

SUSTAINABLE ENTERPRISE

~ Supporting ideas and concepts that help any social or business enterprise succeed~

From a workshop on micro finance by Michael Eber, Program Officer, Grameen Foundation USA held in the ChiConGola Session, Chicago May 23, 2004. Recorded by Rosanna Hille.

1. Have big ideas and start small. Hold a big vision and develop it in small stages.
2. Keep it Simple: What you do must be simple to explain and require simple actions. What information do we need to carry this mission forward?
3. Be True to the Mission: Develop a clear mission statement, a few sentences that describes the purpose for the activity, and stay with this even when the venture grows. A mission can be soul based, faith based, humanity based, etc. Everyone needs to be on board with the mission; if not in agreement, everyone should be comfortable operating within its parameters.
4. Methodology: Decide what methodology will be used to achieve the mission. This is an approach or a series of steps that build on each other to reach a goal. For example micro-credit could be a methodology to achieve the mission “to create micro-enterprises and foster self-employment.” This also includes details such as - do you plan to pursue individual loans, group loans and require mandatory savings?
5. Rigor and Discipline: How will you assure that the people you work with (members, employees) will carry forward the mission using the methodology selected? Do we accept deviation? How flexible are we? Do we reject members or partnerships when they do not conform to what has been decided?
6. Systems: Develop the systems and processes you will use – they can be manual or automated and should reflect the reality of where the project is based. For example: geography, culture, education and organization’s skills/education.
7. Transparency: Maintain openness of information with donors, partners and founders and all stakeholders. This becomes more important as the project grows. This includes information about performance, as well as financial and impact.
8. Staffing: Who carries out the mission and how are they perceived in the community they serve? Consider growth, vision and integrity.
9. “Pull” in the market: Do people want what you are offering or do you have to ‘sell’ the idea to people to get them interested? USA is a ‘push’ market, which requires a lot of promotion and marketing. Try to avoid that.
10. Patience: Working internationally means working in other cultures and other environments and this requires a lot of patience!
11. Funding: Seek local funding first because it is easiest to see and report on progress locally. Funding and progress go together.

References: <http://www.CGAP.org> - information clearing house
<http://www.themix.org> – micro finance exchange
<http://www.socialenterprise.net> – look at the reference page.
<http://www.microfinancegateway.org> – information clearing house