

Business Unusual

Investing in actions,
empowering people



Table of contents

THE STUDY TEAM

Maria Adamowicz, Agata Gołasa,
Maciej Onyszkiewicz, Marta Lutostańska

THE PROGRAM TEAM

1st edition:

Angelika Szkołuda, Paweł Sielczak,
Adam Chabiera;
team support: Helena Bremer, Ida Bocheńska

2nd edition:

Angelika Szkołuda, Paweł Sielczak,
Anna Hincz, Adam Chabiera,
team support: Michał Dawidziuk

REPORT COMPOSITION AND GRAPHIC DESIGN:

Aleksandra Pękala
www.pikne.studio

Cover photo: W. Radwański

Warsaw, 2025

I. Introduction	2
The reason behind creating the report	3
About the study	4
The story – how did it all start?	5
II. About the program	
Participants – who could take part in the program?	7
Direct objectives of the program and way of achieving them	9
Program’s structure	11
III. Business Unusual – a range of benefits for program participants	13
What results have been achieved?	20
Program in the eyes of participants – declared changes and their importance	21
IV. What have we learned from Business Unusual? Practical tips for supporting social organizations and initiatives	29
Practical tips for supporting social organizations and initiatives	32
Assessment of Program’s structure from a bird’s eye view – participants’ perspective	33
Important decisions before starting the program	34
Recommendations at the stage of program implementation	38
The end of the program – what’s next?	40
V. Conclusions	41

I. INTRODUCTION

THE REASON BEHIND CREATING THE REPORT

This publication was created out of the need to share experience from the implementation of the Business Unusual program. In our team's opinion, as well as the participants and experts, in many respects it can be an inspiration to create other programs supporting the development of initiatives, innovations and organisations, regardless of the area in which they conduct their social activities.

We are aware that Business Unusual was possible – mainly due to a major trust placed in the Shipyard Foundation by its founder (Google.org) – unique in its flexibility and the scope of the support offered. At the same time, we see the potential in disseminating some of its elements among the implementers of other, similar programs that can be tested regardless of the relationship with the founder. Therefore, we hope that the report that we are handing over will meet the interest of entities such as social economy support centers, non-governmental organizations offering support to other entities, local governments, public institutions, private and public incubators of social entrepreneurship.

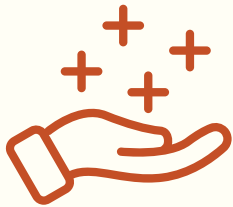


ABOUT THE STUDY

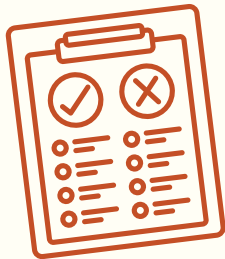
The study, which forms the basis of this report, was carried out by researchers of Shipyard Foundation from March to November 2024. During that time, we looked at:



the usefulness of the various procedures adopted in the program from the perspective of participants, animators and program experts,



benefits resulting from participation in the program,



strengths and weaknesses of the program compared to other programs that offer support in the development of social organizations and initiatives.

As part of the study*, we completed:



a survey including all participants of the program,



interviews with individuals or organizations participating in the program,



group interview with program animators,



individual interviews with selected program experts.

*30 out of 33 people responded to the survey, i.e. 90% of the participants invited to the study.

THE STORY – HOW DID IT ALL START?

At Shipyard Foundation we deal with many subjects, sometimes even too many at a time. We are certainly not masters of reduction and consistent choices. This is because we see a lot of needs and possibilities, but we also have desire to test various new solutions in practice and learn thanks to them – thanks to what we have succeeded and what has not been successful in the end. Of course, the difficulty of self-limitation causes plenty of challenges and complications, yet it also has its positive sides.

The result of our internal “Shipyard-foundation dilemma” is the Business Unusual program. Previously, we dealt with the topic of social economy rather incidentally (although part of our team devoted their resources in the subject before joining Shipyard ranks). The topic of support for people with migrant and refugee experience was similar. We knew people who were great at it, however we worked with them and their organizations occasionally. All this may indicate that we probably shouldn't have taken a try. And yet...

