



Added Value of Networking

Success Story

Success Story title *Connecting support structures for entrepreneurs in rural areas*

Theme *Knowledge exchange; Training*

NRN *Sweden* Coordinator *NSU*

Partners *Regional and local authorities and business support bodies*

Period *Spring 2011 – Dec 2012*

Geo-location *Arvidsjaur, Hässleholm, Uddevalla, Bålsta, Vimmerby, Sundsvall*

Beneficiaries *Regional and local authority civil servants and organizations and consultants giving support to entrepreneurs and in the end the beneficiaries are the individual rural entrepreneurs.*

Background

Many entrepreneurs, especially if they live in rural areas, are facing time-consuming problems to get in touch with all different authorities, advisory service organizations, funding institutions etc. when they want to start a new or develop their existing businesses. It is also difficult just to get to know who all the actors are and what they can offer. There is a knowledge and information gap between the needs of the entrepreneurs and the advisory services and other forms of support they can get.

The Network initiated activities to bring these business service actors together discussing how better coordination and cooperation would create benefits for the entrepreneurs. Offering a meeting place, where the entrepreneurs can meet all these actors at the same occasion in one single place, is one of the solutions coming out of the activity. The challenge was “How can we offer better support to rural businesses and entrepreneurs helping them taking their ideas into action?”

Main activities

In Spring 2011 six regional events were organized called 24-hours race inviting all regional actors offering advisory or financial services to entrepreneurs in rural areas. The places gave a possibility to get participants covering all the 21 counties in Sweden. From lunch the first day to lunch the next day the participants were gathered and with a moderator and several facilitators they all cooperated in a process leading from formulation of the challenge to ideas and commitment to a concrete solution. The process method is called RICA, which stands for the four phases in the workshop process, Research, Idea, Concept and Action. Research is a phase to get a common picture and understanding of the problem and challenge. Idea is a phase where all workshop participants are suggesting several creative, brave and innovative solutions. In the concept phase the group choose those ideas that are believed best and most possible to implement creating a plan for how to perform by whom and when. In the last action phase all small workshop groups are trying to “sell” their concept to the others.





Main results/benefits

The best concept of all six races was promised an “Award of honour” at the yearly Rural Gala arranged by the NRN. Several concepts, including the awarded one, have come to practical use. In the Örebro County, which got the award for “Best support” initiative was tested locally in two places during autumn 2011 and the concept is now to be permanent. The County administration is organizing a joint day for entrepreneurs in the towns of the county with the participation of actors like The Swedish Tax Agency, The National Exports Council, Local banks, Coompanion, Almi (a state owned business financing institute), LEADER, The Public Employment Service, Municipality of Örebro etc. Three meetings like this are planned for spring 2012 and more will follow.

A similar idea but with features of the TV-concept “Dragons den” has been implemented in the Småland region. The support organizations were seated in a half circle and in front of them the entrepreneurs had 2 minutes each to present their business or development idea. The different actors gave their responses immediately and after the 2-minute presentations there was time for speed-dating with the most relevant actors. There are more “Dragons dens”, or actually “Idea challenges”, already planned.

One, maybe unexpected result, was that the different support actors learned a lot from seeing and listening to each other in action. It created synergies between them. The NSU is also planning a meeting with all the County Administrations to present the results and good examples.

Another result is that the website www.verksam.se, giving structured information and services of value for the entrepreneurs from the three government agencies – the Swedish Companies Registration Office, the Swedish Tax Agency and the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, now will have added information about rural development and the RDP from the Swedish Board of Agriculture.

Contribution of the NSU

The idea came from a working group within the NRN and the role of the NSU was the practical organizations of the event but also acting as facilitators in the process and sometimes even moderators of the whole meeting. The dissemination of the results through reports the “Award of honour” and also with the follow up meeting during spring 2012 is organized by the NSU.

Contribution of the partners

The partners in the NRN initiated the idea. The regional business and entrepreneurship support organizations have been actively involved in the 24-hours races and have also been assigned responsibility for the implementation of the concepts.

Success factors

There are several success factors in this:

1. The different business support actors, authorities as well as organizations and business consultants get to meet each other and can learn to know each other better creating a synergy of expertise and also a possible coordination of their activities.
2. The interactive methods in the workshops creating a process designed to result in concrete actions and commitment.
3. The format with lunch to lunch meeting creates a relaxed and at the same time more focused environment. The participants have set aside time and efforts to an active participation.
4. With a better coordination of the different business support actors the entrepreneurs get to meet all important actors more easily and maybe in one single occasion and can get their responses immediately.
5. When such meeting platforms are organized the entrepreneurs get also to meet with other rural entrepreneurs which can create synergies.
6. In one single website, rural entrepreneurs can find all relevant information needed from government agencies, when developing their business.

Additional information

<http://www.landsbygdsnatverket.se/huvudomraden/omnatverket/arbetsgrupper/gruppstodjaentreprenorer.4.510b667f12d37>

