



## SENIOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURING

Building capacity among seniors to serve as  
social change brokers in communities

Erasmus+ 2016-18



## HOW TO WORK WITH THE PROJECT IN PRACTICE?

Inspiration for practice partners

This small guide addresses the project's practice partners, while  
another paper addresses and invites the seniors directly



## WHY A PRACTICAL GUIDE?

*Why not just read the application?*

Well, the application is a long document and full of all sorts of information - and, frankly, somewhat theoretical and abstract.

Therefore we need to “translate” the application into a more practical language, trying to tell the story about the project from a partner and community point of view.

This is what we are doing in this small inspirational guide.

In this context “guide” does not mean “manual”: we do not pretend to know precisely what should happen in the local practices; if we knew that, we wouldn’t need the project ☺

Therefore “guide” means much more something like telling the stories of the project and its missions in a more practical language - and with a view to what the project might look like from a practice partner perspective.



## WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT AND WHY?

*What is, then, the “core” of the project, or as we sometimes says the “juice” of the project?*

In the application we can read:

The project objective is to mobilise teams of seniors in participating project communities and beyond to build capacity among them to serve as SOCIAL CHANGE BROKERS in these communities, spotting social change needs, bringing together relevant stakeholders and citizens and facilitate or drive the social change process, and to exploit the social change

processes to sustain their activity through creating appropriate organisational frameworks, be it as volunteers, association members, employees, consultants or social service providers.

*What does that mean and why are we doing this?*

The idea of the project comes from 3 challenges:

- people live much longer and there will be many more seniors in our societies; therefore it is getting still more important to re-engage those seniors in social and economic life
- our national budgets, especially our social budgets, are under pressure and many countries will not be able to or willing to finance some of the social services we are used to; many known and new social needs will remain unmet
- our sponsor, the European Commission, invites us all to find new ways of practicing democracy: engaging citizens much more actively and directly in finding new ways of solving problems in the communities and through what is called cross-sector responsibility

So, if you put these 3 challenges together, you have:  
Senior Social Entrepreneuring!

The idea is, then, to find and engage experienced seniors and create interesting experiments about how they can help identify and solve present and future social needs.

We will come back to what “experienced” means later...

Of course, we cannot expect our seniors to understand right away what they are supposed to do, even if they are clever, resourceful and experienced.

We need time in the local teams to discuss and understand what senior social brokering means, to find a common “language” and to take the first steps.

This process can be quite complicated and the project is aware that considerable time will be needed.

This first “capacity building” among local partners and seniors is extremely important and the practice partners should put a lot of effort into this.

*What is it that the project would like the seniors to engage in?*

When the Commission invites us to engage citizens much more in solving social problems, in particular at local level, we have to ask: *But who will do this? Who has the time and the resources and the motivation?*

Definitely not all citizens!

But perhaps precisely experienced seniors!

*Why is that?*

Because they have the time, they might have had long and interesting lives and know very many things - and they might like the idea that even if you are a senior, and perhaps retired, you can still carry out extremely important missions in society and create interesting engagement for yourself to enrichen your life... Being a senior does not mean that you do not wish to be challenged ☺

So, perhaps precisely seniors could be such citizens identifying and responding to social problems, needs and challenges.

This is what the project would like to help find out - along with similar European initiatives.

*Yes, we agree, but how?*

How are they supposed to do that, and how are practice partners supposed to support them?

Let us take a look at what kind of activity such senior social entrepreneurship include:

### LOOKING AT THE COMMUNITY

The project would like the team of seniors to look at the community and ask such questions as: What does not work here? What should be improved or changed - or what should be created? Do groups of citizens have needs and interests not met? Could something be done?

Of course, "community" does not mean London or Barcelona. Community could be small or medium size towns or cities, a part of a bigger city, a suburb - or it could be a community of unemployed, elderly or young people.

It's important to define our communities in a realistic and useful way.

Obviously, some needs and interest cannot just be spotted by taking a walk in the city: the senior team might have to study certain things in the community and go and talk to people who know about such needs and interests.