When in the autumn of 2021 we received a proposal from Google.org we would describe what Shipyard Foundation could do sensibly and meaningfully in this area – we would try to use our experience in incubating social innovations, implementing grant programs and contacts with people and institutions concerned with social economy, and supporting people with migrant and refugee experience. This is how the initial version of the program was hatched, and over time its more specific shape clarified. The beginning of the actions coincided with the escalation of the war in Ukraine, and it became clear to us that although we originally assumed the issue of supporting projects of people serving migrants and refugees would be only one of many, later we decided to put it on the top of the agenda. It was flexibility that we wanted and had to make one of the flagship features of our program, as well as the support we offered within it. The Business Unusual provided us with arguments confirming various hypotheses and assumptions close to us at the moment of joining the program, yet it also taught us a lot – humility as well.

We knew that there was no ideal support program, not even one model that would fit all areas of social activities – too many variables affect the possibilities of both grant holders (or institutions providing other forms of support, similar to grants) and grant recipients. However, we know that there are support programs in which founders (sponsors, donors) care more about numerical than qualitative data, where it is much more important how many people ultimately received support under the co-financed projects than what kind of support it was. In our work, we often collide with the image of the grantor – a dangerous controller that grant recipients are afraid of. We, too, are very often limited by the formal and substantive requirements – largely understandable – formulated by our founders and operators, however we strongly believe that regardless of them, space for trust, flexibility and a far-reaching individual approach to needs can be created.

Our experience in the design and implementation of the Business Unusual program has strengthened our conviction that the accessibility of the procedures in force in the program and real support, intended for both the recipients of activities implemented under co-financed initiatives, and for the organizations themselves (grant recipients), plays a crucial role. That is why we like to think of Business Unusual participants as our colleagues rather than vendors obliged to deliver the results described in the contract. As they are not only offerees, but also our partners – with whom we act on the basis of mutual trust and strive for the best, aiming at qualitative results.

I am convinced – like other people behind Business Unusual – that we finally managed to create a program in which we built relationships based on mutual trust with almost every participant, and achieved reliable (although we will see this in time) results. I am hopeful that this report will be – although to a small extent – an inspiration for others and an example of how programs like this can be implemented.

Adam Chabiera

Head of Social Innovation at Shipyard Foundation

II. ABOUT THE PROGRAM



Business Unusual

Inwestujemy w działania, wzmacniamy ludzi

Wzmacniamy przedsiębiorczość w małych i średnich przedsiębiorstwach, wspieramy ich w rozwoju i zwiększaniu konkurencyjności. Naszym celem jest wsparcie przedsiębiorców w ich działalności i zwiększenie ich efektywności.

www.businessunusual.pl

Gość

Business Unusual is a program of direct support for social entrepreneurs in Poland, understood by us as social leaders. It was created to help newly emerging and already existing social projects in Poland, addressed to people with refugee and migrant experience. The program was aimed at **strengthening those initiatives and organizations – providing them with the greatest possible longevity and independence to introduce positive social change in their environment more effectively and efficiently.** It was a program that instead of grants, offered participants expert and institutional support annually.

The program team worked an average of 3.5 full-time jobs for 3 years (the process of substantive preparation and implementation of support).

initiatives / organizations participating in the program increase their sustainability and self-reliance



