the programme, for the 1st cycle, we had to learn a lot in terms of **what entrepreneurship looks like if a mother is the entrepreneur and not the stereotypical male white man**. Because in an honest reflection, in earlier programmes our target group was mainly these privileged people. So the content was very startup-like, business modelling and all that. And we didn't feel good about it. We knew that it must be broader and further developed the framing around entrepreneurship, in order to really have an inclusive programme. To learn more about that, we took some time to talk with alumni from previous programmes that are part of our target group. Based on that, we started **adding new content building blocks in order to be more targeted towards women**. For example, we noticed that mothers that were on maternity leave for quite some time experience the product testing phase quite heavily, so we put **extra efforts in building up their confidence**. We had to **do it step by step and make kind of this onion principle**, where they're first tested within the group, then within the Impact Munich community, then we did small testing pop up within bigger groups, so they could build up confidence.”

Impact Hub Munich
Germany (Women)

“One thing that really worked well was mentoring. I think it's really valuable for young entrepreneurs, because they get a very personalised support and it's very hands-on. It's not just about what they learn from the mentor, a lot of it is **confidence building** as well. The mentor is kind of a cheerleader, in a way. And confidence was one of the biggest challenges with this group, them having confidence around themselves and their ideas.”

Impact Hub King's Cross
UK (Youth)

“We did a small but important thing, that was a photo shoot, because it was important for us that all the mothers had very **professional photos** where they felt good with themselves. So they could build a website and be confident with their pictures.”

Impact Hub Munich
Germany (Women)

Learn more

- **Is a lack of self-confidence hindering women entrepreneurs?**
(International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship)
- **New research: Confidence bigger barrier to starting a business than finance say 6 in 10 female entrepreneurs** (Tide)





TOOLS FOR

Connecting participants to supportive people

5

Consider before starting

When talking about improving one's business, it's crucial that entrepreneurs are able to expose their real needs and desires. This demands connection and vulnerability. However, it is necessary to understand that people from underrepresented groups sometimes face certain barriers when it comes to showing themselves vulnerable. It is crucial that business support organisations understand that and are able to help entrepreneurs build trust.

Supportive people are crucial in many ways: as role models, inspiration and as someone the entrepreneurs can identify with. Having access to supportive people is also essential when it comes to opening doors to knowledge and spaces that were not accessible to these entrepreneurs before.

In short, it's all about fostering the right environment, being accessible, having a diverse and representative pool of mentors and encouraging people to reach out for support.

Your role often will be to create the right matches based on representation, soft and hard skills with the aim to overcome barriers. For that, you need to know your community well to create powerful matches - be it for mentoring or peer-to-peer learning.

TOOL

Intentional mentor matching



Mentors matter for all entrepreneurs. But for people from underrepresented groups, it doesn't just matter if these mentors are knowledgeable in the field or if they can open doors to their network. It also matters who these mentors are and if they can understand the barriers the entrepreneurs may be facing. That's where intentional mentor matching comes in.

However, having a diverse mentor network is not just for matchmaking, it's crucial also for representation. A newcomer to your incubation space - and maybe the entrepreneurial sphere in general- needs to see that people like them can be successful and are gaining visibility - for example, as mentors.

How to do it

Start by **reflecting on your existing mentors' pool**: how diverse are they? Do they reflect the profiles of your participants? If not, what identity traits are missing? Keep in mind that the mentors don't need to be "the same" as the participants of your incubation programmes. However, having certain things in common or sharing interests and life experiences can go a long way in enhancing a mentor-mentee connection.

If you feel that your mentor's pool is not really diverse, it's now time to **expand that pool**. Map out what kinds of mentors you are looking for and ask around your network. Keep in mind that being able to do mentoring for free is linked to privilege, so diversifying your mentor's pool might require revisiting how you engage with mentors.

Finally, there comes the **matchmaking**. Of course, you will look for a match in what your participants need in terms of business support and what mentors have to offer but you will also try to match them according to shared experiences, interests or identities. Sometimes, a matchmaking event in which mentees can pick their own mentor can be very useful.

It can be useful to give your mentors detailed **information** about their mentees. Just be careful to not over-stretch their underprivileged traits which can be disempowering. It's crucial that your incubation participants are seen as entrepreneurs, not charity cases by mentors. In that sense, it might be useful to leave it up to mentees to decide what they want to share with mentors about themselves.

