

Title: Is it Possible to Make Mentoring Projects Financially Sustainable?

Facilitator and room number: Elmira Kakabayeva, Room 1.102

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Number of participants: 8

Who are you and to which institution do you belong?

My name is Elmira Kakabayeva, I am managing Education Centre at Mentori National Resource Centre in Mentorship - an initiative of Rybakov Foundation. Mentori's mission is to be an infrastructural platform for mentoring organizations and projects to make their work more advanced, sustainable, and professionally connected. To fulfill our mission we are developing several infrastructural solutions: IT platform that includes mentoring programmes for teenagers, students, elderly (in progress) that are realized through private profiles, matching system and individual schedules and diaries; an interactive nationwide map of organizations that develop mentoring projects; event calendar for those organizations; mediatheque of mentoring programmes and tools; a collection of mentoring programmes (in progress). We also run an annual international mentoring conference Global Mentori - the first international event on mentorship in Russia (2 days in November, 100 speakers, 3000 participants). As a result, we have established a Consortium of Mentorship with the most active organizations that develop mentoring projects to solve complex infrastructural problems through intellectual and financial collaboration.

What is your major starting question or hypothesis

Who are the main stakeholders of mentoring projects? Where can we find sustainable funding for the projects that are focused on social-psychological support? We at Mentori resource center in Moscow believe that mentoring projects can be financially sustainable if we look at the new trends in business, technologies, and philanthropy.

Starting questions:

Is it possible to make mentoring projects financially sustainable?

Where are you getting your funds from in Europe? Are there any risks?

What do you need to think about in terms of sustainability?

Sequence of content/methods:

Each participant presented himself/herself. The facilitator shared the context and challenges she is facing in her organisation in Russia. Participants were able to participate during a Q&A approach.

The facilitator created a scheme on the flip chart to explain her ideas and challenges, showing the several services and core businesses of her organisation. Then the discussion was launched by introducing the questions for discussions (see above).

Main arguments presented by the facilitator:

- The project was recognised and it got funding for the period of three years, so now it can deliver services to other organisations to be sustainable.
- Based on the needs shared by the different Russian organisations it is foreseen to be a source of cash flow for big events and trainings as well as to provide a website to manage those organisations far away.
- The fundraising has to be "aggressive": focus on what people are willing to give to deliver the "social value" targeted by the programme, which can only be perceived as fair if "selling" works together with ethics, impact evaluation and communication to funders.

Three main points of discussion:

- How can long term funding be achieved when a time-bound project funding ends (practitioners and programme managers/coordinators)?

- Participation in grants: “We believe, if we give grants the project only lasts for the duration of the grant, but we want them to be sustainable” (funder).
- It is a very difficult context in a situation of lack of funding and poor communities.

Results of the session:

The session provided good inputs to the facilitator and participants:

- **All the participants agreed that the topic of sustainable funding for mentoring programmes should be taken into consideration more seriously:** Public funding can be very helpful, but it is necessary to consider if it is budgeted as a project (grant) or as a service (more continuity). In Germany, the funding is specialising on refugee projects at the moment. No one present knew whether the funding will continue, when the urgency for refugee projects will decline. A participant that is funded by the municipality (3 different ministries: education, environment and urban planning) and EU social funding (2 to 3 years and renewed) shared that even if the project is successful, the investors won't fund it again. The participant shared that he doesn't see any alternative to this kind of funding at the moment. **The conclusion is that a project has to diversify its funding sources and target groups also.**
- Other concerns were related to the way the investors/funders see mentoring programmes. **Investors/funders look at mentoring programmes as projects and not as services or programmes.** It is not clear what values and outcomes they see in mentoring programmes and services.
- Another reason for the recent funding situation is related to the design of the social sector in general: often the same organisations and structures receive the public funding.
- Also **social organisation managers and entrepreneurs need to be trained to develop strong fundraising strategies and skills.** This is why the facilitator urged to invest in the communication with stakeholders. People from NGOs should be trained to become good “sellers” of their services.
- Finally, to sell services it is most important to define the consumer and what added value is being delivered. This will tell a lot about the type of organisation and how it can get funds.

References:

- www.mentori.ru
- www.global.mentori.ru