SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN BUSINESS ADVISORY SERVICES

A Guide for Business Advisors and Business Developers

RYHTi
Support structures for social entrepreneurship in Lapland

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Economic Development Centre

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GUIDE FOR BUSINESS ADVISORS

Supporting and advising social entrepreneurship

Why was this guide written?

Social entrepreneurship combines business activity with social or ecological benefit. Clients are not always able to articulate what makes their idea social, or how impact is connected to a financially viable business. This guide helps advisors make the mission, revenue logic and impact visible, discussable and actionable as one coherent whole.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is intended for business advisors and business developers in situations where:

- the client's idea addresses a social or environmental problem; or
- the client is considering whether the company's activities could be both social in purpose and financially viable.

What does this guide provide in practice?

A shared language, a question framework and practical tools for client meetings.

The guide provides a shared language, a set of guiding questions and practical tools for client meetings.

- Shared language and basic concepts: what social entrepreneurship is — and what it is not
- Questions for advisers: mission, target group, revenue model, impact and governance
- Practical tools and exercise templates: SBMC, problem tree, target group profiles and funding pathway
- Lapland perspective: sparse population, long distances, seasonal variation and partnerships

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP – BUSINESS WITH PURPOSE

Social entrepreneurship means creating solutions to social problems in a financially viable way.

What is social entrepreneurship and why does it matter?

A social enterprise is not a charity, but a business operating in the market that sells products or services. Its primary difference from mainstream business lies in its purpose: the aim of the enterprise is to solve or alleviate a social or ecological problem through business activity. Financial viability is important because it enables both impact and the entrepreneur's livelihood. Profit or surplus is not seen only as income to be distributed to owners, but can be directed back into advancing the social mission. In addition, social enterprises often emphasise transparency, responsibility and democratic decision-making practices.

Social entrepreneurship is not a new phenomenon. Perhaps the best-known social enterprise in Finland is the Linnanmäki amusement park, through which the Children's Day Foundation raises funds for child welfare work.

In social enterprises, responsibility is not a separate "add-on", but the core of the activity. The enterprise seeks to strengthen positive impacts and prevent or reduce negative impacts on people, the environment and society. Especially in Lapland, as a sparsely populated region, mission-driven enterprises can complement services alongside public actors and strengthen local vitality. A mission-driven business model can also be a natural option for an entrepreneur who wants to combine earning a livelihood with activities that respect nature values.

Social entrepreneurship in a nutshell

Social entrepreneurship is a form of entrepreneurship where the primary aim of business activity is to solve a social or environmental problem and create measurable positive change.

The aim may relate, for example, to environmental protection, sustainable development, regional vitality, culture, education or inclusion in the labour market.

Making the mission, revenue model and impact visible

In social entrepreneurship, the enterprise is both a solution to a social or ecological challenge and a financially viable operator. In business advisory work, it is essential to help the entrepreneur make visible how these three areas are connected:

- Mission: What problem is being solved, and for whom?
- Revenue model: Who pays, where does the income come from, and what are the key costs?
- Impact: What concrete change is created, such as benefits, outcomes and impacts, and how is it monitored?

The key elements of social entrepreneurship

Solutions to real problems

Social enterprises develop social innovations: genuinely impactful solutions to social problems.

For example, the Finnish maternity package was originally developed to support low-income families and to strengthen mothers' and babies' access to healthcare.

Advisor perspective: *clarify the problem, the target group and the change produced by the solution.*

Stronger together

Those affected by a particular social problem are often its best experts. For this reason, social enterprises listen carefully to their stakeholders. Social challenges are usually complex, and they cannot be solved instantly or by one actor alone.

Many social enterprises therefore work together with other companies as well as the public and third sectors.

Advisor perspective: *identify stakeholders, partners and co-creation: with whom will the solution be made to work in practice?*

No impact without viability

For a social enterprise to create impact, its business activity must be financially viable.

Most of the profit or surplus generated by a social enterprise is used to pursue social change, either by investing in the development of the company's own activities or by donating to, for example, non-profit activities.

Advisor perspective: *verify the revenue logic: who pays, for what and why? Without this, impact will not scale.*

Responsible in multiple ways

Responsibility is at the core of social enterprises. In responsible business, the company aims to prevent and remedy the negative impacts of its own operations and the entire value chain on people, the environment and society. Responsible business covers environmental responsibility, social responsibility and responsible governance.