Insights

“I think that one of the shiniest parts of the training was when - on the third session - the mentors arrived. Everybody was super excited that there was going to be a chance to meet the mentors, and everybody was super happy with the mentor. We tried to pair the mentors to be kind of **role models** to the participants. We also wanted the mentors to help the young people **develop professional skills in the area** in which they wanted to work in the future. It was important that these were types of people that they don't normally meet in their daily lives - they weren't social workers, or foster care educators, nor teachers, or anything similar. **They treated the participants as partners**, they were not just teaching them.”

Impact Hub Budapest
Hungary (Youth)

“We would like to work differently with the mentors in a future programme. Because right now the mentors are working pro bono two hours a month. But ideally, in the future, **our plan is to pay the mentors.**”

Impact Hub King's Cross
UK (Youth)

“We had **four experts in four different fields**: legal consultancy, sales, finances, and communication & marketing. As for the matchmaking methodology: we have a **spreadsheet** with the information of the entrepreneurs - which we share with the mentors -, and another spreadsheet with the information of the mentors - that we share with the entrepreneurs -, so they can know who is who, their backgrounds and contact details. Besides that, the mentors' file has a space to insert information about each entrepreneur, and they add things like the decisions they had to make, how the sessions are going, what kind of problems they've been solving, what kind of recommendations will they give us about these entrepreneurs (for example, informing us that they are not that developed in one specific area), etc. So **at the very end, we have a full picture of the progress of each entrepreneur over the three months, and in the different fields.**”

Impact Hub Madrid
Spain (Seniors)

“For this group it was better to work only with **1on1 sessions**, instead of group sessions. It worked well to do these sessions **in-person** which was much more productive. The presence and the energy, the body language are important for that target group.”

EU|BIC Entreprene. WAPI
Belgium (People with Disabilities)

Learn more

- [Mind the gap: The role of gender in entrepreneurial career choice and social influence by founders \(Strategic Management Journal\)](#)
- [Representation Matters in Mentoring Relationships. Here's How to Foster It. \(College Spring\)](#)
- [Starting a Youth Mentoring Program: Matching \(mentor\)](#)



Purposeful hosting



Reaching out for support can be intimidating, especially for aspiring entrepreneurs with less confidence. They might not want to take up too much time and don't schedule a 1on1 for a question - even if they are stuck. That is why it is essential for programme managers to be present and host the programme proactively.

How to do it

- 1. Be approachable.** Hang out at the coworking's kitchen (if you have one) and connect with incubation participants there. Stick around after workshops for anyone who would like to talk, etc. Of course, that is easier done in-person than online, but it's definitely also possible. For example, offer slots for 15min virtual coffee chats, stay around after a session for anyone who would like to ask questions, etc.
- 2. Approach participants yourself** in an informal way. Make sure they don't feel like you're micro-managing them, but rather that you are genuinely interested in how they are doing and if you can be of any help.
- 3. Facilitate ice breakers and social activities** that help participants build connections and trust with you. Open up to them and make yourself "human" by showing vulnerability and making them feel at ease.
- 4. Be intentional.** Small details like music, flowers and other decoration, as well as snacks (that are in line with people's eating habits) at workshops, can go a long way in showing how you value participants.
- 5. Check back** if a participant tells you about a challenge or upcoming event, make sure to ask them about it a few days later.

Insights

“We had a blended programme with meetings happening online and offline. People are less outspoken, less open to say when they are struggling with something when they are online, because they feel they have to shut the whole group and to be out in the open a lot. Whilst offline they have smaller groups where they are together, it is a bit more flexible, and you don't have the whole group on you if you want to say something. When online, they don't reach out to me as fast as they would if we were meeting offline. My feeling is that **offline they're a little bit more approachable and easier** to communicate with.”

Impact Hub Amsterdam
Netherlands (Women)

We had a facilitator who is very experienced in working with refugees and migrants, those in the LGBTQ+ community, as well as women, and young people, actually across the whole programme' target groups. And most of all, he had a really good experience in terms of fundraising, and how they can be more sustainable in terms of their income. He was facilitating the programme, and helped us with one-to-one support outside of the group sessions. They had a chance to have up to five **1on1 sessions with our mentor, and facilitator**. And then they've also got me as **additional support** if they needed any kind of support in between those sessions as well to help them understand better the kind of tasks and the tools that we were giving them to then work on to implement in their businesses.”