greater efficiency and effectiveness of conducted social activities



positive social change in the world



photo: W. Radwański

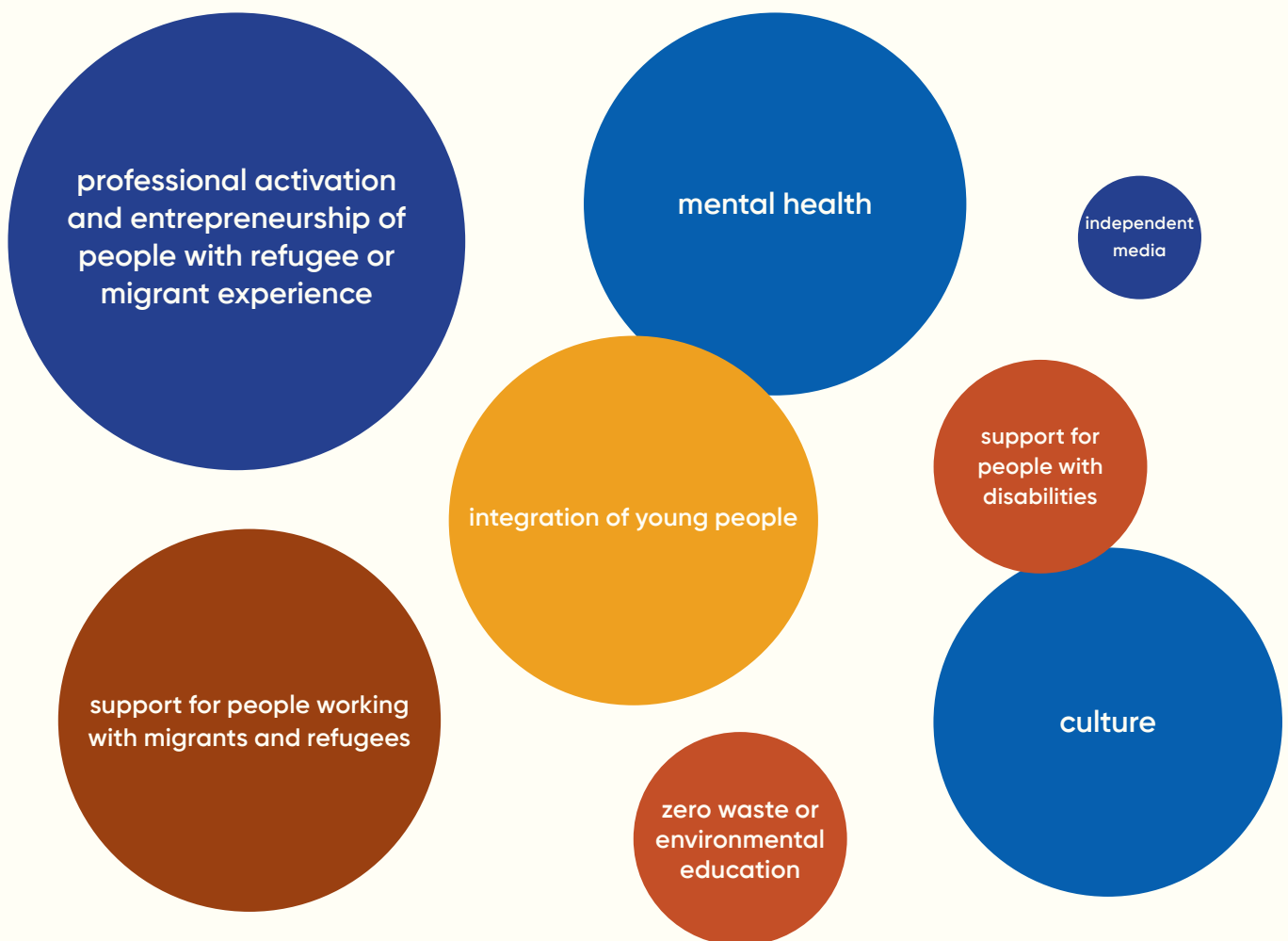
1. PARTICIPANTS – WHO COULD TAKE PART IN THE PROGRAM?

The program was open to anyone who carried out or planned activities for people with refugee and migrant experience, including:

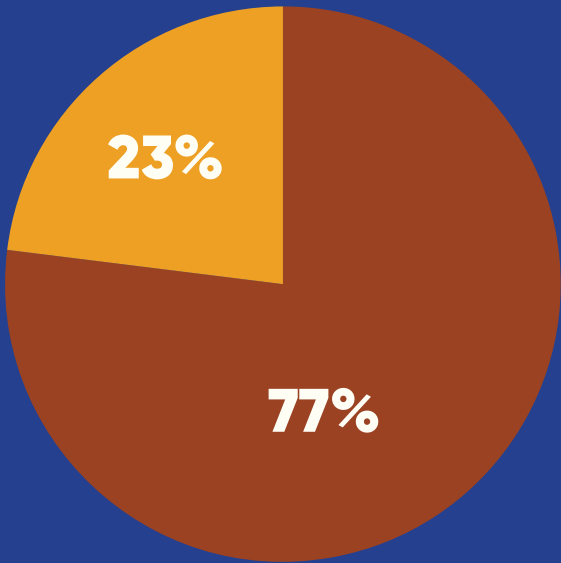
- social organizations
- informal individuals or groups,
- companies pursuing a social mission,
- social cooperatives

The Business Unusual program was attended by 33 participants from, among others, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, Somalia, Lithuania, Martinique and Chechnya.

