

# Better Incubation Roadmap

by LIAISE - Linking Incubation Actors  
for Inclusive and Social Entrepreneurship

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# List of Abbreviations

<b>BSO</b>	Business Support Organisation
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>CoP</b>	Community of Practice
<b>EBN</b>	European Business and Innovation Centre Network
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund
<b>ESF+</b>	European Social Fund Plus
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EU BIC</b>	Eu Business Innovation Centre
<b>EVPA</b>	European Venture Philanthropy Association
<b>GECEs</b>	Expert group on social economy and social enterprises
<b>IHUB</b>	Impact Hub
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PwD</b>	People with Disabilities

# Preface

All Europeans who want to set up their own business, whatever their profile, should receive active support. This is in essence the message underpinning the Better Incubation project funded by the European Commission. I sincerely thank the partners that have successfully conducted it and I am very happy to preface this Roadmap that gives concrete tools and examples for a more inclusive approach to incubation and business support services.

Entrepreneurship creates jobs, develops skills and serves the society at large. By accompanying social entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial efforts of underrepresented groups (women, youth, migrants, seniors, people with disabilities...), we contribute to an economy that works for all. Social entrepreneurship and inclusive entrepreneurship foster social and labour market inclusion, creating quality and lasting jobs for those with fewer opportunities. Both often drive sustainability in economic and industrial development and fairness in the green and digital transition.

Transforming progressively the dominant mind-set of incubation is certainly a positive step. Indeed, businesses that receive support from incubators have higher survival rates, create more jobs and generate more revenues. Tailored support - notably targeted and specific training, workshops, coaching, mentoring, business advice, and networking opportunities - leads to more financial support opportunities and better use of finance. It appears this is especially true for enterprises created by members of underrepresented groups and social economy initiatives.

The Better Incubation project aims to tackle the higher-than-average barriers faced by these entrepreneurs when developing their businesses. Among other results, it has created the present repository of practical steps and know-how for mainstream business incubators to expand their support beyond their usual “clients”.

I trust that Better Incubation will increasingly confirm itself as a great source of inspiration for many stakeholders. The best practices it delivers open paths for broadening the scope of business incubators towards a sustainable and inclusive development of all EU countries and regions.

— *Brigitte Fellahi-Brognaux*  
*Head of Unit, European Commission DG EMPL*

## BETTER INCUBATION – HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE THREE PARTNER NETWORKS (EBN, EVPA AND IMPACT HUB): WHAT THE PROGRAMME BROUGHT TO OUR COMMUNITIES.

Amid the still-unfolding impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, increasing unrest on European territories and the effects of climate change, innovation systems change is no longer a buzzword. It is an urgent call to action for the business community. At EBN, we believe that the next era of entrepreneurship is about raising the bar, levelling the playing field, expanding participation and scaling the networks of social, financial and knowledge capital that provide the foundation for successful and sustainable start-ups and scalable businesses.

Our work in the field and most recently in the Better Incubation project makes it clear: Business support organisations can, need and fortunately do expand their scope and increase their role towards inclusive and impactful entrepreneurship. The Better Incubation Roadmap provides members of the EU|BIC community critical hands-on tools to better capacity-building and support services offered to innovative SMEs taking up the call to deliver in the sustainable transition.

Besides the imperative moral reasons, the business case has been widely set out by leading consulting and institutional studies. Listed among the top reasons to release the untapped potential of social and inclusive entrepreneurship are: a) to attract and retain the best talent; b) to better serve consumer markets, including those in which UREs are the main customers; c) to enhance diversity and improve overall performance in the workplace and economy; and d) to address future demographic change. Specifically, for (partially) public-funded BSOs this market opportunity can be a driver to increase profits and become more self-sustainable enterprises – independent from public funding.

Excitingly I can acknowledge that EBN and the EU|BIC community now have the tools to meet the needs of this point in time. Yet, growth is far from meaningful unless it comes with integrity. Businesses, governments, innovators and the people they work with are drawn closer to the EU|BIC community because they are looking for a better way: one that looks for sustainable growth; that puts people and the planet first and at the heart of innovation; and that holds continuous improvements, learnings, and accountability at heart when it comes to creating high standards for business and innovation performance. As the EU|BIC community continues to grow, we stay committed to these core values and include the lessons of the Better Incubation project at our fundamentals.

From establishing our standards for better innovation business; to advocating for excellent support actors to be included in innovation legislation; to building a pan-European, global movement of people committed to using breakthrough innovation bolstering regional, sustainable economic development; to witnessing its resilience through a global pandemic, we have always been doing this work together, reactive to what matters while keeping an eye on long-term innovation systems change.

— *Laura Lecci*  
CEO at EBN

EVPA seeks to foster inclusive social entrepreneurship in direct alignment with our purpose to drive positive change for people and the planet. The Better Incubation Program was a major step forward toward this aim, because mobilising and empowering Business Support Organisations helps create a more supportive ecosystem for impact. Beyond building the ecosystem, we saw the program as essential to strengthening the long-term financial stability of social entrepreneurs, especially those from underrepresented groups. Program highlights along the way included the development of practical tools like the Better Incubation Roadmap and the opportunity to connect with the communities of practice. Connecting with the communities broke down silos and brought unexpected collaborators together, an approach the program also pursued when it came to the program's events. Participants of the Switch Pitch series, for example, joined open discussions with a variety of practitioners, gaining a better understanding of how capital providers work with incubators effectively to drive impact. EVPA members now have the opportunity to discover rising talent from underrepresented groups and boost access to professional-advancement opportunities for these individuals. When program participants can connect to our committed and diverse network, the added value is clear.

— *Roberta Bosurgi*  
CEO at EVPA

Building on our work with entrepreneurs across various cultures and contexts for many years, Better Incubation brought the opportunity to both apply our learnings and to bring us fresh perspectives. Not only did this initiative spur us into a deeper, more structured conversation with members, peers and allies about inclusion, but it opened up new opportunities to diversify our reach in terms of the target groups we work with. It is our belief that in order to meet the challenges of the world, we need more inclusive entrepreneurship in order to build a future in which we can all thrive. Better Incubation signals a step into a next new level of grounding diversity, equity and inclusion work in conscious entrepreneurial action. Through the capacity-building workshops and communities of practice, we have grown as individuals and as a network. With our partners, the first bricks are laid and with this Roadmap we recognise - and celebrate - all the dedicated incubators who will continue to bridge people with the opportunities and know-how they need to make the difference we all need.

— *Tatiana Glad*  
Executive Director at Impact Hub Network

# 1. Introduction

## a. What is Better Incubation

Better Incubation is a 2-year programme (2021 – 2022) funded by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation, and is led by three network organisations: The **European Business and Innovation Centre Network**, **Impact Hub** and the **European Venture Philanthropy Association**. The aim of Better Incubation is to foster inclusive and social entrepreneurship in Europe by mobilising and empowering Business Support Organisations (BSOs) with capacities to effectively help the social enterprises and potential entrepreneurs from underrepresented groups to grow their businesses.

**The key objective is to kick-start an “eco-systemic” change by bringing incubation and business support services closer to the society and contributing to societal needs through entrepreneurship and self-employment based on job creation, skills development, and provision of opportunities for unemployed and vulnerable people to fully participate in the society and economy.**

↗ [Read more here](#)

## b. Better Incubation Roadmap

The new European Action Plan “**Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy**” (2021-2030) launched by the European Commission recognises the importance that the mainstream BSOs have in the support of social economy entities (p.14):

*“The Commission calls on Member States to encourage mainstream business incubators to extend their support to social economy entities, to improve business investment readiness support opportunities. The ‘Better Incubator’ pilot launched by the European Commission can serve as inspiration”* and can be seen as a key tool to systematically incorporate the social economy into the different socio-economic policies of the EU, including industrial, innovation and cohesion policies.

One of the tools to contribute to the objectives of the Better Incubation project and implementation of the Social Economy Action Plan in general, is the Better Incubation Roadmap, a methodological guide for the mainstream BSOs on how to embrace inclusive incubation.

**Better Incubation Roadmap is a methodological guide proposing a series of convenient and simple steps for the mainstream BSOs who wish to experiment or expand their inclusive incubation practices.**



## 2. Content

### WHO IS IT FOR

The Better Incubation Roadmap aims to be a practical easy-to-read guide directed primarily to the mainstream BSOs. It intends to provide diverse options in case the BSOs would like to create and design organisational processes to better cater the needs of social and marginalised entrepreneurs. The guide should also help the business incubators in their efforts to build strong and sustainable relations and networks with the key stakeholders in the business support ecosystem, as an ingredient for its transformation.

The practical content of the Roadmap is strengthened by the good practices from the BSOs (EBN members, EU|BICs, Impact Hub King's Cross and other organisations) who have already successfully implemented inclusive organisational strategies and have experience with supporting entrepreneurs at risk of social and economic exclusion.

We also believe the Better Incubation Roadmap will provide some inspiration for other stakeholders to work towards more inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems across Europe.