**EU|BIC Coventry University
Social Enterprise CIC**
UK (Migrants & Refugees)

“The mentoring happened in **the language that was needed**, in general, English, and Turkish, depending on who was comfortable with what. In addition, our Arabic speaking colleague was always joining the sessions to help the entrepreneurs. She was acting both as a peer entrepreneur - a migrant entrepreneur - and as a kind of **interpreter** in case something was unclear, or they just felt more comfortable speaking in Arabic instead of other languages.”

Impact Hub Istanbul
Turkey (Migrants & Refugees)

Learn more

- [The Art of Hosting \(Deskmag\)](#)
- [Hosting in a hurry v 1.1 \(Chris Corrigan\)](#)
- [The Art of Gathering \(Priya Parker\)](#)



TOOL

Peer-to-peer support



It doesn't always take experts to help your incubation participants. Often, peer-to-peer learning can go a long way. It was one of the most outstanding methods used within the pilots of the Better Incubation initiative. Indeed, no one can understand the challenges of entrepreneurs better than the ones who are facing them at the same time, right? That connection can get even stronger when people are part of the same underrepresented group and do not often get the chance to exchange with others they can identify with so strongly.

The impact of peer-to-peer learning is manifold:

- **Personal** (friendship, empowerment, mutual support)
- **Collective** (sense of belonging, collective action and knowledge creation)
- **Practical** (providing advice, learning new skills, sharing information)
- **Social** (increased social networks and facing discrimination together)
- **Etc.**

That means that your job is to make sure that there is time and space for such peer-to-peer learning.

How to do it

1. **Define scope.** Peer-to-peer learning elements of incubation programmes can focus on different aspects: helping participants build confidence, giving each other feedback on their business models, pitches or similar and/or helping each other find solutions to problems. Decide which of these you would like to feature in your peer-to-peer learning.
2. **Pick space and time.** Peer-to-peer learning can happen both in dedicated sessions or without. You have to first decide how and when you want people to share their challenges and suggestions. Peer-to-peer labs or slack channels... your choice.
3. **Define tools.** An example exercise you can use is: "I need" / "I offer". Basically, you create a space (a flipchart on the wall, an online board or spreadsheet, etc.) where people write down what kind of support they are currently needing and what they can offer. This can be a kick-off for people to connect. Speed-dating can be another option to kick-start conversations.
4. **Decide if facilitated or not.** Both in online channels and in sessions, it can be useful to facilitate participants in their peer sessions. Especially, when these sessions are closely linked to the general curriculum. At the same time, it can be powerful if peer-to-peer learning happens self-facilitated by the group.

Insights

“One very important aspect is the peering block, where we tried different methodologies. And it's also something where we're still learning. In the beginning, we did a kind of **coworking** together every week at the hub, where we all made **check-ins** together and hosted a bit more, so they can learn from each other and work with each other. Then we also tried a few **evenings online**, more wind down sessions, just sharing how you are and not that work related. So we tried different methodologies there. And I think that's a very important aspect to **build this community and these relationships.**”

Impact Hub Munich
Germany (Women)

“Having more people on the programme would be great because it gives them the breadth of peer learning. We really wanted them to have a peer network that they could continue tapping into after the programme, where they could support each other without us, but we haven't made it a central part of the programme. We hope it **gives them that legacy of the support for each other.**”

EU|BIC Coventry University
Social Enterprise CIC
UK (Migrants & Refugees)

“They were very appreciative of the open rounds where they could **talk with each other and definitely feel very inspired** by each other. And also, there is the topic that they don't perceive themselves as entrepreneurs, even though some of them already started their company, they still don't describe themselves as such. But then they sit next to another woman telling a similar story, and they tell her she is a great entrepreneur. I think that when they get together, they **start recognizing themselves as entrepreneurs**, as well as it helps them to gain confidence and to have a safe space. And just to feel themselves part of an entrepreneur network, which represents them and not some startup guys.”

Impact Hub Munich
Germany (Women)

Learn more

- **The Transformative Power of Peer-to-Peer Learning Networks (Emerge)**
- **Share to Know: Furthering peer-to-peer and collaborative learning methods (The Young Foundation)**



TOOLS FOR Facilitating access to capital



Consider before starting

Statistics show that if people with disabilities, women, youth, seniors as well as migrants are underrepresented in the entrepreneurial space, this gap increases even more when it comes to access to financial capital. Although many initiatives are emerging to invest specifically into some underrepresented groups, these are still marginal and the most money being invested is still in the hands of privileged individuals, usually white men.