Participants' areas of activity*



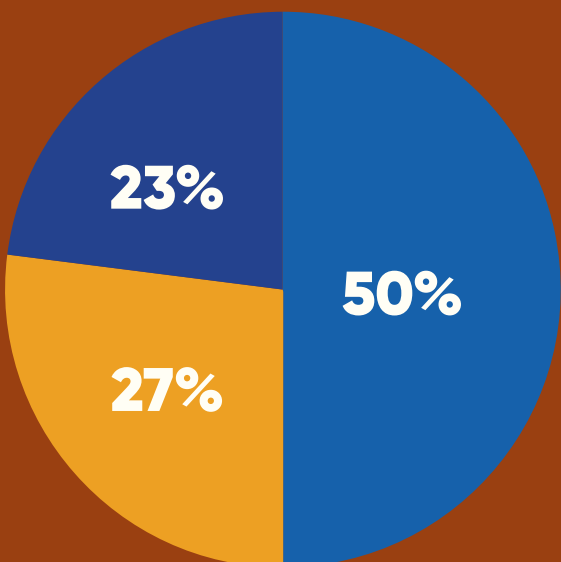
*Based on a survey n = 30.



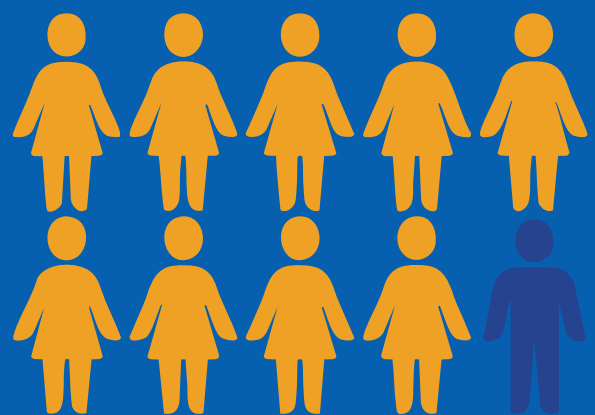
77% were **organizations** (non-governmental organizations, companies or other entities with legal personality), and 23% were **private individuals or informal groups**,



73% had a **personal migrant or refugee experience**,



50% at the time of joining the program had **two years or less** of experience in conducting business for migrants or refugees, 27% – **from 3 to 5 years** of experience, and 23% – **over 5 years**,



93% were **women**.

2. DIRECT OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM AND WAY OF ACHIEVING THEM

In order to strengthen the participants on the way to independence, the program team set itself the goal of **equipping them with the competences, knowledge and resources necessary to conduct social activities.**

It was assumed that after the completion of Business Unusual, participants should achieve at least several of the following goals:



organisation of legal and accounting situation,



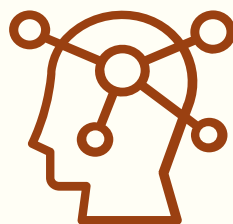
competences in the field of managing oneself and the organization, including: financial management, obtaining funds from external sources, communication, team management,



a plan for the future, including a business plan, a strategy and long-term and short-term goals,



networking – establishing contacts with people and organizations with whom they may undertake joint activities in the future or who could support them in these undertakings,



development of individual psychological resources needed to conduct sustainable social activities, such as self-confidence, self-awareness of strengths, the ability to take care of one's well-being).

Such goals can probably be achieved in various ways.

In Business Unusual, it was assumed that the key to the effectiveness of the program will be: tailoring the offered support to the individual needs of the participants and building a personal and secure relationship with them.

„In my opinion, these close relationships are crucial, as we are talking about really difficult aspects related to development. And there are people in all of this. Working on development is always an intimate area, it is not working just in the name of success. This is really a great effort for all team members. Without such a non-hierarchical, partnership relationship, this cannot be achieved. When the relationship between the counsellor and the supported person is close, you can afford to communicate openly and honestly.”