And, of course, the result should not be a long list of needs and interests. Our project is a small project, and the seniors will need to end up focusing on challenges they find interesting and that are important to the community.

Let's get back to the possible nature of such needs and interests below.

### INVOLVING CITIZENS

Once the senior team has identified one or more social challenges to address, one of the first steps would be to talk to the citizens who have such needs: dialogue with the "target groups", as we say.

It's important to know what they need, what they think - and even to try to involve some of them in the solutions.

Bottom-up "social innovation" will never be successful if we do not stay close to the citizens...

### BRINGING TOGETHER RESOURCES

Then a very interesting challenge: of course the seniors cannot make social changes by themselves; that is obvious.

And the idea is precisely NOT to point to the public authorities and say: "Hey, this is your responsibility".

We are precisely trying to leave this dependency on public funding.

The seniors will need to ask such questions as: who might be willing to support the needed changes? Who might have an interest? Who should contribute - depending on the nature of the needs and the changes proposed...?

The seniors will need to try to bring such resources together and create a joint venture, a joint mission - and they will need to use the now famous step-by-step approach, slowly building up alliances to bring the right resources together...

Such resources might be all sorts of stakeholders in the community, depending on the type of social mission we are addressing: private companies, NGO's in the field addressed, clubs, research bodies, educations, financial institutions - and of course public authorities.

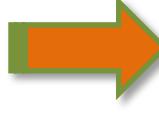
And, not to forget: the citizens themselves ☺

### CREATING POSSIBLE MISSIONS

The seniors will need to lead and "facilitate" this "bringing resources together". They will also need to help this resource group to create solutions: this means define social change missions, including planning, financing, etc.

The seniors are not expected to carry out the missions!

They are expected to help create the missions and follow the missions along the first steps.

 So, the project is simply about: trying to do this in practice and learning from it: what did we do well, what should we do differently next time.  
And, tell the stories about all this.  
That's all, folks ☺



## BEING A PRACTICE PARTNER

*What are the roles of the practice partner, then?*

Well, basically the practice partner represents the project at local level - and therefore needs to "translate" the project into something practically useful in the community.

Different partners, countries and communities will need to adjust the project to local contexts and opportunities.

Nothing wrong with that, as long as we all follow the general principles in the project and work on the same mission ☺

Therefore we can quite easily list the most important roles of the practice partners:

- to bring the project to the local seniors in an understandable language
- to build capacity among the seniors along the first phases, to understand and work in the project
- to support the seniors in their first community actions, to learn from them and alongside them
- to help the seniors to tell the stories to the local community and to the project
- and to share practice and new knowledge in the project

One thing is important in this kind of project: the project is not organised hierarchically like:

- the project knows what do to and tell it to the practice partners
- the practice partners know what to do and tell it to the seniors
- the seniors are asked to go do it!

The project is not like that.

The project does not know more about how to practice senior social entrepreneurship than the seniors - and the same goes for the practice partners. Therefore the practice partners will need to work side by side with the seniors, learn with them and learn from them.

True innovation is not happening if we all know how to do it even before starting the project.

*Last, but not least, it is an important role for practice partners to make the project aware of emerging needs and opportunities along the project - to help the project to take appropriate action.*

In short, practice partners will experience the same kind of frustration, obstacles, roadblocks and resistance as will the seniors, and considerable effort will be needed to overcome all this.



## THE SENIORS

“Experienced seniors”, we said earlier in this paper.  
*Why is that, and what does it mean?*

We do not expect all kinds of seniors to be able to become senior social entrepreneurs or social change brokers.

Being a senior is not enough.

We are looking for a special kind of seniors.

If we look at what the seniors are expected to do as social change brokers, we understand that we are looking for a special group of seniors.

The seniors should be selected on the basis of what they are expected to do in the project, nothing else.

If we think that they will be able to carry out social change brokering, after some capacity building of course, then these are the seniors we need.