Making access to financing more inclusive requires you to rethink the support you offer in access to finance, and it requires, at the same time, that you strive to influence financial organisations to work on their inclusion practices. Organisational biases need to be reviewed in order to create new perspectives on start-up funding.

Another often overlooked aspect of supporting new entrepreneurs with access to finance is helping them manage the money. It can be useful to consider offering support in creating a financial application plan, calculate payroll and runway, etc.

TOOL

Map funding possibilities



Helping entrepreneurs understand what options they have once they require finances can be an important first step. Even if it is crucial to make access to all types of financing equitable for everyone, some entrepreneurs might choose a different approach than venture capital.

Data from the US shows that 77,1% of venture capital investment there goes to white founders - mostly male ones as female founders only receive 9% of investment in total.² Interestingly, research from the UK shows that crowdfunding is the most gender-equitable type of investment when it comes to gender, with 24% of deals going to female-founded companies. Second comes angel investors, in which 20% of investments go to female-founded businesses.³

Giving your participants a clear understanding of their options, and the support you can offer for each funding type is thus crucial.

How to do it

You might already have a good overview of the funding possibilities available to your start-ups. So, it's all about making all the necessary information about each type of funding available.

1. Make a list of financial instruments available and related funding sources: loans from banks, microfinance institutions or crowd-lending; grants from foundations, grant-based crowdfunding or other philanthropic institutions; equity from crowdfunding, impact investors, angel investors, venture capitalists. Etc. For each of them list:

- **Stage of development in which this is possible / recommended;**
- **Pros and cons;**
- **Risks linked to this funding type;**

- **What is usually expected from founders in exchange for the funding,**
- **Support you can offer in acquiring this kind of funding;**
- **Etc.**

2. It might also be useful to create a space where opportunities related to funding are shared, like a dedicated slack channel, blackboard, etc.
3. Connect entrepreneurs with experts, peers, and other support to help them navigate the funding options they are interested in. Given the biases that many funding bodies still have, supporting underrepresented entrepreneurs through door-opening, consulting and vouching is an important task of business support organisations.

Insights

“I would say that maybe the content about finances and investments was the one less impactful for them. Because it was maybe tough to find investment. And honestly, I don't see seniors looking that “aggressively” to find investment. I think that seniors’ entrepreneurship is more about self work, rather than making an unicorn company. **Traditional financing approaches don’t suit them so well**, so this is something that could be changed for the next programme, showing financing approaches that suit seniors better, for example.”

Impact Hub Madrid
Spain (Seniors)

“Sometimes I'll get opportunities for funding, sometimes other people in the team will get it, so we use the **Slack workspace with all the participants to post things** that would be relevant for them. Sometimes I might get something that's more specific to a specific person, so I send it specifically to them. And at the workshop tomorrow there will be sharing of some places where they can go to find databases for funding opportunities, also sharing a bit about what makes a funding application successful and what usually doesn't work.”

Impact Hub King's Cross
UK (Youth)

Learn more

- [Different types of funding \(Reaktor Education\)](#)
- [The 5 Types of Startup Funding \(startups.com\)](#)
- [How to Start Funding More Than Just White Guys \(Builtin\)](#)
- [Nordic startup funding: through the lens of gender diversity \(Unconventional Ventures & Dealroom\)](#)
- [The Social Investment Toolkit \(Ashoka\)](#)

Pitch training



Of course, pitch training is a common practice in many business support organisations. However, it's important to consider that for some members of underrepresented groups, the need for it might be even more important. It will level out the playing field for those entrepreneurs who have had lesser opportunities to build their confidence and public speaking skills.

How to do it

There are many approaches to pitch training, and you likely already have pitching experts in your community that you can access for this. For underrepresented groups, it might be useful to consider:

- 1. Go step by step:** Don't push participants too quickly to get up in front of everyone and pitch their ideas. Help them first, to build their confidence in themselves and gain trust in the group. Also, don't assume they know what is expected of them or that they know what an "elevator pitch" is. Give them an opportunity to make themselves familiar slowly and gain confidence.
- 2. Support their stories:** It's not always easy to know what needs to be in a pitch and what not. Help participants create a balance between their personal story, their purpose, and the business numbers.
- 3. Loosen up:** Theatre games and other tools can be helpful to break the ice and increase trust in the group.
- 4. Keep it small:** Offering workshops for small groups or doing work in smaller groups can go a long way in helping to build up confidence step by step.
- 5. Work with the full body:** Help participants understand that body language is just as important as the words they will speak during their pitch.