- supporting expert Karolina Cyran-Juraszek



photo: W. Radwański

3. PROGRAM'S STRUCTURE

ACTIONS DURING THE PROGRAM						PROGRAM RESULTS
recruitment	inaugural meeting	assignment of animators	implementation of the growth plan: - expert support - material support - regular meetings with animators - group training	*check-point (since 2nd edition)	report and program completion	Participants have an organized legal and accounting situation
		diagnostic meetings				Participants have a plan for the future (strategy, business plan)
		development of a growth plan				Participants have their individual psychological resources increased
		networking				Participants have competencies in managing and financing their activities
		activities for the well-being of participants				Participants gain contacts and acquaintances with potential associates



photo: W. Radwański

A. PREPARATION STAGE

→ RECRUITMENT

The program was characterized by a simple recruitment form and minimal bureaucracy – not only at the recruitment stage, but also throughout the program, up to the report.

In this way, the Business Unusual team primarily wanted to lower the threshold for entering the program for people inexperienced in writing applications for co-financing, and give priority to substantive work over completing formalities – wherever they are not necessary. A simple recruitment form is also a natural consequence of the assumption made in the program about cooperation based on a relationship, and personal conversation.

What the participant did not have to show in the application form could then be the subject of a supplementary interview and a diagnostic meeting later (after qualifying for the program). In practice, people applying to Business Unusual were asked

to answer just a few questions about their organization or group, planned or current activities, as well as the support they expected from the program.

„And it was great that they did not burden me with these papers (...) Shipyard Foundation took everything off our shoulders, you know? And it's great that the program employed experts, that the animators got along with them, that they accounted for them and that they kept an eye on it.“

- participant of the first edition

→ INAUGURATION MEETING (KICK-OFF)

Participation in each edition of the program began with a stationary meeting in Warsaw. **During that event, all participants could get to know each other, learn more about the individual stages of the program and tell briefly about their initiatives to others** (and learn how to do it beforehand – thanks to short substantive workshops devoted to the skills of the so-called storytelling and pitch deck, i.e. creating short presentations of their organizations or activities).



→ DIAGNOSTIC MEETING

The next step of the participants was to participate in individual, several-hour diagnostic meetings with two animators and an external expert experienced in supporting development of organizations and initiatives.

The aim of the meeting was to verify the idea described in the application, to deepen knowledge about the current condition of the organization or initiative and to prioritize the needs to which the program could respond.

„This meeting adjusted the further plan of support. Confronted the expectations of those organizations that may have been unaware with the choice of appropriate tools. Thanks to the meeting, we set priorities and determined what could be done and what could not. Sometimes we managed to notice some previously downplayed area that required immediate support or even intervention.”

- supporting expert
- Karolina Cyran-Juraszek

→ FORMULATING INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Based on the conclusions of the diagnosis, the animator, together with the expert and the participant, formulated an individual development plan (attached to the bilateral agreement signed at that stage), which determined the scope and type of support adequate to the needs.

At the same time, the plan was reviewed on an ongoing basis and, if required by the needs of initiatives, it could be subjected to changes. The most important thing was to enable authentic development and adapt support to changing needs and circumstances.

„Never look a gift horse in the mouth – not with Business Unusual. The horse is constantly checked, as it must serve the beneficiaries. Participants can decide that they want to focus on a specific goal, e.g. creating an online store instead of GDPR-related issues. If they have such needs, they can report it to their caregiver, these are cases I have personally experienced.”

- supporting expert - Kasia Sadło



B. IMPLEMENTATION OF DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Proper implementation of the development plan consisted of the following elements:

→ IN-KIND AND SUBSTANTIVE SUPPORT

This type of support can be compared to a voucher with a total value not exceeding 30,000 PLN (for each initiative or organization). It could have been used for expert consultations, the purchase of services or material resources, as well as ensuring more stable working conditions. In practice, this meant covering the costs of renting the premises during the program or – in justified cases – paying for the working time that the participant had to devote to the implementation of activities in the program. The decision on what specifically will be budgeted, resulted from the development plan formulated in the previous step, however the decision was made in consultation with the participants.

A key part of the support offered was consultations with experts who, as part of their competences, helped participants to implement development plans. Sometimes this meant a one-off meeting that aimed to transfer a portion of knowledge or share experience in a selected area, but in most cases, participants met with experts several times to organize and plan activities in the legal and financial, strategic or related to the development of a new offer. In practice, many advisors worked with the participating organizations and initiatives as intensively and with similar commitment as the animators, supporting the latter in their function.

"I could feel support, care and trust. Someone helping me here in Poland, is the most important thing to me. Someone texts me, "Hang in there, you're doing a great job." Amazing. (...) Each of experts took my hand and said, "You see, we are taking the next step together." It's really important to me."