### WHEN TO USE IT

The guiding principles are proposed to provide a framework for the mainstream business incubators who wish to design new strategies or implement changes at the organisational level. These changes might be needed to allow for an experimentation or systematic application of the inclusive incubation practices.

The Better Incubation Roadmap does not cover the programmatic level, i.e. business incubation services provided by BSOs to end-users. We recommend the following resource materials developed under the Better Incubation project that offer comprehensive tools and methodologies on the diverse support services to be developed by the BSOs who wish to assist social and vulnerable entrepreneurs.

- [Better Incubation: Collection of Best Practices in Inclusive Entrepreneurship Support Programmes](#)
- [Toolkit: I want to make my incubator more inclusive, what now?](#)
- [Better Incubation Insights Paper](#)

### A NEED FOR FLEXIBLE APPROACH

The Roadmap is based on a flexible 'pick and choose' approach to account for the complex organisational nature of the business incubators. The steps to develop inclusive incubation practices can be prioritised considering the typology of BSOs, their focus (sector), location, target market, service offerings, business support ecosystem and institutional framework they operate in. The proposed tools in the Roadmap can also be adapted for the different business models of BSOs such as public, private, non-profit, university and mixed (public/private).

## STRUCTURE OF THE ROADMAP

One of the most important parts of the Better Incubation Roadmap is to **define the key characteristics of an inclusive incubator**. The document is therefore structured along five main organisational dimensions of the BSOs:

1. Internal organisational characteristics (programme strategy, organisational processes, operational functions, organisational culture, and governance)
2. Financial sustainability
3. External positioning and stakeholder partnerships of the BSOs in the wider ecosystem
4. Branding and visibility
5. Impact measurement and assessment

# 3. Key definitions

## **BUSINESS INCUBATOR**

Business incubators are types of business development support programmes that provide a range of support services to entrepreneurs in business creation and during the early stages of the business lifecycle (OECD, 2020). The mainstream business incubators can provide the business support services dedicated for vulnerable or social entrepreneurs, but these support programmes are not the core activities that they deliver.

## **SOCIAL INCUBATOR**

Social incubator is an organisation aimed at supporting projects, firms, and people with entrepreneurial ideas for social change, aiming at producing their effects within specific territory (Social SEED, 2020).

## **SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Social entrepreneurship's main goal is to address pressing social challenges and meet social needs in an innovative way while serving the general interest and common good for the benefit of the community. The social entrepreneurship targets to social impact primarily rather than profit maximisation in their effort to reach the most vulnerable groups and to contribute to inclusive and sustainable growth (OECD/EC, 2013).

## **INCLUSIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Inclusive entrepreneurship refers to the inclusion of marginalised communities in entrepreneurship to assist them in addressing economic and social issues. The marginalised entrepreneurs such as women, youth, migrants, senior or people with disabilities should be included in the entrepreneurship process. Inclusive entrepreneurship contributes to social inclusion as it gives all people an equal opportunity to start up and operate businesses. (OECD/EC 2019).

## **ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEM**

Although there are many definitions of what exactly comprises an ecosystem, the most dominant is the Isenberg's entrepreneurship ecosystem, which comprises six functions (support, finance, culture, access to markets, human capital, and policy) that work together to create a supporting environment for business creation (OECD, 2013).

## **STAKEHOLDERS**

Stakeholders are individuals or institutions that can be directly or indirectly affected by BSO's operations and activities or might have an influence and impact on BSO. The key stakeholders are important influential resources and should be treated as potential sources of risk and opportunity (ILO, 2021).

# 4. Challenge

## a. Why inclusive incubation

The BSOs can be an effective support for new and growing businesses. Businesses that receive support in incubators tend to have higher survival rates, create more jobs, and generate more revenues (OECD/EC, 2019). BSOs usually play a catalytic role in innovative entrepreneurship through the experimentation with new ideas and introduction of new products, services, or processes into the local market. This experimentation can contribute to addressing economic and social challenges. Across Europe, there is a variety of different business incubator models. These include the incubators that focus on development of businesses within a certain industry or sector, such as technology or green economy, or BSOs that foster territorial development.

*At first sight, the mainstream BSOs can be perceived to promote a type of highly exclusive entrepreneurship support by granting only the most promising businesses access to support services while leaving all other entrepreneurs empty-handed (ILO, 2021).*

With an objective to address the current complex economic, environmental, and social challenges, the governments have been keen to promote social and inclusive entrepreneurship to encourage more people to start businesses and enable them to scale (Miller and Stacey, 2014). This includes an emerging trend of the ‘social incubators’ (Social SEED, 2020) set up exclusively for social entrepreneurship support or with the dedicated entrepreneurship programmes tailored to support marginalised entrepreneurs (Better Incubation Toolkit, 2021).

Many mainstream BSOs have also committed to a **role of change agents, and they foster inclusive growth through integrating the strategic sustainable development into their mainstream business incubation processes**. These BSOs are inclusive of diverse entrepreneurs, helping facilitate transition toward growth entrepreneurship for all.

## b. Rationale for BSOs to integrate the inclusive incubation

Supporting social and marginalised entrepreneurs requires support structures which can respond to differences in the nature and scale of the barriers that these groups face and their “different way of doing business” compared with the general population (Better Incubation Toolkit, 2021). **The Better Incubation Roadmap attempts to identify what are these structures on the organisational level, and how they can be integrated in the standard capacities and processes, which are already existing within the mainstream BSOs organisational make-up.**

Most BSOs also work on promoting and strengthening the overall entrepreneurship ecosystem. This strategic work captures a range of actors that work together to create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and sustainable business creation (Baskaran et al, 2019). The role of marginalised groups and social entrepreneurs is also critical in creating a vibrant ecosystem as these groups have always provided goods and services in the local economies and communities they live in and generated innovation and economic development. By serving diverse types of entrepreneurs, BSOs can play an active role in building inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems, exploring the untapped potential of the ‘unlikely’ entrepreneurs who want to develop and try out innovative ideas (Dietrich et al, 2010).

### **TECHNOLOGY INCUBATORS AND INCLUSIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

The technology incubators can become an entry point for the technology-based firms with growth potential established by women, youth, migrants, and other marginalised groups or encourage business models which use technology to deliver solutions to social or environmental problems. Broadening their client base offers technology incubators a possibility to test new business models, tap into new markets and expand their influence in the entrepreneurship ecosystem, including public-private dialogue and policies. It also reflects the trends in new industry standards and regulatory compliance such as new [EU social taxonomy](#), or [co-creation principles in the EU digital and green transition](#).

## 5. How was this Roadmap produced

The data collection for the Better Incubation Roadmap originates from desk research, interviews, and focus groups. The desk research was conducted over May – June 2022 to identify major trends and challenges of the business incubation processes and ecosystem, and social and inclusive entrepreneurship across Europe. The qualitative research covered two focus groups which were conducted in June and July 2022 with two distinct groups of stakeholders – social impact investors (7 members of EVPA network) and mainstream business incubators (6 members of the EBN network). The objective was to explore their insights on existing programme and organisational practices, and gaps in supporting inclusive incubation. The data collection also included semi-structured interviews with 8 BSOs - EBN members. To complement the interviews with EBN BSO professionals, Impact Hub King's Cross and 3 other external organisations/experts were interviewed.

The objective of the interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of their experience and gather best practices about organisational processes and ecosystem work related to the support of social and marginalised entrepreneurs. The focus groups and interviews were carried out online, audio recorded and transcribed. The triangulation and verification of the data was concluded during the EBN Social and Inclusive Incubation Lab and the 2022 EBN Techcamp powered by Better Incubation held in Lipica (Slovenia) the 19-20 October 2022, where the findings were discussed, commented, and validated by 80 participants representing EU|BICs, Impact Hubs and other BSOs and incubation experts from 26 countries.

# 6. What is an inclusive incubator

The success in the implementation of the inclusive incubation mission can be influenced by a number of success factors, including internal and external organisational environment, structures, and processes. This section will introduce a framework which can serve to identify five core elements and critical resources for your organisation to establish new or expand existing inclusive incubation practices.

Each element is illustrated by the good practice example of the BSOs which already have an experience in inclusive incubation.

## a. BSO organisational characteristics

**The first section should enable you to reflect on the following questions:**

- **How to reflect inclusive incubation in your organisational strategy?**
- **How is it incorporated in your organisational mission statement?**
- **How is the support to social and/or marginalised entrepreneurs linked to your core business priorities?**
- **What organisational resources need to be made available in the organisation to ensure a solid framework for BSO expanded operations?**
- **How is diversity and inclusion reflected in your organisational processes?**

### ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY

On the first step of this staircase your organisation should consider integrating inclusive incubation elements into its organisational strategy. It is recommended that the strategy sets out the rationale why the BSO attempts to engage in inclusive incubation, and what are the expected accomplishments achieved through the inclusive incubation in the mid-term. It is advisable not to blindly replicate but adapt your organisational model to the realities of the territory where you operate.

