

Phoenix Development Fund (PDF): Themed Report Summary

Themed Report Title: Women in Enterprise

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Context

Train 2000 (Merseyside), WEETU (Norfolk Waveney and East Suffolk) and the WBDA (West Midlands and South West) participated in the 'Building on the Best' PDF projects in this theme. The projects provided enterprise and employment support services to women. Each project looked to enhance existing programmes, develop and test new methods of working, identify and work with additional target groups and broaden geographical coverage.

Lessons Learnt

Role of PDF and SBS

A number of consistent messages emerged:

- **Programme Commissioning:** Each of the three organisations agreed that the project commissioning process was very effective. The application process was considered non-prescriptive, allowing projects to submit proposals leading to learning and new model development. External and independent appraisal panels strengthened trust and accountability by effectively separating SBS PDF staff from project application decisions.
- **Programme Management:** The PDF had effective programme management processes in place from the outset, e.g. the project reporting process, external financial management and monitoring, individual project support from PDF staff.
- **Committed to Discovery:** Unlike other development funding initiatives the PDF programme sought feedback at all stages on the models being tested and developed rather than placing emphasis on outputs.
- **Showcasing and Sharing Practice:** The PDF programme excelled in this area by facilitating and encouraging sharing of both successes and failures within model development.

Client focused support

Each of three organisations undertook a market segmentation exercise to provide target group profiles. This profiling process enabled service delivery specification to reflect the needs of clients. Previous design and delivery experience of the three organisations had demonstrated inappropriate assumptions about the type of women choosing a gender specific business service. It is often assumed that women educated to degree or postgraduate level have sufficient confidence and knowledge to seek out business support services. There is evidence that women who hold senior management and executive positions, possessing graduate and postgraduate qualifications are equally as likely to access the specialist sector services as women with no qualifications nor paid employment experience.

Networks

Engagement with formal and informal networks proved essential to the three organisations in attracting and reaching women who would not consider using the services of a mainstream agency. Another significant positive outcome was the strength of the network built up not only between the PDF 'Building on the Best' projects but also other women-focused organisations. Sharing and implementing best practice led to an increased demand for the services and wing awareness of the role which women's enterprise plays in the economy.

Useful points for the project

Overall impact on the theme

A significant number of the women supported did not move into self-employment. However, many did improve their employability and secure a job, a promotion, qualifications or decided to proceed with further FE/HE studying. This demonstrates the close link between the enterprise/employment education activities contained within the three projects enhancing the potential career choices for women, including the self-employment route.

Strategic Issues

To consider how the positive outcome achieved from adopting the integrated PDF business support programme for women might enhance the more ad-hoc nature of RDA-led mainstream business support.

Much of the pre- pre start-up stages supported through the three PDF projects are often not available through mainstream business support provision. These include:

- Confidence building
- Meeting/contributing towards childcare and caring costs
- Enhanced educational skills
- Language training for non-English speakers
- Delivery of support services in native tongue

Over-arching issues

The PDF funding allowed each of three organisations to lever in additional local, national and EU funds. This helped to enhance the quality of the support available to clients. The three organisations concluded that their individual programme was appropriate to serve the needs of their identified target groups. The monitoring and evaluation processes enabled service delivery to be refined and the development of new products/services to reflect demand.

Messages for policy-makers and commissioners

- Targeted initiatives such as PDF can have a significant impact in reaching and supporting under-represented groups into business.
- A recognition that it takes time to put in place effective infrastructures for the delivery and monitoring of projects.
- Ring-fenced (clean money) allows for additional match funding to be levered in, which increases the level of support available to clients.
- A PDF type approach acts as a catalyst for encouraging partnerships to be established across a wide range and diverse mix of organisations.
- Strategies need to be put in place when new time-bound initiatives are being developed that address long-term funding and sustainability.

Policy and Service Delivery Implications

Policy

The lack of a coherent strategy post the funding ceasing has led to a loss of momentum within the three organisations, and has led to changes within their business service delivery models.

Service Delivery

How to effectively share across the women's enterprise network the products, toolkits and materials developed. These have the potential to be incorporated into standalone programmes or as an element of mainstream provision.

Recommendations

To ensure that the findings from the report are made available to the Task Force on Women's Enterprise and to the Women's Enterprise contacts in the RDAs.

To look at suitable channels for disseminating the findings from this theme and for sharing best practice on the products, toolkits and materials developed. For example, for these to be made available to participants at the Women's Enterprise Unit pilot workshop scheduled for September 2006.

To look for solutions for supporting women into women that go beyond public sector funding. This might include investigating the potential for engaging with and encouraging the private sector to fund PDF type projects in the future. This could be achieved by setting up 'enterprise trust funds', which could incorporate best practice elements from the PDF projects.