Advisor perspective: *guide the company to identify and reduce negative impacts in its own operations and value chain.*

Social entrepreneurship in Finland

Collecting comprehensive and comparable statistical information on Finnish social enterprises is challenging because there is no single established and precisely delimited definition of a social enterprise. Social entrepreneurship is also not limited to a specific sector or legal form: **a social enterprise may operate, for example, as a limited liability company, cooperative, association or foundation engaged in business activity.** The company may be small or large, and its impact may be broad or targeted at a specific, clearly defined group.

The objective of a social enterprise may be, for example, to:

- reduce loneliness among older people
- enable employment for people with partial work ability
- reduce food waste
- improve the accessibility of facilities
- support the employment of immigrants
- prevent social exclusion
- promote the use of renewable energy
- clean plastic waste from the sea
- improve access to health and social services
- promote the circular economy

…or solve another social or environmental problem.

Why should business advisers know this?

- You can recognise when a business idea has a social mission and when it is more about "ordinary" responsibility or sustainability.
- You can help the entrepreneur put the mission into words and translate it into a business logic: who pays, for whom value is created, and how that value is produced.
- You can help avoid common pitfalls, such as an unclear payer–user–beneficiary relationship, a problem that is too broad, or dependency on project funding.
- You can guide the entrepreneur in choosing a suitable legal and operational structure and in making transparency visible through rules, articles of association and reporting.

Further information on social entrepreneurship

Information, advice and guidance

The Centre of Expertise for Social Enterprises (YYO) provides guidance for social enterprises and for those planning social enterprise activity. Useful materials include:

- Frequently asked questions.
- Entrepreneur's material bank: information on topics such as establishing and financing a social enterprise.
- The Changemaker's Workbook for developing socially impactful business activity.

(https://yyo.fi/en/home/)

Network for social enterprises

ARVO ry, the Finnish Association of Social Enterprises, is a network for social enterprises and impact actors. Its aim is to support the success of its members and increase the visibility and significance of social entrepreneurship. https://arvoliitto.fi/briefly-in-english/

Social Enterprise Mark

The Association for Finnish Work awards the Social Enterprise Mark. However, a company may be a social enterprise even without the mark, as only some Finnish social enterprises use it. https://suomalainentyo.fi/en/mem-bership-and-marks/social-enterprise-mark/

Additional reading :

Social innovations: the publication Social innovations of social enterprises discusses the social innovations and innovativeness of social enterprises and provides policy recommendations for developing the operating environment. (in Finnish)

Measuring social impact: ARVO ry's publication Hyvän mitta: Simple tools for impact assessment (PDF in finnsih) compiles practical ways to assess impact.

FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR ADVISORS

Why should business advisors understand this?

- You can identify when an idea contains a social mission and when it is a matter of "ordinary" responsibility.
- You can help articulate the mission and translate it into business logic: who pays, for whom value is created and how that value is produced.
- You can help avoid typical pitfalls: unclear payer-user-beneficiary roles, an overly broad problem, or dependence on funding.
- You can guide the client in choosing a suitable structure and making transparency visible through rules, articles of association and reporting.

In social enterprises, responsibility is not a separate "add-on"; it is the core of the activity. The company aims to strengthen positive impacts and prevent or reduce negative impacts on people, the environment and society. In Lapland in particular, as a sparsely populated region, mission-based companies can complement services alongside public actors and strengthen local vitality. A mission-based business model can also be a natural alternative for an entrepreneur who wants to combine livelihood with activities that respect nature values.

Basic characteristics of social enterprise activity

Social enterprise activity can usually be identified through four basic characteristics:

1. Mission: a primary social or environmental objective.
2. Viable business activity: products or services, sales and customer value.
3. Use of surplus: profit or surplus is directed towards advancing the purpose.
4. Transparency and good governance: operating principles, decision-making and responsibility are made visible.

Legal forms from the perspective of social entrepreneurship

A social enterprise is not a separate legal business form. It can operate, for example, as a limited liability company, cooperative, association or foundation. Social entrepreneurship is also not limited to a specific sector: the enterprise may be small or large, and its impact may concern society more broadly or a specific target group.

A limited liability company may be a suitable business form when the aim is to conduct business, grow and cooperate with customers, investors or the public sector, for example. In this case, it is importa nt to consider how the social mission and the use of surplus are made visible in the company's documents.

A cooperative, in turn, may be suitable in situations where the activities are built around a shared need of members, employees, customers or the local community. In cooperatives, community, member benefit and democratic decision-making are often emphasised.