### ORGANISATIONAL MISSION

The mission defines the long-term vision of the business incubator, what it wants to accomplish. The organisational mission statement should identify the core values of your organisation and the framework that informs your operations and communicates your objective. It is therefore useful if you define or integrate your goals related to the support to social and marginalised entrepreneurs into your organisational mission (World Bank and IFC, 2002-2009). As a result, the mission statement will clearly communicate the ultimate value your incubator brings to its end-users and other stakeholders and highlight what is distinctive about your organisation (how it is different from other BSOs in terms of programmes and services).

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

Defining the strategic objectives plays a significant role in mapping out the direction where the incubator is headed in the next years, as well as the objectives your organisation should reach in the mid-term. The strategic goals are closely related to the environment where you operate (Dietrich et al, 2010). During the strategic planning it is important that you explore the following points:

- Is there a demand for inclusive incubation services in the territory where your incubator operates;
- Will your response towards social and marginalised entrepreneurs be accurately targeted;
- How will the support to the social and marginalised entrepreneurs bring an added value to the existing core activities of your organisation.

The creation process of the organisational strategy might require an assessment of the region's key characteristics and conditions, existing social challenges, including the identification and evidence of the social and business needs of the target groups existing in the local context. When conducting this assessment, the BSO can choose and focus on various aspects, depending on the organisational objectives or local conditions, including (non-exhaustive list):

- analysis of macro-economic factors (regulatory environment, entrepreneurship support institutions, economic constraints and opportunities, socio-cultural factors, availability of regional support for BSOs through the government authorities).
- analysis of meso-economic factors (landscape of business and social support infrastructure such as business intermediaries, social economy and social organisations, government agencies already offering services and support (financial or not financial) to social or marginalised entrepreneurs and groups).
- analysis of micro-economic factors (economically active population, number of existing and potential local entrepreneurs from target groups, access to finance, higher education institutions).

### PRACTICAL ADVICE

During the strategy development phase, it is advisable to include other stakeholders of the entrepreneurship ecosystem. This can take the form of consultation, collaboration, or co-creation. Please refer to the section 6.c on how to identify and strategically work with the stakeholders.

## FEASIBILITY STUDY

Initially, the mainstream business incubators may lack the knowledge about the specific target groups and market opportunities which have not been originally included into their business plan. The feasibility study can thus be used in the early process of business planning to investigate whether there is a potential for offering services and attracting a sufficient number of end-users (marginalised or social entrepreneurs) and develop appropriate marketing strategies. It can also help clarify if the inclusive incubation support can become a feasible part of the incubator's activities. Another advantage of a feasibility study is that it can serve as a basis to define other alternatives and plans (Dietrich et al., 2010).

Building evidence through data is a core aspect for creating the feasibility study. The data can be gathered through diverse sources, namely desk research (existing reports, studies, statistical data) or field work (meetings, interviews, or surveys).



## BUSINESS PLAN

The outcome from the feasibility study provides a guideline for the BSOs business plan. In this stage, the business incubator's model with the rationale for the inclusive incubation activities is elaborated. It will also include how the incubator will address the market failures in the territory (if this is the rationale), the specific target group(s), the expected levels of demand, a detailed operating framework (infrastructure and services), the estimated capital investment and running costs/sources of funds, and other factors (World Bank and IFC, 2002-2009).

Analysing all these conditions should clarify to the mainstream and/or technology business incubator how the support to social or marginalised entrepreneurs is linked to the core organisational priorities and what added value will these activities bring to the incubator's strategic objectives.

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE | EU|BIC Inkubator Sežana, Slovenia

#### Upskilling Incubator's human resources to work with and offer business support to people suffering from hearing losses

Before starting the process of building up the pilot incubation project for people suffering from hearing losses, we have educated our team to gain special skills and knowledge about social impact management and measurement, thanks to the dedicated training organised by EVPA in the framework of Better Incubation. Hence, we used the EVPA offered tools for optimal business planning of the project. We've started with connecting with our main stakeholders, such as the National Association of Deaf People of Slovenia, the Higher Educational School for Design Sežana and entrepreneurs having experiences with deaf people in business. We have organised a special [on-line workshop](#) for the association and its members, mostly people with hearing disabilities, using interpreters for sign language and immediate subtitling of the workshop (video [full version](#)). Immediately after the workshop we conducted an on-line interview with a prepared questionnaire session with people with hearing disability. The evaluation of the responses was a base for defining the needs and expectations of the potential attendees and our guidelines for the creative business school program design. For the marketing purpose we created a [video invitation](#) with sign language and subtitles that was shared on the web pages, social media networks and other channels of all stakeholders involved in the action. That communication campaign resulted in 11 participants attending the [3 days' workshops](#) in Sežana and Rodik. An additional video was broadcasted by the national public TV, being launched on an [on-line TV](#) for people with hearing loss

— *Dorijan Maršič*  
CEO, EU|BIC Inkubator Sežana

## ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Setting up the inclusive incubation processes will most probably require changes in the governance of the business incubator. The governance structure contains key players which have the overall responsibilities for the functioning, monitoring and evaluation of the incubator's operations, performance, impact, and sustainability (European Commission, 2002).

The success of any organisation, including BSO, depends on its human potential. There are several layers of human capital in the business incubators which are part of its organisational structure:

- Board of Directors/Governing Board
- Leadership team or Management
- Advisors or Advisory Committee
- Specialist team or responsible staff

### PEOPLE ARE THE DETERMINANT FACTOR UNDERLYING EVERY PROCESS

Assess the available human capabilities and resources in your organisation to identify the gaps and needs for setting up or expanding your inclusive incubation processes, such as management motivation, availability of qualified personnel, commitment from founders, Advisory Board support, and champions advocating the principles of inclusive incubation in the organisation or outside.

The observations from our interviews show that business incubators with successful inclusive incubation practices are distinguished by a motivated and engaged Board of Directors and leadership team committed to this mission and related operations. Equally important is to seek to integrate the inclusive incubation programme and activities into the fabric of the organisation. This means to ensure that an adequate amount of the qualified and trained employees is assigned to this part of the organisational mission.

There are different approaches to how you can include staff dealing with inclusive incubation in your organisational structure. The first one is to have a team of qualified experts established as a special unit which will grow its capacities based on the needs and objectives. The second one is to streamline the work related to the inclusive incubation into the overall organisational structure through vertical integration thereby enabling different teams and units in the business incubator to work on and promote inclusive incubation activities under already existing mainstream services and activities.

### EXPANDING YOUR IN-HOUSE CAPACITIES

There is a possibility to expand your competence on inclusive incubation beyond human resources and knowledge already existing in your organisation. If you are unable to build sufficient human expertise in-house, you are encouraged to reach towards outside connections. Advisory boards can offer needed skills, information, advice, and guidance. Advisory board members can include representatives of social entrepreneurs or marginalised groups, social impact investors, NGOs, and social organisations. Another possibility is to form knowledge-based alliances with think tanks, universities, and other more experienced incubators giving you the opportunity to tap into their expertise, skills, and networks.

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE | EU|BIC Berytech, Lebanon

### Believing in social entrepreneurs and their power to shape a better Lebanon

At Berytech we believe that social entrepreneurship is essential to the Lebanese economy. Our experience tells us that social entrepreneurship plays a major role in creating and sustaining a better socio-economic environment, however it needs a proper ecosystem to grow where social innovators can be mentored, financed and supported. This is addressed and solved through Berytech's programme Impact Rise – Lebanon's pioneer social entrepreneurship scale-up programme, funded by MEPI, launched back in October 2019.

The Impact Rise social innovation programme is designed and managed by Berytech and funded by the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) to put ambitious startups, devoted experts and support partners on the road to growing sustainable and successful social ventures. We consider that successful programmes depend on human capabilities and resources allocated to the organisation to be the advocates of the principles of inclusive incubation. From alleviating poverty to employing more people to saving the environment, our programmes and startups are making a big difference in Lebanon.

*"The programme was launched the same week of the 2019 Lebanese revolution. Why do we keep on repeating this? Because we saw the actual work of social entrepreneurs during the crisis and how this programme continued to grow and create all these opportunities. Having worked extensively with the startups it was amazing to see how they managed to keep a strong drive and believe in their venture and mobilise their communities during the toughest times in Lebanon. This showed us, in reality, the importance of social entrepreneurs in responding to crisis and contributing to a better country".*

— Krystal Khalil  
Programmes Director, EU|BIC Berytech

## ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

The core values reflected in the organisational mission of the BSO (see section 6.a) should also be extended to its organisational culture. Integrating the culture of diversity and inclusion into the mainstream organisational procedures, practices and programmes means that the BSO is reflective not only of the overarching diversity of the society at large but also sends the positive signal to the entrepreneurs from marginalised groups. The staff of the business incubator increases its ability and experience to provide adequate and tailored support to their end-users. The high level of diversity and inclusion in the workplace is also associated with greater productivity, innovation, and workforce well-being (Baskaran et al, 2019).

### WHAT IS ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

'Culture' describes the shared values, attitudes, and practices in the organisation. Organisational culture is probably the strongest source of prejudice since it supports many inherent behaviours and values. Creating culture is therefore an ongoing long-term process. Even if your organisation has focused time and resources on the diversity and inclusion policies, it is worth regularly assessing whether there are any gaps or concerns that need to be addressed.