- participant of the second edition

In exceptional situations, funds were also allocated to retrofitting the organization, the purchasing process was then carried out by the program operator.

This greatly simplified participation in the program and allowed participants to focus on developing their ideas.



→ REGULAR MEETINGS WITH ANIMATORS

People qualified for the program received an individual supervisor from the program, the so-called animator.

The animation team consisted of three to even five people (so each of them had at least several initiatives under their care).

Each of the animators provided the participants with extensive substantive, organizational and emotional support.

Substantive and organizational support for animators consisted of the following activities (not all of them were implemented in each case and could occur in different proportions):

- formulating a development plan (support) and modifying it on an ongoing basis in the event of changing circumstances,
- acquiring experts providing services and consultations adequate to the participants' needs,
- networking program participants with other organizations and institutions,
- informing about interesting events, programs or trainings taking place outside the program,
- sharing knowledge and experience with participants,
- solving encountered problems or dilemmas via counselling,
- promotion of the initiative among experts and other external entities,
- sharing knowledge about the character of Polish non-governmental sector,
- controlling the budget and schedule of each initiative.

However, all these activities would not be effective without **emotional support**:

- creating relationships based on trust, openness and honesty,
- genuine care for the development and well-being of the participants,
- recognition and strengthening of the participants' efforts and successes,
- comfort and help in finding solutions, also in an area not directly related to professional life.

The relationship with the animator was one of the key elements of the Business Unusual program, creating a sense of security in the participants.

„The animator guided us in a very gentle way, she always asked us what we wanted, what suited us, and we felt that we could strive for everything that was needed for our development. It was a feeling that everything was possible, that we had space to achieve our goals. And the same with the plan – we felt that we could have everything. All we needed was a bit of boldness”

– participant of the second edition

„The fact that Shipyard Foundation provides the participants with a caregiver for a longer period of time, extending the support for months, and not acting according to the indicators that must be met under the threat of exclusion, distinguishes this program. Most grant programs offer more ad hoc counselling.”

– supporting expert
– Katarzyna Sadło

→ GROUP TRAININGS

Some of the participants took part in supplementary individual work **group trainings** devoted to issues in which the knowledge of the participants was at a similar, often basic level (e.g. fundraising, social economy, organization finance, the Act on the Protection of Minors).

→ JOINT EVENTS AND MEETINGS

In addition to individual development plans, the Business Unusual program undertook activities aimed at building a network of contacts between participants, as well as familiarizing them with other, more experienced initiatives and institutions. This was served by: an inauguration meeting, a study trip, a closing meeting of the program, as well as a networking meeting within both editions.

An important element of the program was also an anti-burnout trip. It allowed participants – often working very intensively – to catch a breath, reflect on their own psycho-physical condition in the context of their social activities, as well as learn how to manage the well-being of employees in their organization.

It is worth noting that all travel and accommodation costs were covered by the program.

„Rest. I met other people, I heard a lot of similar questions from other girls, other organizations that arrived here after the outbreak of the war. I heard that it wasn't just my condition, that it wasn't just my responsibility. I felt that everyone who spoke was also about me and to me too.

It was a kind of joint therapy.”

- participant of the second edition

CHECK-POINT (mid-term evaluation of cooperation)

Based on the experience of the first edition, the Business Unusual team introduced a so-called checkpoint, which was aimed at assessing cooperation with all participants three months after the start of the development plan.

The following **criteria were taken into account**:

- Are the objectives of the initiative being developed in line with the objectives of the program?
- Are participants engaged (attend meetings, events, devote time to their own work)?
- Do participants maintain contact with the Business Unusual team (inform about changes, are they responsive)?

A positive assessment meant continuation of cooperation, and a negative one could result in termination of participation in the program. Before the checkpoint, the organization could use up to 1/3 of the budget allocated for support (i.e. up to 10,000 PLN).

C. REPORT AND CLOSURE OF THE PROGRAMME

→ REPORT

The stage of **the report was really a formality** – it was limited to a brief description of the activities undertaken in the program, their effects and encountered during difficulties.

This was sufficient as the animators were up to date with the participants' progress. In addition, due to the lack of grants, participants did not have to account for the implementation of the budget or financial obligations. This was the task of animators.