The decisive factor is therefore not the legal form, but the purpose of the activity and how the mission, use of surplus and transparency are implemented in practice. Advisers should ensure that these principles can, where necessary, be made visible in documents such as rules, articles of association, operating principles and reporting.

What the adviser should ensure

The mission does not remain just a slogan, but is visible in the product or service, revenue model and indicators.

The mission guides decision-making also when compromises need to be made, for example regarding pricing, target group or partners.

Benefits of a mission for the enterprise

- Increases distinctiveness and trust
- Makes partnerships and co-development easier
- Can open pathways to impact funding and procurement

Social enterprise activity in different company forms

Because a social enterprise is not a separate legal business form under Finnish legislation, compiling comprehensive statistical data is challenging. The data website of the Centre of Expertise for Social Enterprises has aimed to identify as broadly as possible organisations that meet the characteristics of social enterprise activity.

Examples of legal forms:

- **Limited liability company (Ltd):** Veikkaus Oy; Istekki Oy; Fimlab Laboratoriot Oy; Pirkanmaan Jätehuolto Oy; Rinnekodit Oy; Tukena Oy; Hoivatie Oy; AtCare Oy; SunUra Oy; Auction Oy
- **Foundation:** Finnish Student Health Service; Helsinki Deaconess Foundation; Children's Day Foundation
- **Other public-law legal entity:** University Pharmacy; University of Eastern Finland
- **Association based on special legislation:** Finnish Red Cross
- **Non-profit association:** Kirkkopalvelut ry; Save the Children Finland
- **Cooperative:** Via Sign Language Sector Cooperative; Salla Cooperative Jotos; Suomen GTM Cooperative

UNDERSTANDING THE ENTREPRENEUR'S MOTIVES AND OBJECTIVES

What should the advisor explore at the beginning?

In social entrepreneurship, motivation is often strong, but the risk is that the business logic remains unclear. The advisor's task is to help combine meaningfulness, competence, real need and willingness to pay into one coherent whole. When these do not meet, the idea can easily remain a "good thought" without viable business activity.

1. What change matters most to you, and why?
2. For whom is the change most important, that is, who is the end beneficiary?
3. Who pays for the solution, and why this particular solution?
4. What competence and networks do you have, and what is missing?
5. How will you know that the change is actually happening? What would be a

Exercise: The entrepreneur's values and mission

Duration: 10–15 minutes. Ask the entrepreneur to complete four sections. The business idea may also be developed by a team, group or an existing community, in which case the exercise should be discussed together.

1. What do you love doing: theme or issue?
2. What are you good at: competence or experience?
3. What can you be paid for: buyer or payer?
4. What does the world need: problem or need?

Finally, formulate a mission statement in 1-2 sentences: "We help [beneficiary] solve [problem] by providing [solution], so that [change/impact]."

Once the mission statement has been formulated, check:

- Has the beneficiary, or "for whom", been defined precisely enough?
- Is the solution something that someone is willing to pay for, and who pays?

If needed, create two versions of the mission statement: **(A)** a short version for the website and **(B)** a more detailed version for the business plan.

Identifying social problems as the starting point for business

Impact management requires the company to be clear about three things: what problem is being solved, who benefits and what the root causes of the problem are. Without this clarity, the choice of actions and indicators easily becomes guesswork, and the solution may address symptoms rather than causes.