When talking about a culture of inclusion, it is recommended to look internally and reflect on what messages you are sending within your organisation. Here are several suggestions on how to improve your organisational culture:

- Translate the inclusive values included in the organisation's mission into your organisational culture and internal communication to guide your employees;
- Cascade the inclusive culture from the top leadership levels to day-to-day operations across the organisation;
- Design diversity and inclusion-focused hiring policies;
- Incorporate your values on diversity and inclusion directly in the code of conduct, onboarding materials, employee handbook and other organisational processes;
- Invest in training for your employees, but especially the frontline staff to ensure that they understand the challenges faced by different marginalised groups;
- Co-design the inclusive policies on the organisational level with disadvantaged groups;
- Build processes to demonstrate your commitment to inclusive culture and equal treatment through promoting and considering diverse perspectives and feedback provided by your employees.

## TECHNOLOGICAL INCUBATORS AND INCLUSIVE CULTURE

The exclusive/elitist culture is often associated with technological industry, and especially high-tech incubators may have a less diverse leadership and management, and start-up portfolio than other types of BSOs or social incubators (Dietrich et al, 2010). This state intentionally or unintentionally influences the culture in areas such as language, policies, norms, values and rules, and shapes employee's perceptions about inclusion and diversity. Consider diversifying your workforce and hire historically underrepresented groups in tech industry at all levels of the organisation.

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE | EU|BIC accent, Austria

#### Tech Business Incubator supporting high potential female entrepreneurs in Lower Austria

accent is the tech business incubator of the Lower Austrian region. Its mission is to support academic spin-offs and innovative start-ups in launching successful, knowledge-intensive companies. Especially the access to a wide network helping develop and grow business ideas is requested by founders. This network contains national and international financing companies, R&D institutions, NGOs, industry and investors.

To strengthen the interconnection between technologies and societal impact, accent also facilitates the transfer of CERN technologies into spin-offs and start-ups. In terms of early stage-support, the incubator's portfolio is completed by an own CPI-programme (the creative pre-incubator) at universities of applied sciences as well as a dedicated "accent makerspace" that will intensify peer learning and enable experimental prototype development for the founders.

Recently, accent decided to further enhance its service qualities by carefully adapting its methodologies – with the goal that more high potential female entrepreneurs should feel comfortable and confident to develop businesses. Why is that? Though 47,3% of companies in Lower Austria

were launched by women in the first six months of 2022, in fact only 25% of technology focused start-ups were founded by females. While encouraging technology related innovations by mission, the accent incubator has set out new measures to improve this situation and create a greater balance in terms of gender equal business chances.

With newly tailored services, female founders are helped in tackling their own challenges by sharing tools and different problem-solving techniques that can clearly advance their business journeys. In addition to the given initial financial support to female founders, accent offers also intensive coaching and selected impulse sessions. These versatile support measures over the first 18 to 24 months create a solid and inspired basis for women to develop their businesses successfully and sustainably.

— *Julia Uhlik*  
*Project Manager, EU|BIC accent Inkubator GmbH*

## USEFUL RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- ↗ [EBN Technical Note #08 | Inclusive Entrepreneurship](#)
- ↗ [Development Guidelines for Technology Business Incubators](#)
- ↗ [BIM Module 6A | Managing the Incubator, Part 1](#)
- ↗ [Socialseedproject.eu/outputs/](https://socialseedproject.eu/outputs/)
- ↗ [Nesta Good Incubation](#)
- ↗ [Better Incubation Toolkit: I want to make my incubator more inclusive, what now?](#)

## b. Financial sustainability

One of the main challenges for the BSOs is to create a sustainable business model. This refers to defining the cost and income model to fund their operations and core activities in the medium to long term. This section will guide you through the strategies that can be taken by your organisation to set up and run sustainable inclusive incubation programmes, by answering the following questions:

- **How can you develop a sustainable funding model to enable implementation of the inclusive incubation programme?**
- **What are the key elements of the sustainable funding model?**
- **Why is the sustainable funding model a valuable tool for increasing your organisation's influence in the social impact ecosystem?**

The sources of income of the BSOs differ according to their legal status, objectives and nature of the organisation. The BSO owned as a public body usually receives mainly (if not only) public funds, while these might be strongly reduced if organised as a private organisation (established with the intention of running it as a for-profit business).

Every incubator has to build a **relevant resource mix**, based on the nature of the industries it operates in. However, it is important to recognise that some types of incubators, especially the BSOs supporting social or marginalised entrepreneurs, might be particularly challenged. When setting up the incubation programme dedicated to these types of entrepreneurs, the public sector subsidy is frequently the only or major source of the incubator's revenue. Even in the implementation phase, most incubators require a generous amount of subsidy.

A public revenue can be helpful during the start-up phases of the programme when the programme is establishing its value. However, in the long run, this dependency is reducing the opportunity for achieving operational and programmatic self-sustainability and survival.

### WHAT IS A SUSTAINABLE FUNDING MODEL

It is important to distinguish between the two categories: “developing a sustainable funding model” and “funding the programme”.

“Developing a sustainable funding model” refers to an incubator's ability to cover expenses with predictable, reliable sources of funding. A sustainable incubator generates income that contributes to its operational budget; does not depend on one source of external support; and makes sure that outside funding is either reliable or replaceable. Whereas “funding the programme” refers to the ability which incubators have in finding appropriate resources for their end-users, i.e., entrepreneurs (EVPA, 2020).

Major support measures available for financing inclusive incubation programme (EVPA, 2020; EBN and JP Morgan, 2018):

- Grants and subsidies from public authorities (national or local) or universities
- Grants from European funds
- Grants and other support from trusts and foundations
- Private support from venture capital funds, corporations
- Alternative revenues (crowdfunding)

It is therefore recommended that BSOs running inclusive incubation programmes **diversify their funding streams**. An access to a wide range of funds enables them to fulfil two roles in the ecosystem:

## INTERMEDIARY

On the programmatic level, one of the main challenges for BSOs concerns the **mismatch between the supply side represented by the social impact investors and demand by the social or marginalised entrepreneurs seeking investment**. The sustainable business model resting upon a mix of funding increases the potential of your organisation to bridge this financing gap, by allowing you to engage with the end-users (entrepreneurs) on a long-term and strategic basis, and improve entrepreneurs' investment readiness and impact performance (EVPA, 2020).

## CATALYST

The role of the catalyst is connected to **empowerment and capacity of the BSOs to influence and transform the local entrepreneurship and impact ecosystem**. An access to a wide range of funds not only broadens the opportunities for your organisation to support the vulnerable or social entrepreneurs but ensures that the core activities of the inclusive incubation programme are fully covered. The public funding allows your incubator to maintain close ties with local and national government bodies and fulfil regional or sectoral development objectives. Combining it with the private funds gives you further opportunities to innovate, solidify or scale-up your inclusive incubation initiatives, and achieve greater social impact (EBN and JP Morgan, 2018; EVPA 2020).

Some incubators also experiment with the crowdfunding platforms, creating deeper connections with the local entrepreneurship potential and needs of the local community (See EU|BIC Fundecyt-PCTEX, [www.goteo.org](http://www.goteo.org)). See section 6.c. to read about the role of the BSOs as the catalyst in the ecosystem.

Based on our research and other sources, the most significant income source of the mainstream business incubators to finance inclusive or social entrepreneurship programmes is public funding (EBN and JP Morgan, 2018; EBN 2020). The sources such as ESF+, ERDF and Interreg have been game changers for the development of social enterprises, creating new opportunities and giving a new boost in countries where no or limited public measures addressing social enterprises previously existed. The other possibilities for financing include the InvestEU, Erasmus+ programme, and Horizon Europe (European Commission, 2021).

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE | EU|BIC FUNDECYP-PCTEX, Spain

### Designing sustainable business models for incubation and acceleration programmes meeting regional social challenges

EU|BIC FUNDECYT-PCTEX has been developing social entrepreneurship accelerators and related programmes since 2013. A highlight which is worth sharing as it is related to methodologies that we have designed and established internally. This methodology combines the design of a sustainable business model with the adjustment of products and services to the social challenge. Our programmes are aimed at two types of targets: firstly, to entrepreneurs who endeavour to start their first social enterprise and secondly, also, to traditional companies that seek to introduce social entrepreneurship into their business model.

In order to provide more concrete examples, we are highlighting below our flagship programmes related with social entrepreneurship, sustainability and support of youngsters.

1. The [EFES project accelerator](#), an acceleration programme of the Cross-Border Laboratory of Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship. It is oriented to the development of capacities through training and tutoring by experts in social entrepreneurship, promoting the creation and consolidation of innovative social enterprises in the [EUROACE region](#). The programme provides blended capacity building including training and business support combining collective work sessions with individualised tutoring. The ultimate goal of the programme is to foster the social entrepreneurial mindset for start-ups working with new sustainable business models, searching to solve societal problems or social and environmental challenges while generating a social change with a positive impact on the territory.

