



Women Ambassadors, Sweden

What?

The 'Women Ambassadors' scheme was set up to: (i) increase the visibility of female entrepreneurship; (ii) inspire female entrepreneurship through personal stories and role models; (iii) make it easier for women to identify with entrepreneurial role models; (iv) encourage more women to view entrepreneurship as a potential career; and (v) help women to address their entrepreneurial challenges by sharing their experiences.

Why?

The main motivation was to influence the norms related to individuals' occupational choices by challenging the mainstream image of entrepreneurship as a male pursuit. A national survey asked the general population to name a business-owner or entrepreneur; only 6% mentioned a woman, even though 30% of Swedish enterprises are run by women. To address this perception, 880 women entrepreneurs were selected as ambassadors to help promote female entrepreneurship and to increase the desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship among women.

Key activities

The project lasted between 2008 and 2014. The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth was responsible for co-ordinating and implementing the project at a national level. Regional co-ordinators could apply for funding to implement the project in each region. They were responsible for organising meetings and networking opportunities for the ambassadors in their region, and for informing local authorities and interest groups about the project. The selection of ambassadors was key to the success of the scheme. A particular emphasis was placed on creating a diverse group of ambassadors in terms of ethnicity, age, industry, company size and geographic region. Priority was given to women who had been running an enterprise for more than two years. Examples of ambassadors' activities include speaking in schools, sharing experiences with women interested in starting a business, and developing networks for women in business.

The programme also provided direct advice and coaching to potential women entrepreneurs. On occasion, ambassadors have provided women the opportunity to follow them in their daily work to gain practical experience of everyday life as a business owner. Hence, the project has been a combined effort to promote entrepreneurship and to share experiences with potential entrepreneurs.

Impact

The initiative involved approximately 2 000 women entrepreneurs. The ambassadors had reached more than 170 000 women in approximately 11 000 activities. The survey of programme participants and ambassadors has shown that the participants had more interest in entrepreneurship after meeting an ambassador. The ambassadors found the scheme helpful in terms of developing stronger personal brand, expanding social networks and enhancing their competencies.

This case study was adapted from material published in: OECD/EU (2016), Inclusive Business Creation: Good Practice Compendium, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251496-en> [1]

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Links

[1] <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251496-en>