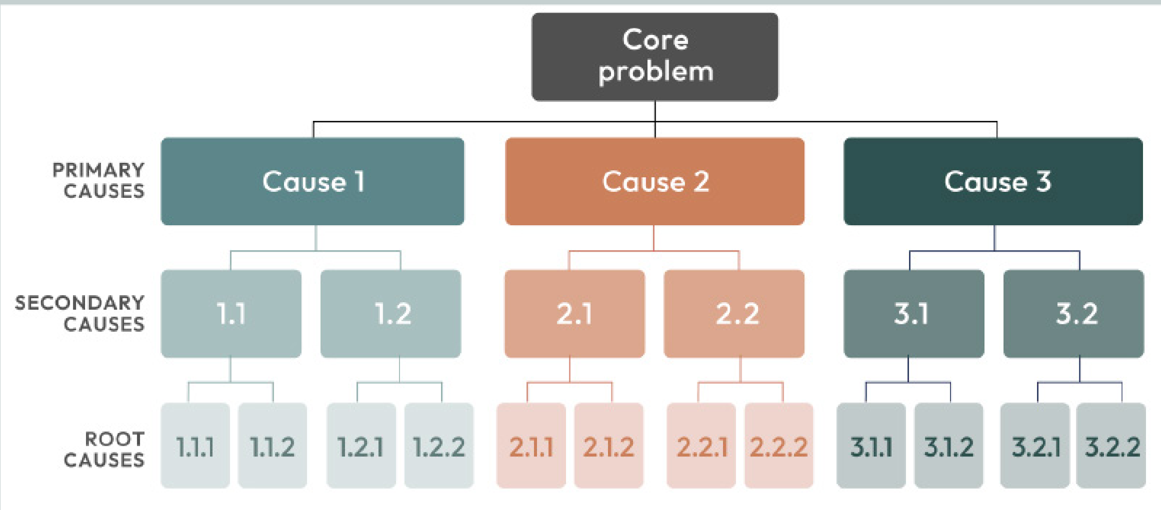
Lapland perspective

In Lapland, root causes are often linked to long distances, service accessibility, seasonality, demographic development and labour shortages. Ask separately: how will the solution work in a sparsely populated area and under seasonal variation, and who pays if the user cannot pay?

Exercise: Problem tree to solution tree

Duration: 15-25 minutes.

- Problem tree: write down the core problem. Record the root causes below it and the consequences above it. Examine the consequences at different levels: individual, community and society.
- Solution tree: turn the problem into a positive change. What needs to change in order to influence the root causes? What does success look like in practice? Identify 1-2 concrete signs.



ADVISOR PATHWAY: FROM IDEA TO A TESTABLE BUSINESS MODEL

Integrating the mission into business idea development

The social mission should be integrated into the development of the business idea from the very beginning. When the mission is clearly reflected in defining the problem, identifying the target group, designing the solution and conducting early testing, it does not remain a separate value statement or a communication promise.

A consistent process helps build a solution that responds to a real need and whose impact can also be made visible in practice.

1. Proceed step by step so that the mission does not remain disconnected:
2. Problem first: choose a clearly defined and concrete problem.
3. Target group: distinguish between the payer, user and beneficiary.
4. Root causes: build a problem tree and choose the branch you aim to influence.
5. Solution idea: describe the solution concretely, such as a product, service or operating model.
6. Early testing: test with a small investment and find out the willingness to pay and the most important benefit.

Lapland perspective

Plan testing often as a hybrid model, combining remote and face-to-face elements, and make use of partners such as municipalities, associations, educational institutions and employers. Take into account accessibility and the impact of seasons on reaching customers.

Sustainable Business Model Canvas (SBMC) as the advisor's main tool

The traditional Business Model Canvas (BMC) is widely known, but it is not always sufficient for planning a social enterprise: impact is at the core of the activity, and potential harms must also be identified. For this reason, the Sustainable Business Model Canvas (SBMC) is used in social enterprise planning.

SBMC helps to verify:

- financial sustainability: revenues, costs and revenue logic
- social and environmental benefits: what changes and why
- potential harms and risks, and how they can be reduced
- target groups clearly: payer, user and beneficiary
- connection to the Sustainable Development Goals, usually 1-3 relevant goals where appropriate

Lapland perspective

In the SBMC, channels, customer relationships and partners are often especially critical: the service must work under conditions of long distances and seasonal variation. Also record practical implementation: mobility, delivery, schedules and local contact points.

Exercise: SBMC for advisors

Duration: 30–60 minutes. Ask the entrepreneur to complete the SBMC template.

The adviser facilitates the exercise and asks clarifying questions; the client produces the content and makes the decisions.

Advisor quality-assurance questions

- Is the value proposition written as an outcome, not only as a feature?
- Is the payer clear, and can willingness to pay be tested?
- Have at least 1-2 harms and actions to reduce them been identified?
- Have 2-5 early-stage indicators been agreed, covering both financial performance and impact?

1. Fill the SBMC

Use the solution and target group you selected in the previous exercises as the basis for your work. For each section of the canvas, answer the guiding questions on the previous page and remember to consider the sustainability perspective! You can download another version of the SBMC here: https://www.case-ka.eu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/SustainableBusinessModelCanvas_highresolution.jpg. It includes more detailed instructions if you need extra guidance.