2. [The sustainability pre-accelerator](#), seeking to identify new ideas and innovation projects in their early stages of development, aiming to develop marketable solutions to challenges related to sustainability. Here the selected projects benefit from an adapted programme aimed mainly at analysing their target market, determining their technical and economic viability, as well as optimising and finalising the technological development of their product or process.

3. Another specific programme for young people is the [RAISE Youth project](#), an accelerator aiming to promote social entrepreneurship for young people in the rural world. For this action, we have adapted our work methodology to the target of young people. The methodology that we have created is designed to offer an agile and deep itinerary that allows the young entrepreneurs to design, define and set their entrepreneurship projects and the impacts associated with them, using a holistic approach that integrates their personal perspective and the necessities of their communities with nature.

— *Anto Recio Cuesta*  
Social Innovation Manager  
EU|BIC FUNDECYT-PCTEX

— *Rosa Méndez*  
Project Advisor,  
EU|BIC FUNDECYT-PCTEX

## USEFUL RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- [BIM Module 5B | Financing an Incubator, Part2](#)
- [Incubators and Accelerators: Bridging the Gap for New Impact Ventures in Europe](#)
- [Social Impact Investment. Best Practices and Recommendations for the Next Generation](#)
- [EVPA\\_MAZE | Enablers of Impact, report2020](#)



## c. Ecosystem's characteristics

**The incubators should not be stand-alone entities but rather work alongside other organisations and broadly based networks to promote wider regional or sectoral development strategies (European Commission, 2022).**

There are external factors that can largely influence the success of inclusive incubation practices in your organisation. The moral component connected with the inclusive incubation is not only in the BSO's actions and practices, but also how the incubator connects with their strategic networks and local stakeholders to address market failures. You will therefore hardly accomplish your inclusive related organisational mission if your organisation does not actively cooperate with other actors of the wider ecosystem.

The questions below should guide you to actively engage in the incubation ecosystem and contribute to its transformation:

- **What are the different driving forces available for your organisation to engage in the wider incubation ecosystem?**
- **Why can it be important for your organisation to be embedded in the local context?**
- **Why should you consider the public policy adaptation strategies to succeed with inclusive incubation programmes?**
- **What kind of alliances and partnerships exists in the ecosystem which enables you to achieve your inclusive organisational mission?**
- **How to select the ecosystem stakeholders?**

### EXTERNAL FIT AND POSITIONING

Business incubators are the actors in the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem. They should be designed to support and be part of a broader strategic framework – either territorially oriented (local development) or focused on specific policy priorities (e.g., innovation, entrepreneurship, employment), or a combination of both (European Commission, 2002).

The function and the value of the business incubator that provides targeted support and low entry barriers to marginalised or social entrepreneurs can be enhanced by the positioning strategy the BSO applies towards the external ecosystem.

Setting-up or expanding inclusive approach to incubation **should not be an isolated activity**, with the following considerations:

- Integration of the business incubators into wider regional or local development strategies can be a powerful incentive for the governments to provide adequate technical infrastructure, appropriate policy framework and needed financial support to support inclusive incubation.
- The governments (local or national) often use business incubators as a part of their inclusive entrepreneurship policies and programmes. Understanding your government's expectations and adapting to the current or future policy strategies can therefore help amplify or validate your efforts focused on disadvantaged groups of entrepreneurs.
- When your programme and activities are well integrated into the fabric of the local territory and its broader economic development goals, your organisation can become a powerful actor to participate in the transformation of the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

→ A number of factors related to the external ecosystem should be considered in the process of designing the inclusive incubation programmes: pre-existing approaches, needs of the end-users, territorial needs, and expectations of the local stakeholders. These should be mainly addressed through the feasibility study and reflected in the organisational strategy (see section 6.a).

When designing your inclusive incubation programmes, avoid a duplication of activities which are already existing in the ecosystem, and are already delivered by other actors in the territory. If there are such organisations in the community or region, adjustments should be done to complement their initiatives. There are several contextual assessment tools to review the pre-existing system such as [stakeholder analysis](#), [influence mapping](#), or [problem tree analysis](#).

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE | EU|BIC Coventry University Enterprise, United Kingdom

#### Enhancing social entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems to achieve social impact locally and internationally - Coventry University Social Enterprise (CUSE)

At Coventry University Social Enterprise, our remit is to maximise Coventry University's role as an anchor institution by finding ways of benefiting the local community and achieving true social value.

At CUSE we do focus on wider regional and international development strategies. Indeed, our social enterprise and social innovation activities are a key contributor to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. We are the only UK example of a social enterprise set up by a university to promote social entrepreneurship and innovation.

Our work has an impact locally and internationally. Alongside our continued work with the British Council and Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, we have also been focusing on reaching under-represented student groups within the UK.

Our funded programmes helped us fulfil our mission to realise people's entrepreneurial potential. We have developed a range of training programmes, resources, and toolkits to meet our clients' needs.

— *Mariama Njie*  
Social Enterprise Programme Manager, EU|BIC CUSE

## INTERACTION WITH OTHER ACTORS

The BSOs with the successful inclusive incubation programmes we have interviewed have described the incubation ecosystem as a **sybiotic connection of diverse players**. They emphasised that the incubation process itself can be brought to fruition through the partnership and collaboration of several stakeholders. The stakeholders can provide different kinds of expertise relevant to the incubators or its end-users. To succeed in inclusive incubation efforts, you should strive to create a mixed and diverse range of partnerships, some of them with formal ties, some of them as informal relationships (EBN and JP Morgan, 2018).

**The following core stakeholders operating in the ecosystem can have a personal stake in accomplishment of the inclusive mission of the BSO:**

- Public sector such as a central government, authorities that operate at the regional / local level, regional development agencies.
- Private sector covering profit seeking entities such as corporations, development or ethical banks, SMEs, private impact investors as well as corporate foundations.
- Social sector with non-profit organisations, social enterprises, cooperatives, NGOs and organisations representing vulnerable groups, social economy organisations.
- Academia, including universities and business schools.
- Other actors can include Chambers of Commerce, other incubators and accelerators, coworking spaces.

It is often emphasised that the BSOs should form different partnerships to expand opportunities for their end-users, however targeted collaboration with diverse actors functioning in the entrepreneurship ecosystem can also generate important strategic benefits.

Here is a list of justifications for your BSO to consider joining forces with other entities. Please note their contribution (listed below) is depended on the specific objective and nature of relations:

- Pooling of **complementary skills** and resources;
- **Preventing silos**, removing created boundaries and enabling stakeholders from different perspectives to cooperate towards common goals;
- Fostering incubator's success through finding more efficient coordinated response;
- **Using individual stakeholders' strengths** across sectors can lead to an increase of the risk appetite often avoided when working with a single stakeholder or sector, thus helping to boost and scale up innovation and implementation of new approaches;
- Enhancing the **mutual learning** and collective outcomes;
- Raising the **incubator's visibility** in the region or community;
- Ensuring **sustainable financial and non-financial support** to the BSO's inclusive incubation programme;
- Providing advantages of **familiarity and proximity** to the local ecosystem and end-users;
- Tapping on the **support networks and resources** - people with relevant expertise to create further access to outside resources for the end-users but also for the implementation of the entire incubation programme;
- Improving the ability to gain resources and new knowledge among the community of the business incubators.

The main benefit of the cross-sector collaboration stems from its capacity to unlock existing potentialities and produce systemic changes leading towards **transformation of the entire incubation ecosystem**. As it facilitates inter organisational interactions, it puts the business incubator into the leadership function, where it is able to influence and change stakeholders' perspectives and push for scaling up of the new practices.

## PRACTICAL ADVICE

### The following elements are key to a successful cross-sector collaboration:

- It takes time to build the relations between all parties and build the case;
- These partnerships require constant nurturing, investment in terms of resources;
- Expectations from the partners need to be clear and set from the beginning;
- Partners have to be accountable for their responsibilities;
- The role and contribution of each party has to be acknowledged;
- A strong sense of co-creation fosters a strong motivation and alignment of incentives.

Social and inclusive entrepreneurship is directly connected to **the community and local social economy organisations**. These stakeholders should be ideally identified at the feasibility assessment stage (see section 6.a). The expansion of existing networks to the local social organisations while embracing bottom-up approach will be vital for your organisation to gain an understanding of the current local needs and efforts at the grassroots level. Community partners offer not only the relevant knowledge and skills but also credibility and necessary non-financial infrastructure to reach out to marginalised groups. They can become your ally in the development and implementation of your inclusive incubation mission.

## Vision of the stakeholder ecosystem

During the strategy development phase, it is useful to identify critical stakeholders within the incubation ecosystem who are at the core of your incubator's mission. It will be necessary to conduct interviews with the existing stakeholders – those who are already committed and providing support to your inclusive incubation initiative or have promised to do so in the future. These interviews will serve several purposes: identify stakeholder's opinion, strengthen mutual commitment, and fill in potential gaps in your competence and capacities.

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE | EU|BIC EURONOVA, Spain

### Supporting the emergence of migrant entrepreneurs in Malaga

Since 2018 Spain has been one of the countries receiving most of the refugees and migrants in Europe. The asylum application is a human right but, despite the fact that Spain and the EU have clear protocols in this regard, many migrants do not know where and how to find this information.