Insights

“What we have at the end of the programme is a **pitch event**. So, we set them on a stage and have them feel what it's like to pitch and get feedback and questions. And there I made sure that **most of jury is female** and that there's a keynote that is also a woman, so they would still get these role models and also get judged by females - that may have different questions.”

Impact Hub Amsterdam,
Netherlands (Women)

“For the wrap up we are keeping it quite small and intimate. They're going to be able to pitch their businesses for each other, and **their mentors as well as their family are invited to attend**. We get them to meet each other in person as well, because they haven't done it so far. So , they can take this time to celebrate their achievements and what they've done.”

Impact Hub King's Cross
UK (Youth)

Learn more

→ [Voice and Dialogue \(Drama Toolkit\)](#)

→ [Create a Pitch \(IDEO\)](#)

Offer funding



Offering funding can make all the difference, some of the pilots within the Better Incubation initiative showed this. For some underrepresented founders, even a small amount of EUR 1'000 matters a lot. Keep in mind that attending a business incubation programme is always an investment of time and money (even if it's to pay for transport to your location) and for people with a lower-income background, that investment might sometimes be difficult to make. The outlook of receiving some initial money to get their company started, for example, to buy some initial materials, can be an important motivational factor. Having received a grant or small investment, also helps entrepreneurs show future investors that their idea is worth investing in.

How to do it

- 1. Cover costs:** Covering the costs of transport or internet data, materials and other expenses linked to participating in your programme might be crucial for some people to be able to participate in your programme.
- 2. Money for completing:** There are different ways in which you can make seed funding available. For some underrepresented groups, like marginalised youth, for example, it might be a great motivational tool to offer a small amount of seed funding for all those participants who reach the end of the programme.
- 3. Competition:** It can also be great to offer seed funding in the form of a small competition among your cohort. You can even use them as a jury themselves or invite your community to vote. Make sure you reflect on how you can make this an equitable process.
- 4. Match-funding:** You can also consider recognizing the successes of entrepreneurs through match-funding. For example by doubling the money they can raise in crowdfunding themselves. Before including crowdfunding in your programme, consider if the effort and result for your entrepreneurs makes sense. It's a big-time investment to run a crowdfunding campaign and your entrepreneurs might already struggle to find time for everything.
- 5. Free services:** If you cannot or don't want to invest in money, you can also consider offering free services (such as co-working, business help desks, meeting rooms, etc.) as a reward even beyond the programme duration.
- 6. Etc.**

Insights

“We were also offering them some funding, we said that if they would attend up to 80%, they would be eligible to do a pitch, which **they could apply for up to £2000 worth of funding**. But only one of them would get it, so there was that bit of competition. Ultimately, it means they've given themselves that time to actually engage with us and implement some of the things, and to understand that the tools work and they need to take advantage of it.”

**EU|BIC Coventry University
Social Enterprise CIC**
UK (Migrants & Refugees)

“We had some **seed money that they could apply for**. We had altogether around 900 euros and they could receive financial aid. We talked to the partner organisation about what would be attractive for these young people, and we decided that they could apply for 300 euros per person, so they could buy something that's really worth for them and they couldn't afford. It's our contribution so that they can start their businesses and start working.”

Impact Hub Budapest
Hungary (Youth)

Learn more

→ [A guide to understanding pre-seed funding \(Nexea\)](#)

TOOLS FOR Managing impact



Consider before starting

Making your programmes more inclusive requires trying out different approaches. That is why it is crucial that you include measuring the success of your inclusion efforts within your impact measurement and management system. Also, having clear data on your programme's impact can be useful to attract funding and sponsors for both the business support organisation and the entrepreneurs.

For entrepreneurs, especially social entrepreneurs, measuring impact is an important part of their work. Doing a good job in measuring the impact of the programme is thus also a way to showcase how impact measurement can be done. Since the topic might be new to your participants, it might be useful to explain why and what you are measuring.

When collecting data about underrepresented groups, be it interviews or surveys, make sure you have clear protocols or ethical principles applied in the process. You need to have clarity on what data you are collecting and why and how you can protect everyone's privacy rights.