Value Proposition	Key Activities	Key Partners	Customer Relationships	Customer Segments
	Key Resources		Channels	

Cost Structure	Revenue Streams
Environmental and Social Harms	**Environmental and Social Benefits**

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Examples of social enterprise business models

A social enterprise business model can be built in many different ways. In business advisory work, it is useful to recognise different models through which a social or ecological objective can be combined with financially sustainable operations.
The examples below show how the mission can be reflected in the revenue model, service pricing, brand or use of resources.

Subsidisation

The weaker profitability of one product or service is supported by the sales income from another product or service. This model enables the enterprise to provide socially important but less profitable activities in a financially sustainable way.
Example: A café or restaurant can use income from regular customer sales to fund part of its community-based or low-threshold activities.

Applications in services:
- Training service: The enterprise sells training to corporate customers at market price and uses part of the income to offer free or low-cost training to unemployed people or young people.
- Well-being service: Regularly priced customer appointments support a service that is offered at a reduced price to people on low incomes or those needing special support.

Buy One, Give One

For every product or service purchased, the enterprise enables a corresponding product or service for someone who needs it. The model can strengthen the brand and engage customers, but it requires that the sales margin also covers the cost of the "given" part.
Example: Warby Parker – "Buy a Pair, Give a Pair".

Applications in services:
- Hairdressing service: The customer pays for a haircut, and the model enables another haircut for someone who needs it, either directly or through a partner.
- Snow-clearing or home service: The customer buys the service, and the model enables an agreed number of hours of similar work for someone else, such as an older person or a person on a low

Product as a Service

The customer does not buy the product to own it, but pays for its use, rental, leasing or performance. This model can lower the threshold for purchasing, increase accessibility and encourage the enterprise to develop long-lasting and maintainable solutions.
Example: Tools, furniture, equipment or mobility solutions can be offered as a monthly service instead of being purchased and owned.

Applications in services:
- Assistive device or well-being service: The customer pays a monthly fee for using a device or tool instead of buying it.
- Business service: The enterprise offers, for example, workspaces, equipment or technology as a service, where the customer pays for use, maintenance and servicing as one package.

Lapland perspective

In services, mobility and staff resources are often critical. It is often most sensible to agree on targeting with a partner, such as a municipality or organisation, and to ensure that the donated work can be carried out without unreasonable travel or time costs.

Mission-driven brand

The company's responsibility, values and social purpose are a central part of its brand and competitive advantage. Customers may be willing to pay more for a product or service when they feel that their purchase also supports an important social or ecological goal.
Example: Patagonia and Mifuko are known for having responsibility and mission as a strong part of their brand. Kalevala Koru is also known as a company that emphasises responsibility, although it is not usually classified as a social enterprise.

Applications in services:
- Tourism service: The customer buys an experience service, and the company clearly communicates its impact on local employment, respect for nature or support for cultural heritage.
- Well-being or coaching service: The service is designed so that the customer is not only buying a service, but also taking part in supporting socially meaningful activities.

Resource efficiency and recycling

The business is based on saving materials, using side streams, using recycled materials or reducing waste. This model can create both environmental benefits and cost savings.
Example: Durat manufactures products from 100% recycled plastic.

Applications in services:
- Construction or renovation service: The company uses recycled or reused materials and offers customers solutions that generate less waste.
- Event or catering service: The activities are planned so that material waste, single-use items and food waste are minimised, and side streams are used as effectively as possible.

Advisor checklist questions

- Cost calculation: how much does the "given" element cost, including working time, logistics and administration?
- Implementation: is the service given directly or through a partner?
- Targeting: how is "someone in need" defined fairly and transparently?
- Verification: how is implementation demonstrated, for example through data or a partner report?
- Potential harms: could the model create distortions or dependency, and how can these be prevented?

Understanding customers and target groups

Paying customer, user and end beneficiary

In social solutions, the payer, user and end beneficiary are often different actors. This is one of the most common points where a business idea “leaks” if the roles are not clearly articulated and the payer’s benefit remains unclear.

Lapland perspective

In Lapland, the payer may often be a municipality or employer, the user may be a resident, and the end beneficiary may be regional vitality or well-being more broadly. Ask in particular: if the municipality is the payer, what measurable benefit does the municipality receive, for example in costs, employment, service level, attractiveness or

Exercise: Target group profiling

Duration: 10-20 minutes

In the exercises, the advisor facilitates and asks clarifying questions; the client produces the content and makes the choices. Record the answers together in a visible format, such as an SBMC template or shared notes.