To this end at EU|BIC Euronova we have been working with a large spectrum of specialised stakeholders from our ecosystem, to respond in an effective way to the most common challenges related to innovative entrepreneurship faced by migrants in Spain. Together with our ecosystem we wish to remove barriers (language, administrative, cultural) in establishing a company and transform the journey to entrepreneurship and venture creation in a feasible solution for refugees and migrants.

An example of best practice in this field is the project '[EasyRights](#)' working on the process of developing a platform to provide its users with personalised and context-sensitive information, taking into account their background, demographics and language skills. The platform supports refugees in their search for answers to different needs, in a way that saves time for both migrants and social service staff and reduces costs for public administration.

— *Sandra García*  
Senior Business Advisor, EU|BIC Euronova

## USEFUL RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- ↗ [BIM Module 4A | Marketing and Stakeholder Management, Part 1](#)
- ↗ [Promoting sustainable entrepreneurship through business incubators, accelerators and innovation hubs](#)
- ↗ [EVPA Policy Brief 2019 | Incubators and Accelerators](#)
- ↗ [OECD SME and Entrepreneurship Papers](#)
- ↗ [MAZE-EVPA Cross Sector Collaboration for Better Social Outcomes 2018](#)

## d. Branding and visibility

In the journey towards building more inclusive incubation practices, it is important to consider the relationship between what is happening inside and outside of your organisation. It is about ensuring that your external conduct is consistent with your internal values, and organisational processes and how this intersection is embedded in your external communication. The section below will help you to reflect on the following questions:

- **What is your brand saying about you as an organisation and your value proposition?**
- **What differentiates social impact communication from other topics?**
- **Are there any adjustments needed in your communication campaign in order to succeed in pursuing your inclusive incubation mission?**

All incubators should communicate with the external ecosystem to promote their organisations and their end-users. The messages your incubator sends to other stakeholders should be consistent with your organisational culture and mission. In case you want to communicate details and impact of your efforts around the inclusive incubation programme, it is important to understand the **need for internal and external alignment** - integrating your external “message” with the new inclusive mission and organisational culture.

The objective of this type of communication is to not only inspire positive social change but also show your commitment to measure the success of your inclusive incubation practices through brand awareness and social impact. For more information also see the sections 6.a. and 6.e.

The primary audience for promoting the inclusive incubator are its end-users/entrepreneurs and stakeholders who can add the most value by supporting the incubator's sustainability and maximising the success of its mission. In the early stage when your incubator tries to establish its organisational brand connected to the support it provides to social and marginalised groups of entrepreneurs, it will be important to invest in the communication and promotion as a way to shape the reputation of the organisation and its value proposition.

### What is organisational brand

Organisational brand relates to organisational culture, behaviour, and communication. All these parts are equally important and must be coherent as they are directly linked to the values and perceptions of the organisation by the stakeholders, including founders, board, employees, and end-users (Balmer & Gray, 2003).

Overall, the organisational branding is a critical long-term investment and is formed and managed as a result of the **strategic communication process**. The following questions need to be asked to structure your communication strategy:

- **Why?** Defining the objective of your communication
- **Who?** Identifying your target audience
- **What?** Formulating your key messages
- **How?** Outlining the main communication channels to reach your audience

There are a number of tools which could be used to convey your messages through strategic communication. They are ranging from:

- traditional approaches such as media advertising and advertorials (advertisements written as objective articles), social media, websites, trade show participation, promotional events, printed materials, video production, publications.
- more creative tools such as blogs and discussion fora, impact storytelling, recommendations from respected sources (investors, universities), tours of the incubator, networking forums and open lectures sponsored by the incubators where different stakeholders are invited.
- publicly available data and figures on the BSO's performance and social impact through the social impact reports which help to build transparency and mutual trust with the key stakeholders – useful advantage in building organisational reputation (see section 6.e).

The appropriate modification and targeted messages are needed to ensure your new value proposition and organisational brand is adequately explained to different stakeholders. You should also consider adjusting the language used when producing promotional material to the target audience and host awareness-raising events in venues that feel open and inclusive. For example, high-tech incubators can build their inclusive image and shape their organisational brand by being intentional about the way they talk about diversity in their organisation but also externally, by communicating about/with vulnerable groups as an integrated part of their community rather than as symbols of diversity.

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE | IMPACT HUB KING'S CROSS, United Kingdom

### Communicating Impact and Inclusion

#### Highlights from the communication strategy of IHUB King's Cross

At Impact Hub King's Cross, our mission is to accelerate entrepreneurial action that benefits people and the planet. We do this through an inspiring workspace, business support, and networks that enable changemakers to thrive in London and beyond. Our brand and the way in which we communicate, orientates around making impact-driven entrepreneurship a reality for everyone.

To do this effectively, we ensure that our unique selling points are centred in our communications strategy, focusing on our legacy within the London social enterprise ecosystem and our impact community, while also emphasising our global presence via the larger Impact Hub network. Furthermore, we ensure that our brand story consistently highlights our key pillars - inclusive entrepreneurship and climate action. These themes are echoed throughout our communications channels, including social media, our website and case studies. Visually, we showcase our brand through bold and brave visuals across our platforms, while highlighting people working together to encapsulate the feeling of being part of our Hub.

Looking ahead to 2023, our goal is to increase the profile of Impact Hub King's Cross by establishing a consistent PR strategy that highlights our legacy and success within impact entrepreneurship, enabling us to reach more entrepreneurs and grow our community.

— *Laura Marney*  
*Programmes Director*  
*Impact Hub King's Cross*

— *Sarah Isaakidis*  
*Marketing and Communication Manager*  
*Impact Hub King's Cross*

## USEFUL RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- [Better Incubation: Communicating Impact](#)
- [Your communications strategy: What are you reporting, and to whom?](#)
- [BIM Module 4A | Marketing and Stakeholder Management, Part- 1](#)
- [Marketing and Stakeholder Management](#)

## e. Impact Measurement and Assessment

This section should help you understand the added value of performance measurement and assessment of your organisation. Especially when it comes to inclusive incubation practices it is important to use monitoring and assessment as a tool to ensure that the support you have been providing to your end-users and your overall contribution to a wider policy or funders' objectives, is relevant and has an impact. You can reflect on the following questions:

- **Why is it important to engage in the impact measurement and assessment as an incubator running inclusive incubation?**
- **What are the main principles for measuring your social impact and its main dimensions?**
- **What are the internationally recognised tools and methodologies you can apply to conduct, monitor and evaluate your social impact?**
- **How to define relevant indicators and collect the data?**
- **How to use the data and results from the social impact measurement and assessment?**

### IMPACT MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

Measurement systems are used to track and monitor the performances and processes of the BSOs. A well-organised system can help improve their organisational performance and can provide feedback that can be further used to improve their efficiency as well as their incubated companies. It can also continually encourage innovation within the incubator so that it is tailored and adapted to its local context (European Commission, 2002).

The incubator's organisational performance should be assessed not only in terms of outputs (immediate results) such as number of social enterprises supported, enterprises created by marginalised individuals or their failure rates, but also in terms of the achieved **long-term impact**, covering wider social, economic, environmental consequences attributable to the activities, including change of unemployment rates of vulnerable groups in the region, improved social capital of the local communities, increased participation of various stakeholders on the ecosystem level.

#### What is social impact

Social impact consists of a set of an organisation's activities that impact directly or indirectly both external stakeholders, internal stakeholders, and more generally the society. It is the reflection of social outcomes as measurements, both long-term and short-term, adjusted for the effects achieved by others, for effects that would have happened anyway, for negative consequences, and for effects declining over time. The social challenges impacted by the organisation's activities mainly depend on local contexts and environment, and therefore cannot be addressed the same way (EC/GECES, 2014).

While it is crucial to monitor and evaluate business incubator's performances, it is not a common practice. The social impact measurement and assessment is a complex exercise for each organisation, regardless of its size and focus. Besides the necessity to have adequate skills and access to expertise, it also requires a critical and reflective attitude of your organisation.



## For the mainstream business incubators, the social impact measurement is particularly important because:

- it helps establish that they can be drivers of local/regional economic and social development, contributing to the relevant public policies.
- it can supply the evidence that they can provide or facilitate innovative solutions to the social/economic challenges.
- it enables them to raise the required resources (preferably diversified funding) to build their organisational processes and capacities and fund their inclusive incubation programmes.
- it increases recognition of the mainstream business incubators through identifying and showcasing their good practices on inclusive incubation across the incubation industry.