TOOL

Impact measurement platform



To see the impact your programmes have on start-ups, it is important to track their progress. Although attribution is a challenge, you can at least see how your participants develop over time within and after the programme.

It's important that you include indicators related to demographics in your questions. In the pilots of the Better Incubation initiative, these indicators were co-created within the Communities of Practice, exploring inclusion for the 5 different groups.

How to do it

- 1. Describe.** Let's start by mapping out the kind of impact you hope your programme will have. This should ideally happen before you start.
- 2. Define.** Now it's time to define the kind of indicators that can help measure if the described change is achieved. For that, you can create your own list, or you can consult an existing list of indicators such as Iris+.
- 3. Plan.** To measure these indicators, you need to decide how you will collect the data. It's easier to choose a platform that allows us to measure impact over time.
- 4. Collect.** To get your data, you need to send out your survey to participants at different moments - before and after the programme as well as potentially sometime later.
- 5. Analyse.** It's time to compare, analyse, and learn from the data you collected.
- 6. Act.** Impact measurement should always lead us in making our programmes better.

Insights

“For applications, there's the F6S Platform. There you can, for example, **track draft applications**, so we tried to follow up with them. And that's where we had the **applications in English, Turkish and Arabic**. The programme required that people had some English skills, but we thought that this could have given the idea that other groups were welcomed.”

Impact Hub Istanbul
Turkey (Migrants & Refugees)

Learn more

- [F6S Platform](#)
- [Impact Metrics \(Sopact\)](#)
- [Iris+ \(Giin\)](#)

TOOL

Exit interviews with participants



Doing an exit interview with participants is a valuable opportunity to gain insights about your incubator in general - make sure to also include questions about inclusion and access.

How to do it

- 1. Start by creating an exit interview template.** Have conscious questions when doing an exit interview. Ask yourself: what information do you want to collect to improve your incubator's culture and process?
- 2. Train people to do exit interviews.** Exit interviews should not be an interrogation, rather a two-way assessment for both parties. To make sure this is done thoughtfully and carefully, make sure to train people on how to do exit interviews.
- 3. Have a clear agenda.** When scheduling the interview with the participants, be sure to tell them the full agenda of the meeting.
- 4. Include the exit interviews in your company's processes.** After doing exit interviews, the content and insights should also be used to improve your business support offering. To do so, make sure that all this information gets in the flow of the incubator's culture to improve the process, people, and culture.
- 5. Exit interview template.** Now and then go back to your exit interview template to make sure that the questions still make sense in your context. If step 4 is done right, your organisation will improve and change over time. The exit interview should accompany the change!

Insights

“The first time they came one of the groups said they wanted to do a lot of things; they had a gigantic list of 100 desires. In the end, they decided to do one thing at a time. **You could see the transformation over the three months.** Similarly with another participant, you would see that in the beginning, she was all over the place. And when closing she was speaking about a very detailed action plan and a very concrete roadmap.”

Impact Hub Athens
Greece (People with Disabilities)

“In the end, I’m planning on having an **interview or talk**, asking them what they have learned, what they found the most interesting thing about the mentoring. It will also serve as a **feedback** for me in the future.”

EU|BIC Ruse Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Bulgaria (Youth)

Learn more

- [Get Feedback \(IDEO\)](#)
- [The Art of Powerful Questions \(Chris Corrigan\)](#)

Competence framework



The pilot programmes implemented within the Better Incubation showcased what is surely often the case: entrepreneurial programmes, especially pre-incubation and incubation, do not necessarily lead to people becoming entrepreneurs. Some might decide to go (back) to employment instead while others might decide to come back to entrepreneurship at a later stage of life. That is why showcasing to the participants what kind of competencies they are developing within the programmes and supporting them with a certificate is important.

How to do it

- 1. Define a competence framework:** make sure to understand how the framework of competencies of your choice works. Using an existing framework to understand more about the entrepreneurial mindset is a good strategy, as it gives a foundation to work from. The Ruse Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Bulgaria) uses The European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp) as a reference tool to help their participants reflect on the competencies they developed.
- 2. Focus on the competencies covered in your programme:** Within the competence framework of your choice, which of the competencies are being developed in my programme? This is a great exercise for you to do before even running a programme.
- 3. Assess the competencies developed by the participants:** if you decide to use the EntreComp framework, their manual provides assessment tools to apply to the participants. You can also choose to do a qualitative assessment with participants at the beginning and end of the programme.
- 4. Create certificates:** competencies can be a great way to enhance participation certificates and showcase each person's unique development journey.
- 5. Evaluate data:** After assessing the participants, it is also important to analyse the data gathered from the group. Here are some questions you can ask yourself:
 - **Which competencies were developed by the group?**
 - **What competencies did we hope they would develop but did not?**

This will allow you to adapt and improve your programme in future editions, together with other data gathered.