→ CEREMONIAL FINALE

In addition to an individual summary of the cooperation by each of the animators, the participants also had the opportunity to meet at **the ceremonial finale of each edition**.

During the event, in an interview conducted by Żenia Klimakina – a journalist of Nowa Polska portal – they talked about the changes that took place in their organizations or initiatives under the influence of the program.

D. PROGRAM EVALUATION

The last element of the program was its **ongoing evaluation**, understood not only as an accompanying study of the first and second edition, but above all, as a process of reflection of the team on the implemented program and the possibility of improving it during the program (both at the level of the entire structure and individual cooperation).



III. BUSINESS UNUSUAL – A RANGE OF BENEFITS FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



WHAT RESULTS HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED?

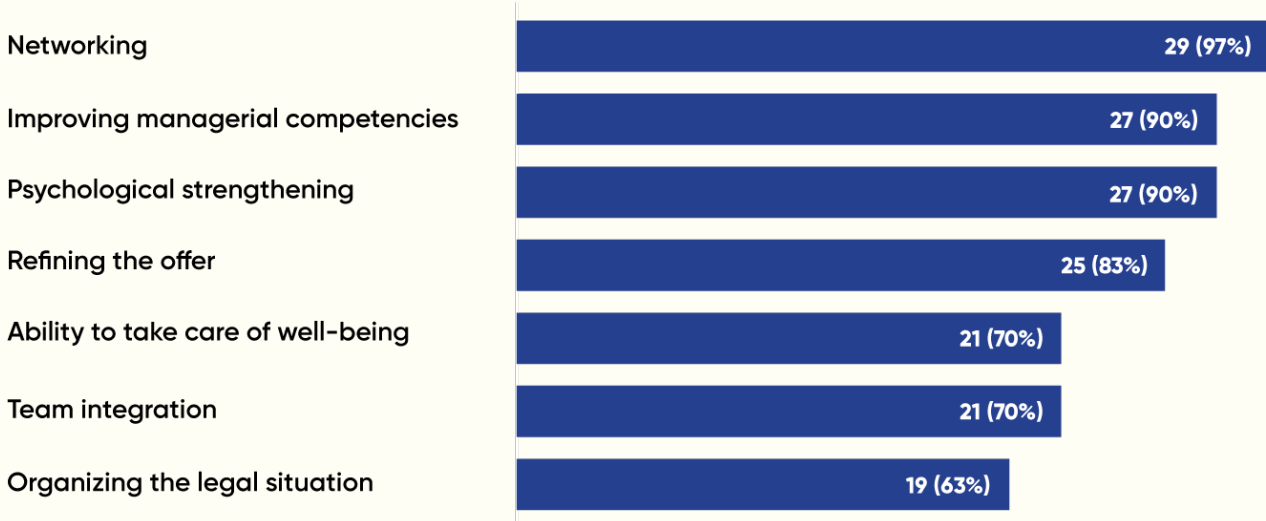
As a part of the evaluation study of both editions, we verified how the assumptions of Business Unusual program worked in practice. The program was created to support participants and their organizations in conducting social activities, increase their independence and resilience. Despite an individualized approach to a diverse audience, Business Unusual team identified a set of benefits that organizations and activists should receive at the end. The assumed effects were discussed earlier, in the section of the report devoted to the description of the program. Here, we look at how the results actually formed and show the impact of the program on various aspects of the participants' activities.

Both editions of the program, in the opinion of the participants, turned out to be a success – they all noticed the positive changes that took place in their organizations and activities thanks to Business Unusual.

An overview of these declared changes is illustrated in the graph below.

Participation in the program brought benefits to all participants in almost every dimension

The chart is based on participants' responses to the question of how the program influenced various aspects of their activities and/or their organization. Responses "rather agree" and "strongly agree" were counted as "yes." (n = 30)



1. LEGAL AND ACCOUNTING ORDER – THE FOUNDATION OF THE ORGANIZATION’S DEVELOPMENT

As part of the Business Unusual program, **almost 63% of the program participants organized legal and accounting issues.** For some, this meant formal establishment of an organization, which enabled them to carry out activities in a systematic manner. The program facilitated decision on the choice of legal form and smooth passage through this process. Thanks to support of Business Unusual experts, many newly established organizations have not only come into existence, but are also developing steadily.