The impact measurement life cycle can be divided into several steps. EVPA and European Commission defines a five-stage process for all social impact measurements, to be implemented in sequential order: (EVPA, 2015; EC/GECES, 2014)

- Setting objectives
- Identify stakeholders and their needs
- Setting relevant measurements
- Measure, validate and value
- Report, learn and improve



*The 5 steps of social impact measurement.  
Source: EVPA, 2015*

### Europe's regulatory framework of sustainability

Considering the complexity of measuring social aspects, the EU has taken a leading role in terms of developing sustainability regulations in both the financial and non-financial sectors. To encourage compliance with the social objectives, the classification system 'EU social taxonomy' will define common principles and criteria for the activities that could be considered socially sustainable and ensure uniformity of reporting. It should facilitate decision-making for the impact investors interested in this type of investment, who must ensure that the incubators/companies really implement sustainable practice. It is therefore expected that these regulatory efforts will increase the importance of developing and conducting social impact measurement in the business ecosystem. For more information check:

➤ [Techical exper group on sustainable finance](#)

### WHO CAN BE INTERESTED IN YOUR SOCIAL IMPACT?

The social impact measurement and assessment should embrace the **stakeholder-based approach** and always include the stakeholders' voice (EC/GECES, 2014). It not only helps identify where improvements in your organisational practices are needed but also enables you to manage and communicate the social value you create.

Equally, each stakeholder in the ecosystem can directly benefit from your social impact management and assessment. Their interests and needs can be defined through the stakeholders mapping (see section 6.c) or through direct interactions:

- For public authorities it can be useful to evaluate the efficiency of their policies, or the impact of their interventions supported through your BSO;
- Impact investors could be seeking solid data to be used for measuring the social value of their investments;
- For citizens and social economy organisations it can be interesting to see how your BSO contributes to the community needs with innovative solutions.

## WHAT TO MEASURE?

There is no standard methodology for measuring incubator performance, therefore it is essential to define the relevant indicators (Key Performance Indicators - KPIs) which will be used as a basis for the measurement. For social impact, the choice of indicators is based on what dimensions you want to measure (societal needs, objectives, resources/inputs, activities, results), allowing you to assess both quantitatively and qualitatively various aspects of your incubator's social impact.

### Tools to identify social impact indicators

In order to find and manage indicators and measure impact, here are the valuable resources and internationally recognised tools:

- ↗ [Global Value Exchange](#)
- ↗ [Local Multiplier 3](#)
- ↗ [Social Impact Canvas](#)
- ↗ [Outcomes Stars](#)
- ↗ [IRIS Base](#)

### PRACTICAL ADVICE

We recommend starting with few assessment dimensions and few indicators: the ones that are the most important for your organisation. It is often counterproductive to measure too many dimensions and set too many indicators as you will not be able to properly focus on all of them.

## HOW TO MEASURE?

An assessment (or evaluation) is a systemic approach for estimating the "value" of an action or activity. An impact assessment allows you to estimate the consequences of your organisational activities. The basic assumption here is that different kinds of incubators can have different measurement needs.

There are multiple methodologies available for the BSOs to conduct the social impact assessment (non-exhaustive list):

- ↗ [Cost-effectiveness analysis](#) (quantitative)
- ↗ [Cost-benefit analysis](#) (quantitative)

- [Social Return on Investment](#) (quantitative)
- [Capability approach](#) (qualitative)
- [Qualitative survey](#) (qualitative)
- [Theory of change](#) (qualitative)
- [Stakeholder mapping](#) (qualitative)

## HOW TO MONITOR AND ASSESS

It is important that monitoring and assessment are designed to be objective and systematic. The impact assessment should address the following key questions:

- Objectives/Need: What are the objectives of the incubator? What is (are) the problem(s) that you are trying to address as an incubator?
- Inputs/Resources: What resources are you using to meet these objectives?
- Processes/Activities: What are you doing to meet these objectives?
- Outputs/Outcomes: What are the results of these processes/activities?
- Evidence: How do you know that it is the incubator that has made a difference?

## USING THE RESULTS

While ways to measure impact differ, this approach requires a systematic collection and tracking of data – quantitative and qualitative. The impact data is a foundation for continuous learning and offers a huge advantage to convey the essence of the social, economic, and environmental impact of the work done in your BSO. It also provides an opportunity to give a clear picture of how your organisation is performing and to refine your organisational processes or your stakeholders' approach. This data and insights can be afterwards translated through effective communication and made available to your stakeholders via your website, annual or impact reports, content generation etc.

Monitoring the changes in impact you have gathered through the data collection over time can feed into your organisational strategy. It is expected that the impact and agility of your programme dedicated to supporting social and marginalised entrepreneurs will increase as it assimilates the learnings derived from the previous iterations and cohorts. The extent of this change can serve as an indicator of added value of your entire inclusive incubation programme to the core activities of your organisation.

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE | EU|BIC Candidate SocialFare, Italy

#### Accelerating Impact: the case of Unobravo company

SocialFare has a strong experience in startup acceleration, innovative methodology implementation, and specific expertise in Social Innovation methodologies and practices to support the design, validation, and acceleration of social impact ideas and their business applications.

SocialFare is merged in a wide network of entrepreneurship actors having developed strong connections with the territory and the local relevant stakeholders belonging to the world of Social Impact, Business Acceleration, Impact Investing, Research & Innovation, and policymaking.

SocialFare has its own Seed fund called SocialFare Seed and supporting the startup Unobravo was one of their recent success stories.

4 months of intensive acceleration and expert consultancy with our Acceleration Team and the network of advisors have led Unobravo to grow immediately at an uncommon pace, distinguishing itself among the most promising impact startups in the Italian panorama. The choice of SocialFare Seed is to invest in forward-looking ideas, being an investment vehicle dedicated to SocialFare startups. SocialFare Seed were the first to invest in Unobravo by betting on a project which was still in its infancy, led by an Italian psychologist under 30 going through her very first entrepreneurial experience.

Today Unobravo employs over 2,000 people (93% women) and offers psychological support to 40,000 patients.

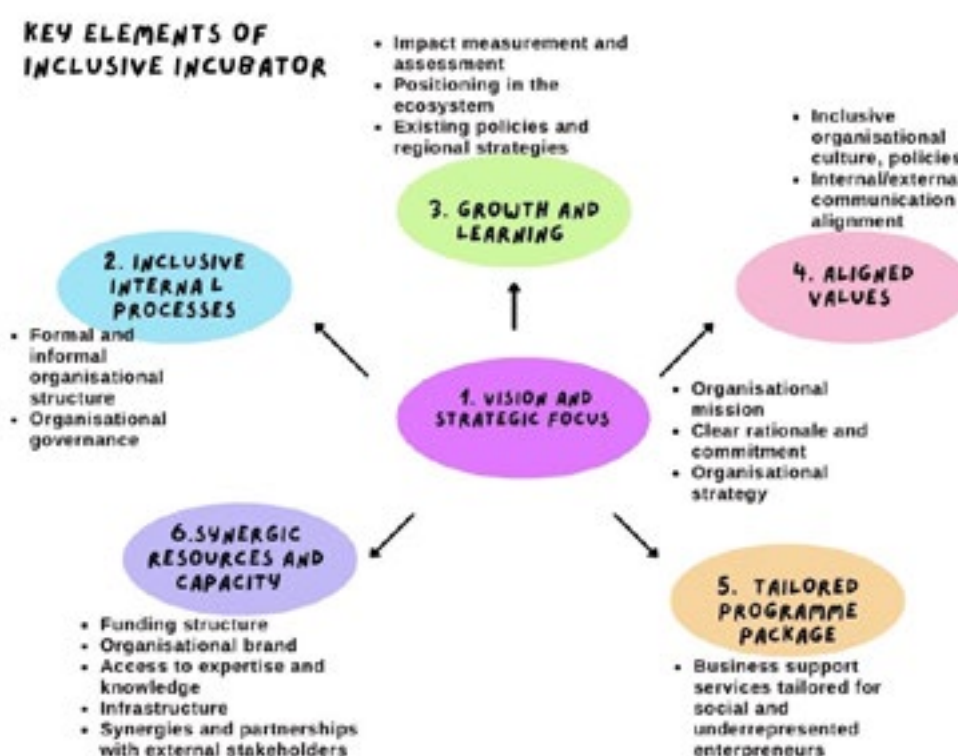
— *Martina Muggiri*  
*Acceleration Manager, EU|BIC Candidate SocialFare*

## USEFUL RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- ↗ [EVPA, A practical guide to measuring and managing impact](#)
- ↗ [Better Incubation, Module 3 – Impact Measurement and Management](#)
- ↗ [Proposed approaches to social impact measurement in European Commission legislation](#)
- ↗ [Proposals for social impact measurement and management](#)
- ↗ [Monitoring, Evaluation and Benchmarking](#)
- ↗ [Final Report on Social Taxonomy](#)
- ↗ [Better Incubation Toolkit: I want to make my incubator more inclusive, what now?](#)

# 7. Key elements of an inclusive incubator

On their journey to incorporate inclusive incubation into their core organisational priorities, the business incubators should consider several factors identified by the Better Incubation Roadmap called **“The key elements of an inclusive incubator”**. These dimensions represent a combination of organisational vision, processes, growth and learning, services and resources and can be selected and implemented based on the priorities and needs of each business incubator.