Of course, we could create a sort of “competence profile” for such seniors, and even some very detailed ones, but why not be pragmatic and direct and ask: *which are the most important characteristics of the seniors we need?*

So, let us provide some short and clear answers:

- seniors that are willing to engage in and enjoy considerable challenges and to mobilise their resources to solve important social problems
- seniors with clear entrepreneurial mind-sets, not always going by the book
- seniors with considerable experience in networking, creating new forms of solutions, negotiating and finding new ways
- seniors who know their way around the community
- seniors who are used to communicate with different people and institutions and who are fluent online communicators as well
- seniors who have ambitions to take such engagement further
- seniors who might see social change brokering as an opportunity to enrichen their senior lives in different ways...

Such skills and mentality can be obtained in very many different ways.

What do not matter are such things as educational background or level, language competences, financial or similar resources, formal academic skills or having had important jobs or having managed a major company.

These things do not automatically lead to capacity to social change brokering.

As mentioned, we cannot expect the seniors to be fully prepared to serve as social change brokers.

What we must be aware of is: the seniors to engage have such profiles that we expect them to become good social change brokers.

It is, of course, highly recommended to let the seniors work in teams - at least along the first steps in the processes. Later on, they might wish individually to pursue the missions they have defined and decided to engage in...

An important thing is that some of the seniors might wish to make a business, a job or a volunteering as a result of their engagements.

In this case we should definitely support such steps, as it adds to the sustainability of the social initiatives.

*The role as a social change broker is not a “charity”, but an entrepreneurial engagement.*



## BROKERING

Let's take a moment to look at the most important work in the project: "brokering".

*Why did the project decide on this word?*

Because we wish to make it clear that we are creating a new profile - a new social innovation profile, so to speak, different from such known profiles as: mentors, facilitators, coaches - and even from the profile of the social entrepreneur (as the social change brokering need not lead to establishing a social business).

Brokering means:

- negotiating
- networking
- bringing people together to work on something
- initiative-taking and engaging others in the initiatives

This is precisely what senior social brokering means in our project: a person that detects problems and needs, finds out more about those problems and needs, takes initiatives to bring relevant resources together and to propose possible ways to solve the problems and meet the needs.

It is important to understand that the senior social change broker is NOT supposed to create the solutions alone, and NOT supposed to implement the proposed solutions: the seniors are expected to drive, lead, take initiatives - but at a certain point the missions must be taken over by a group of stakeholders willing to carry out the social missions.

An important role of the senior broker is therefore to engage other resources and to make them work together towards accomplishing social missions.

This also means that a senior broker can work on more than one mission at the same time - depending on time and resources available, of course.

A senior social change broker is more than anything a driver of social change initiatives!!



## SOCIAL NEEDS

*What does “social needs and interests” mean in our project?*

What kind of challenges or needs in the community should the seniors detect, identify and spot?

All sorts of needs and challenges? NO, definitely not.

The project is called seniors social entrepreneurship because the focus is on social needs and challenges.

So, building a new road or creating an ice-cream shop is hardly within the scope of the project ☺

*But what does “social” mean, then?*

The word “social” is of course rather problematic as it can mean nothing and everything at the same time.

However, let us try to find out what “social” means in our context.

In our context social needs covers:

- welfare related to groups of citizens, such as elderly, children, young people, handicapped, migrants, etc.
- needs linked to health and well-being
- infrastructures in the community bringing people together
- livable environments
- any social activity in the community benefitting citizens

So, also in our project, “social” is very broad, and this opens up to a diversity of possible social change initiatives.

Social solutions can be at very different levels: from providing new and better services to elderly to creating street basket for young migrants.

What's important is that the social change missions are serious, visible, meaningful and create considerable change for the citizens involved.

Obviously, it will make good sense for seniors to address *major challenges* in the community.

NB!

The focus of the project is not on the content of the senior social change missions, but on the role of the senior broker.

However, there is more.

The seniors do not only have to address what we call social “needs”, but might also address what we could call social “interests”.

*What's the difference?*

Social needs are such needs that are known needs and not well addressed in the community for various reasons.

We must find new ways to solve such known and unmet needs.

Social interests are new social initiatives going beyond what can be called “needs”: new ideas to create additional social dynamics in the community to benefit the community or groups of citizens.

Example: elderly care is a known social need not well addressed in most communities, whereas intergenerational story-telling is a social innovation in the community, not a “need”.