Create three light profiles:

- **Paying customer**: who pays and on what basis? Which budget does it come from, and what benefit does the payer receive?
- **User:** who uses the solution, and what barriers to adoption exist, such as time, competence, accessibility or trust?
- **End beneficiary:** who or what receives the benefit: person, community or environment, and how is the benefit visible in everyday life?

Exercise: Testing the value proposition

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Write one value proposition sentence for each target group and test its clarity:

- **benefit:** what improves?
- **credibility**: why does this work?
- **verifiability:** how can it be observed or measured?

Value proposition template: **“We help** *[target group]* **achieve** *[benefit]* **by providing** *[solution]*, **resulting in** *[change/impact]*.”

APPLYING FOR FUNDING AND SUPPORT FORMS FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

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Principle: market orientation and a smart funding pathway

A social enterprise should be able to operate on market terms through its own revenue model. Grants can support the early stages, but the activity is not sustainable if they are the only source of income. The funding pathway should be planned step by step — development, piloting and growth — and each stage should be linked to clear evidence: what has been learned, what has been validated and what can be scaled.

In a social enterprise, funding planning is not only about where money comes from. It is also about how the enterprise builds a sustainable revenue model. The starting point is that, in the long term, the core activities of the enterprise should be based on customers, sales and market-based income. Grants, project funding or other forms of public support can be important, especially for developing the idea, piloting the solution and verifying impact. However, the entire business should not be built on them.

The adviser's role is to help the entrepreneur understand which parts of the activity can generate income from the market, which parts may need early-stage development funding, and when the enterprise is ready to seek growth funding or investment.

A smart funding pathway is built in stages. In the early phase, funding may be needed, for example, to build customer understanding, develop the service, carry out the first experiments or create impact indicators. In the piloting phase, the key task is to show that there is demand for the service, that customers are willing to pay, and that the activity creates the intended social or ecological benefit.

In the growth phase, funders often expect clearer evidence: realised customer relationships, agreements, sales data, an understanding of the cost structure, and impact data. The business adviser should guide the client to think about funding as a timeline: what evidence is needed to move to the next stage, and which funding source is suitable for that specific stage of development.

Funding source toolkit for advisors

The advisor should view funding as a "package" in which different sources suit different stages:

- Impact funding and impact investors: financial return plus measurable social benefit.
- Crowdfunding: donation, reward, loan or investment.
- Public funding sources and pro-grammes: regional development, employment, sustainability and innovation.
- Business-oriented instruments: piloting, growth and internationalisation.

Exercise: Building a funding pathway

Duration: 15-25minutes

In the exercises, the advisor facilitates and asks clarifying questions; the client produces the content and makes the choices.

Draw a timeline: 0-6 months, 6-18 months and 18 months onward. Link each phase to:

- the required funding: for what purpose and why
- a possible funding source
- the evidence needed to secure it: data, pilots, agreements, willingness to pay and indicators

CONCLUSION

This guide has brought together the key steps of social entrepreneurship from the perspective of business advisory work: clarifying the problem and target groups, testing the solution early, using the SBMC and building a funding pathway. The advisor's most important task is to ensure that the mission is visible in practice: in the value proposition, revenue logic and measurable results, and that the model also works in the conditions of Lapland, including long distances, seasonality, partnerships and accessibility.

In Lapland, solutions often emerge within an ecosystem. Municipalities, development companies, educational institutions, organisations, funders and employers can act as pilot partners, channels and even payers. Advisors should identify at an early stage which actors can support reaching the target group, implementing testing and building the funding pathway. In this way, the idea is quickly connected to practice and gains the implementation capacity it needs.

Key takeaways

- Define the payer, user and final beneficiary, and test the value proposition early.
- Make both the intended benefits and possible negative impacts visible, and agree on 2–5 early-stage indicators.
- Build the funding pathway step by step, and use market-based viability as a guiding principle.
- Make use of the local ecosystem: a social enterprise does not develop alone, but often together with customers, partners and funders.

Further work after the advisory meeting

The business adviser can recommend the **RYHTI project guide Pathway to Becoming a Social Entrepreneur – A Guide for Jobseekers and People Interested in Entrepreneurship** to the client. The guide provides basic information on social entrepreneurship, as well as practical exercises for developing one's own idea, target group, solution and business model.

With the help of the guide, the client can continue working independently after the advisory meeting and prepare for a possible follow-up meeting with the business adviser.

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