## 1. IMPLANT INCLUSIVE INCUBATION PRINCIPLES IN YOUR OVERALL ORGANISATIONAL VISION AND STRATEGIC FOCUS

The visionary outlook is a backbone of your organisational commitment towards the inclusive incubation principles and clarifies your rationale why your business incubator engages in inclusive practices. It should be reflected in:

- the mission statement which should clearly communicate the ultimate value your incubator brings to its end-users and other stakeholders through inclusive incubation;
- the strategic plan outlining the scope of your activities containing quantifiable objectives on how you are planning to achieve the inclusive programme goals;
- the feasibility study and business plan on whether and how to support the social and/or marginalised entrepreneurs in your territory and justify how it is linked to your core organisational priorities.

## 2. MAINSTREAM INCLUSIVE INCUBATION PROCESSES INTO YOUR STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

Given the vast number of organisational processes, identify and focus on just the critical few processes that will allow you to execute the relevant parts of the organisational strategy.

- Once you agree on integrating the inclusive incubation elements in your organisational strategy, the objectives should be supported by the Board, management, and championed by those within the organisation who will be responsible for implementing the inclusive programme.
- The organisational strategy should be managed through the appropriate governance mechanism to integrate the inclusive incubation programme into your organisation.
- Consider the changes in the responsibilities of internal stakeholders of your incubator related to functioning, monitoring and evaluation of the incubator's operations, performance, impact, and sustainability.
- Build up the organisational structure that is responsive to day-to-day needs of your inclusive incubation programme.
- Decide on the route to build and integrate the team or experts working on your inclusive incubation programme into the organisation: vertically integrated, cross-functional, or separate team of experts.

## 3. LINK ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH WITH LEARNING

The success of your inclusive incubation programme is a two-way process. It depends on how your internal processes enable your knowledge and learnings to be captured, assimilated, and reviewed. In addition, having a clear picture of your inclusive entrepreneurship programme impact allows you to refine and adjust your organisational strategy, making sure that learnings are not ignored or diluted.

- Seek to integrate your inclusive incubator programme into the broader economic development policy goals and into the fabric of the community in which you operate.
- Periodically monitor your performance and social impact to demonstrate the benefits of the policy and funding support you receive and the added value you provide for your end-users (entrepreneurs) and community.
- Conduct a systematic collection and tracking of data – quantitative and qualitative.
- Make sure to incorporate the stakeholder-based approach and feedback into your policy and programme adaptation strategies.

## 4. INTEGRATE THE VALUES OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ACROSS THE ORGANISATION

The organisational values represent the internal normative environment and show how the priorities are organised and decided in your organisation. They impact every aspect of the organisation and provide guiding principles for your employees with purpose and direction.

- Translate the inclusive values included in the organisation's mission into your organisational culture and internal communication.
- Integrate the culture of diversity and inclusion into the mainstream organisational policies, practices, and programmes.
- Cascade the inclusive culture from the top leadership levels to day-to-day operations across the organisation.

→ Ensure your organisational values are aligned with your external communication strategy and programme approach.

## 5. DESIGN A TAILORED PROGRAMME PACKAGE

This organisational element includes practical implementation of the inclusive incubation programme. For the mainstream incubators it means designing the package services specifically tailored for the social and underrepresented entrepreneurs. The mainstream business incubators should conduct an honest analysis of their practices and place particular emphasis on developing dedicated hands-on business support services for these groups to adapt to their unique needs through entrepreneur training, business advice, financing, network resources, etc.

The Better Incubation project offers two comprehensive guidelines that will support you and your organisation through the process of designing and implementing your inclusive programme package for the underrepresented groups and entrepreneurs.

↗ [Better Incubation: Collection of Best Practices in Inclusive Entrepreneurship Support Programmes](#)

↗ [Toolkit: I want to make my incubator more inclusive, what now?](#)

Other resources:

↗ [Social Seeds: Methodological guide for social incubator](#)

↗ [Design Thinking for Impact Incubation Toolkit](#)

↗ [Innovation Compass: Responsible innovation toolkit](#)

## 6. BOOST YOUR POTENTIAL THROUGH AVAILABLE RESOURCES AND CAPACITY

There are multiple organisational and external resources that need to be made available for your organisation to ensure a solid framework for your inclusive incubation programme and expanded operations. The success component also lies in how your incubator connects with the strategic networks and local stakeholders. These strategic investments into your in-house capacities and external resources can allow you to become a catalyst who can initiate changes towards the transformation of the entrepreneurship ecosystem:

→ Develop a long-term sustainable funding model to enable implementation of the core activities of your inclusive incubation programme.

→ Aim for reducing your dependence on public support and diversify your funding streams.

→ Take a stock of the available human resources in your organisation and develop your in-house knowledge base and expertise through continuous capacity development.

→ Expand your organisational competence by reaching towards external expertise and creating knowledge-based alliances.

→ Create strategic partnerships to increase your impact, influence and leadership role in the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

→ Build your inclusive image and shape your organisational brand by aligning your internal values with your external practices and communication.

# 8. Conclusion and policy implications

Final remarks by Kristian Mancinone, Social Innovation Expert at ART-ER and Chairman of the EBN Social Impact Special Interest Group.

As we overcome the pandemic, as we prepare necessary reforms and as we speed up the twin green and digital transitions, I believe it is time to also adapt the social rulebook.

A rulebook which ensures solidarity between generations.

A rulebook that rewards entrepreneurs who take care of their employees.  
Which focuses on jobs and opens up opportunities.

Which puts skills, innovation and social protection on an equal footing.

— *President Ursula von der Leyen*  
*European Commission President*  
*20 January 2021*

The [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) is the European strategy dealing with fair and equal job conditions for people; the 20 principles of the Action Plan are priorities for entrepreneurs aiming at solving pressing societal challenges and making their workplace better to increase productivity and wellbeing of their workforce. Nonetheless, this strategy underlines the importance for entrepreneurs to be aware of the impacts they generate at territorial level and almost all the business environment is becoming more and more conscious of the importance of a systemic approach to face the current crisis.

The Pillar and its 20 principles indicate the conditions under which the twin transition can be reached through the incorporation of social issues in companies' sustainability strategies through enriching and empowering the workforce and enabling territorial partnerships for prosperity.

The [European Skills Agenda](#) stresses the role of regional ecosystems in supporting skills development for people to face the twin transition and overcome the job losses due to the crisis, so that “*nobody is left behind and the economic recovery as well as the green and digital transitions are socially fair and just*”.

The [Transition Pathway for Proximity and Social Economy Ecosystems](#) underlines that “increasing awareness and improving the perception among mainstream businesses of the potential of social economy models - for example, in terms of economic performance and sectoral added value - is an important step in promoting partnerships. To achieve this, it is crucial that social economy businesses also have access to business support available to mainstream businesses, as appropriate. Stakeholders confirmed the key role that business communities, such as sector organisations, chambers of commerce, incubators and extra- or intrapreneurs, can play in achieving this”.



All the mentioned documents and strategies underpin a full commitment by different organisations at territorial level and surely Business Support Organisations have a role in supporting territorial ecosystems and governments (at different levels) in designing competitiveness and innovation policies which can ease the twin transition taking care of the social dimension.

First, they are at the forefront in identifying promising solutions to solve social and environmental challenges through scouting and open innovation programmes they design and implement. Setting the scene for a new wave of incubation and acceleration programmes which are based on responsibility and integrity (see the preface) is a must have for the next generation of BSOs.

Second, they do support the next generations of entrepreneurs accessing capital market; they need to deal with the winds of change in this market, more and more oriented to impact strategies than only profit-distributing billionaire exits and scalable but not sustainable startups (see the ongoing debate unicorn vs. zebras).

Third, and this is particularly important for public-funded organisations, they have a duty on funds they receive in order to demonstrate that their activity generates not only revenue and profits, but a more distributed wellbeing in the territory they are invested in.

New economic approaches are taking the scene at global level: Doughnut Economy, Economy of Common Good, Benefit Corporations, Frugal Innovation; this means that markets have understood the importance of changing mainstream approaches to business development. Diversity management, corporate social innovation, sustainable prosperity and empathy are no more buzzwords for big corporations: if they integrate such approaches in their business strategy to attract and retain talents, engage customers and adopt a purpose over profit approach to markets.

Business Support Organisations need to be equipped with the right tools to support would-be entrepreneurs, social enterprises, and social-tech startups in facing this new way of doing business through adequate tools and programmes.

The 2023 Year of Skills is an opportunity together with the implementation of regional and national ESF+ funds to engage governments in investing in incubation and acceleration programmes that adopt a Triple Bottom Line approach (People, Planet, Profit) adding Purpose as a way to improve new skills for better supporting new entrepreneurs and inclusive entrepreneurship and incubation programmes.

This Better Incubation Roadmap (together with the other Better Incubation project outputs) is the perfect tool not only for BSOs but even for enlightened policymakers willing to design new purpose-driven policy based on a shared distribution of responsibilities in facing and solving societal challenges in the next future. If this Roadmap is used as a tool for implementing Transformative Policies at local level, this will surely benefit all the actors involved in designing such policies from an inclusive perspective.

## USEFUL RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- ↗ [European Pillar of Social Rights](#)
- ↗ [European Skills Agenda](#)
- ↗ [The transition pathway on proximity and social economy](#)
- ↗ [Stop Looking For Unicorns—Be A Zebra Instead](#)

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