Social change brokering can address both needs and interests, of course.



## HOW CAN WE START THE PROJECT LOCALLY?

The key challenge for practice partners in the first part of the project is, of course, to try to recruit and engage a team of seniors.

This can be difficult, and the local partner might need to talk to different community resources and stakeholders to be able to identify such a team.

A lot of networking might be needed, but it is wiser to take your time than to rush and engage the first seniors you meet ☺

It might be a good idea to engage a team of seniors, such as 4 or 5 seniors working together along the first project steps.

The peer support in such teams is often invaluable.

Lots of open dialogues are needed with the potential seniors. Open and direct dialogues with no hidden agendas and with no “pedagogical games” are strongly recommended: peer to peer works best.

Most seniors prefer direct and straightforward dialogues.

Hyper-structured interviewing, formal profiling and questionnaire not recommended ☺

Apart from the capacity building of the seniors, it might be a good idea to explain the project to relevant community players, from whom you might need support along the brokering missions.

Interested community players might even wish to kind of join the local project team to engage in and follow upcoming initiatives.

After all, the project addresses social challenges in the community and community stakeholders should take an interest in such initiatives.

Importantly, the project approach is based on what could be called entrepreneurial capacity building: the seniors are not supposed to be trained along several educational sessions prior to take action, but are supposed to learn on the flight, while carrying out experimentation with social change brokering - and the same is true for the practice partners, learning alongside the seniors.

Therefore the initial capacity building is more about:

- introducing interested seniors to the project and to the local brokering challenges
- allowing the seniors to take pride in participating in an important European and future-directed mission
- finding out in what directions the experience and interests of the seniors go and what kind of support some of the seniors might need along the first steps
- talking a lot about the different steps in social change brokering and about the local community
- listening to the seniors, their experience and their ideas

Then the local partner will be challenged: the real capacity building will need to take place through what we call some first “trying out”: limited experimentation with identifying social needs and interests in the community, dialogues with groups of citizens and initial brokering with relevant stakeholders and community resources - and all this to get in flow with the project methodologies and to create small but useful community networking.

Along this “trying out” - expected to last until the senior mobility in spring 2017 (following which more substantial brokering mission will take place) - the local team will most likely identify some learning needs in the team or among the seniors.

Therefore the local partner should be prepared to insert sessions of learning and capacity building in the “trying out” brokering and when needed. It might be about technology, communication, insight into social topics in the community or similar.

We call this “learning on flight” or “situated learning”: learning taking place when needed and useful.

The local project team will need to create and make available such resources needed to carry through these integrated “learning sessions”.

*This is an important element in the entrepreneurial approach: what we do not have, we need to get!*

The results of the “trying out” should be shared in the project and will serve as useful resources in the senior mobility.

This is how we start the project at local level.

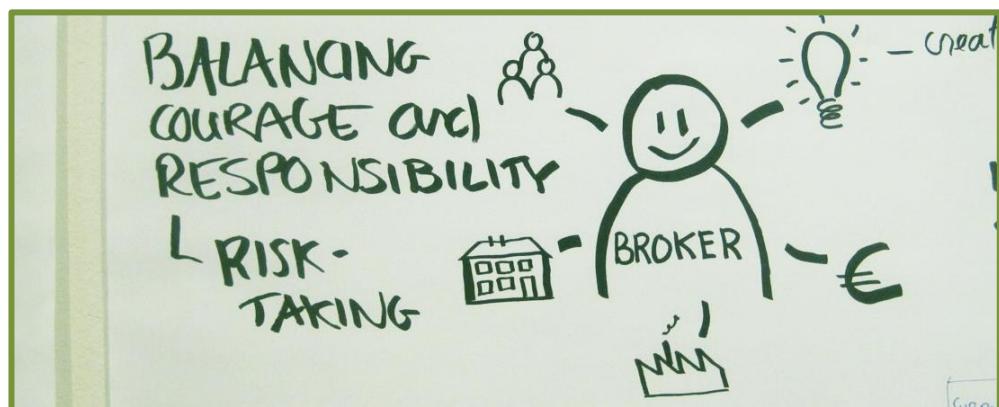
After the mobility in spring 2017 the seniors are expected to engage in much more substantial social change brokering, including capacity building of a new team of seniors.