Insights

“For evaluation we have a questionnaire at the beginning and at the end, provided by Liaise’s partners. I’m planning an interview with them and there is also a competence framework, the **European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework**, which I was thinking of using and talk about the areas they have improved. Then we can provide something like a certificate for them.”

EU|BIC Ruse Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bulgaria (Youth)

Learn more

- [The European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework \(EntreComp\)](#)
- [Applying Competency Based Approach for Entrepreneurship Education \(Procedia\)](#)

Final considerations



Final considerations

Inclusion is a great opportunity for us to rethink and rediscover entrepreneurship. As the programme manager of the New Roots for Mumpreneurs in Impact Hub Munich said: “We need to learn what entrepreneurship looks like when a mother is the entrepreneur”. The same goes for when the entrepreneur is a person with a migrant background, a person with a disability, a senior, a young person, etc.

Updating the image we have in our minds of an entrepreneur will give us important insights into making entrepreneurship better for everyone. This transformation is not limited to business support organisations, of course. But our work can be a catalyst in this change, which creates the conditions for entrepreneurs of all backgrounds and identities to be successful.

Although we might start off by reflecting on how to make our programmes more inclusive for “migrants and refugees”, “women”, “seniors”, “people with disabilities” or “young people”, that should definitely be just the beginning. The entrepreneurial space will become more inclusive if we also manage to see entrepreneurs from an **intersectional lens**, considering the complexity of the identities and patterns of oppression that individuals face within a given society. Increasing the presence of women in business spaces, for example, should lead us to explore if among them there are migrant women, mothers, women with disabilities, LBT+ women, senior women, etc. If we come to the conclusion that this is not the case, we have more work to do. People are frequently affected by a number of discriminations and overlapping disadvantages. Migrants and refugees also have other identities and so do people with disabilities or seniors. The more we can see people for all of who they are, the more we can create spaces where they can fully be themselves and connect to others like them across different identity traits.

What is essential is that underrepresented groups should not be alone in pursuing business careers. **They need to see themselves in their peers, their mentors, in the staff of incubators and accelerators and in policy makers.** The tools described in this Toolkit can help you create small contributions to making that possible.

When underrepresented groups join entrepreneurial spaces, they bring along crucial insight into the real needs of their communities and society as a whole. They also often carry a strong commitment to really making a difference. In addition, business support communities benefit tremendously when these spaces become more inclusive. Entrepreneurs with different backgrounds bring new ideas, perspectives, ways of doing and knowing. As a result of a more inclusive and diverse entrepreneurial space, our society as a whole will benefit from a more robust economy on the one hand, but also more innovation and a fairer society.

To be able to include such impact-driven entrepreneurs from underrepresented groups we are required to revisit one of our basic assumptions: valuing high-growth, tech start-ups more than social impact entrepreneurship. **It’s crucial to ask ourselves if the businesses our organisations help establish and grow will decrease or increase inequities in our society.**

Now it’s up to each of us, but we hope that reading this Toolkit will give you plenty of ideas and starting points to make your business support programmes more inclusive. What are going to be the first steps? **What commitment do we make to making your offering more inclusive?** Don’t keep your answers to yourself, invite your team and wider community into the conversation. That is how transformation starts.

List of resources

Reports

- **OECD/EU, Policy Brief on Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities Entrepreneurial Activities in Europe, 2014**
- **OECD/EU, Policy Brief on Women's Entrepreneurship, 2017**
- **OECD/European Union (2019), The Missing Entrepreneurs 2019: Policies for Inclusive Entrepreneurship, OECD Publishing, Paris**
- **OECD/European Commission (2021), The Missing Entrepreneurs 2021: Policies for Inclusive Entrepreneurship and SelfEmployment, OECD Publishing, Paris**

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BETTER INCUBATION IS A PROJECT BY LIAISE, Linking Incubation Actors for Inclusive and Social Entrepreneurship project LIAISE has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation “EaSI” (2014-2020) under Grant Agreement n° VS/2020/0374. This website reflects only the author’s view and the Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.