The final project models to share across Europe will build on the practical experience created along this “more substantial social change brokering” from after the mobility and one year ahead.

This also provides practice partners with a very simple overview of the project progression:

- Recruiting seniors
- ↓
- Initial capacity building
- ↓
- First trying out including further capacity building
- ↓
- Senior mobility and collective capacity building
- ↓
- Substantial social change brokering missions and capacity building of the new senior team
- ↓
- Description and documentation of local practice leading to the models to share across Europe

It is incredibly important to engage the seniors in creative documentation from the very beginning: inserting a journalistic practice into all major activities. One of the tools is precisely the seniors' personal portfolio. Some seniors might need considerable support to start this documenting process, but it is important to emphasize that "documentation" in this context is expected to be creative and include a variety of media and expression forms.



## WHAT MIGHT SUCH BROKERING PROCESSES LOOK LIKE?

Let's offer a few simple examples of what such social change missions might look like.

Please accept that we are talking about small and simplified examples... ☺



### COMMUNITY CENTER

The seniors detect that the community is increasingly threatened by unemployment - among adults but also among young people.

They investigate this further and talk to some of the new unemployed.

Nothing is organised in connection with the increasing number of unemployed in the community.

The seniors wish to create a place where the unemployed can meet and engage in various initiatives, including for example entrepreneurial initiatives that might help them to prevent long-term unemployment.

The seniors organize dialogues with possible stakeholders and sponsors in the community to make this Community Center a joint mission - a jointed mission in which everybody wins and nobody loses.

A joint mission is created through a collaboration between:

- The local bank's social responsibility fund

- The unemployment office
- A strong local company with considerable resources
- The adult education centre
- The city's Chamber of Commerce and its entrepreneurial service

One of the senior brokers will co-drive and follow the mission along its first 6 months to ensure the quality and sustainability of the Community Centre.



### STREET BASKET

The seniors find out that one of the biggest problems in the community is the increasing number of young African migrants, spending most of their time in the streets and sometimes engaging in problematic activities - out of poor economy and simple boredom.

After talking to the young Africans themselves, their parents (when possible), the schools, the local authorities and representatives of the city's business and sport communities, the seniors identify a strong interest among the young Africans: street basket.

However, there are no such facilities in the city and nobody pays attention to this possible way of getting the young people off the streets.

A joint mission is created among a number of local stakeholders, and with the support of the local authorities and the big basket club in the nearby city.

The idea is to create street basket facilities of high quality in several areas in the community.

The idea is furthermore to use these facilities to engage the young Africans in other activities - at least to be able to meet them collectively and use this to create more opportunities.

Through strong brokering the seniors manage to engage some very famous basket players from the big city a couple of hours from the community - to attract the young Africans and make them proud of being coached by the basket stars once a month.

One of the senior brokers will co-drive and follow the mission along its first 6 months to ensure the quality and sustainability of the street basket initiative and to give the initiative further perspectives.

The senior happens to be very active in sports herself (handball and tennis) and might consider engaging in the further perspectives of the street basket initiative.



### ELDERLY CARE

The seniors conclude that one of the major problems in the community is the lack of sufficient care for elderly.

Public services are cut dramatically and only the best-off elderly can afford proper care-taking, in particular when trying to sustain an independent living in their own homes.

The seniors do not wish to "solve" this problem through charity of individual support from volunteers as they regard this "solution" rather weak and unsustainable.

They define the problem as a structural and systemic problem and they wish to find solutions at that level.

Obviously, this takes a lot of networking and contact to many players in the field of elderly care, including dialogues with the elderly themselves to define their real needs and interests.

The problem is that elderly care is considered a "cost" no matter how you approach it. The seniors wish to change this perspective into a more entrepreneurial approach: a cost that creates social value and economy.

The seniors need to create more substantial knowledge about such a change and engages in a study of similar initiatives of social entrepreneurship in the field of elderly care.

Following a line of consultancies, the senior team finally manages to bring together a stakeholder encounter missioned to define a new joint venture in the community.

The joint venture agrees on a 2 year test period and one of the seniors agrees to co-drive and follow this test period - possibly with a view to further engagement in the initiative and with the possibility of economic engagement as well.

It is possible to create an almost endless number of such scenarios - preferably based on community realities - and perhaps part of the local capacity building might include such scenario development to get in flow with what senior social change brokering means.

Such scenario creation might also be used along the senior mobility.



## WHICH ARE THE OBSTACLES - AND HOW CAN WE ADDRESS THEM?

The project would like to do new things, and therefore we expect quite a lot of obstacles ☺

Europe is full of innovation rhetoric, but when it comes about practical action, few people and institutions are interested...

Obstacles should not make us step back: we should collaboratively overcome such obstacles; we should even expect them...

*What kind of obstacles can we expect as practice partners?*

There will be different obstacles in different countries and communities, but it is possible to foresee some rather typical obstacles, such as for example:

### **Difficult to find the right seniors**

→ You have to keep on trying, perhaps in neighboring communities - you should not compromise on the needed profiles of the seniors

### **Seniors do not have sufficient time to engage properly**

→ You have not found the right seniors yet ☺

### **Seniors do not develop the needed understanding of the roles and the project**

→ You have to work more with the seniors and explain the project from various perspectives; if this does not work, you have not found the right seniors yet ☺

### Community players reluctant to participate, engage and support

→ Sometimes it takes considerable effort from the local partner and the senior team to create the needed break-throughs: a) keep on working with the players, b) identify other (and non-traditional) players more dedicated

### Private sector stakeholders not interested

→ Many private stakeholders do not yet have the mentality to engage in social innovation; you will have to explain European and national policies of cross-sector engagement and you will in particular need to explain how the private stakeholder will benefit from the engagement

### Community players interested and positive, but no funding

→ Only hard work can solve this problem: resourceful stakeholders will need to co-fund social initiatives and create community value

Such and similar obstacles and how to overcome them should be extensively debated in BaseCamp!



## 10 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE PARTNERS ☺



Use considerable time with the seniors to allow them to get deep into the project - and to take responsibility for the project  
You will never take responsibility for a project you do not understand



Work with the seniors as their peers - no top-down approach will work in such projects



3

Always consider major ethical challenges when working with people in the social sector; if in doubt, consult the authorities



4

Do not take the easy way: “we know a few seniors from another project; let’s use them”; try to implement the project with as much authenticity as possible



5

Expect obstacles, roadblocks and problems: this is how innovation happens ☺  
Do not step back from them: work them...



6

Try not to compromise on the profiles of the seniors to engage; in the long run you will not be able to create the needed experimentation



7

Remember, that when you put additional effort into the project and into the local implementation you support the quality of the project - and thereby the project’s (and your) future project and funding opportunities



8

Do not hesitate to create debates in the project: if you do not discuss your challenges in the project and among the partners, nobody will learn...



9

If you can: exploit the networking created along the project to establish small eco-systems of collaboration in the community; they can be used for many other initiatives



10

Put a strong focus on creative documentation from the very first day: we are all project journalists and creative documentation can raise a medium project to an excellent project ☺



## BASECAMP - TELL ME MORE!

When you work with this small guide and start experimenting in the community, you might find things you and your team wishes to know more about.

This is what we have BaseCamp for ☺

In BaseCamp the project can deliver more inspirational material linked to what your team wishes to know more about.

You might for example wish to know more about:

- What might be good profiles of seniors to engage?
- What does entrepreneurial capacity building mean?
- Could you provide more material on what you call the “step-by-step capacity building models”?
- Could we work with more practical scenarios of social change brokering?
- What’s the practical meaning of social innovation?
- What does “cross-sector responsibility” mean?
- How can we explain the benefits of engaging to private sectors players, such as companies, banks and similar?

- What is meant by “ethical concerns” when working in the social sector?
- Etc, etc.

And if so, the project will find useful materials for your teamwork ☺