„If someone had told me a few years ago that I would be managing an organization, I would have said, „No. You don’t have to make jokes like that, ok? It’s not funny” and I would probably be upset that someone is making fun of me. And now? (...) I have my organization, I have accounting, everything is going according to the plan. I have a fully-equipped room. We are acting and I want to move on.

- participant of the first edition

The program has also helped existing organizations that – thanks to support – have tidied up their financial records and resolved issues arising from past neglect.

Sometimes support of the program in making decisions led to the official registration of a new organization, and sometimes to termination of business in its current form, so that in the future it could be resumed using the acquired knowledge about finance and accounting.

„I think they have realized what resources – often limited – they have. They also acquired humility – not everything is needed immediately and not by any cost. They experienced that development is primarily a reflection and operationalization. It is not doing and then thinking, but thinking first and then implementing.”

- supporting expert - Karolina Cyran-Juraszek

2. INCREASE IN PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE – SELF-CONFIDENCE AND READINESS TO ACT

Participation in the Business Unusual program had a significant impact on individual psychological resources of the participants. **More than 87% of respondents indicated that the program had a positive impact on their mental state**, especially strengthening self-confidence and belief that they can meet challenges they face in social activity.

„I treat the country that welcomed me with respect, and I want to give back what I can. A program like Business Unusual was a real gift from the universe for me. It was not just about developing competences – it was only some part of the program. The most important thing to me was to observe myself: how I can live on emigration and cope in a new environment. This is what is crucial to me.”

- participant of the second edition

They also gained a strong sense that they would not be left alone in the face of difficulties. This positive effect was primarily influenced by the involvement and kindness of animators and support of Shipyard Foundation. The program team also gave great importance to concern for well-being of the participants. According to our interviewees, strengthening in this area really had an impact on the increase in their independence and readiness for further social activities.

„I can say that my self-confidence has increased. Before the program, thinking about managing an organization would bring one conclusion – I can't do that. Now? I may not have all the tools yet, but I believe I can learn it, and I'm open to this possibility.”

- participant of the first edition

3. NEW CONTACTS – COOPERATION AND SUPPORT NETWORK

Participation in Business Unusual program enabled participants to establish numerous contacts that turned out to be useful in the development of their organization. **Almost all respondents** emphasized that thanks to the program they gained acquaintanceships of great practical value.

The newly established contacts brought benefits in three main areas:

KNOWLEDGE FROM SOMEONE EXPERIENCED

„For example, when we talked about the fact that the program concerns social entrepreneurship, the topic of a different approach appeared – based not only on social aspects, but also on business. I realized that you can support the same target group differently, sometimes for free and sometimes for a fee, which is completely natural. Often, even when support is paid, people approach it more responsibly, as opposed to free workshops where you can show up or not.”

- participant of the first edition

INSPIRED BY THE ACTIONS OF OTHERS

„It was important for us to learn about different practices – to see how it works in other teams and cities. It was an inspiration for us. As people who are not in their own country, we cannot expect someone to adapt to our needs and, for example, make a place available free of charge. Now, we can see that it's possible. During our study visit in Gdańsk, we noticed how the youth centre works there – it's something we dream about. Now, thanks to these examples, we feel that we can strive for what we want to create, and we have already begun to combine our ideas with the solutions we have seen.”

- participant of the second edition

COOPERATION AND MUTUAL SUPPORT

„P. Foundation wanted to do something with us, and we also wanted to do something with them. I even wrote a project in cooperation with them to do something. And also with K. Foundation, we had those ideas that I would send them our cooking chefs for some of their projects, but also that they would order catering from us – all in all, a mutual support.”

- participant of the first edition



The new contacts were of particular importance for younger, less experienced organizations. Thanks to them, they have gained access to knowledge, inspiration and cooperation networks that make it easier for them to meet everyday challenges. The participants met primarily members of Business Unusual team and experts with whom they would not have had the opportunity to cooperate without participation in the program. In addition, they established relationships with other program participants, including those who shared similar challenges or experiences with them.

„We have a lot now: a website, policies, contacts with other foundations, as well as knowledge of how everything works. We know experts and we know that if we need something, we can turn to them with project issues. We have more information about how it works in Poland – what is important, and what is not.”

- participant of the second edition

„Our animator networked us really well. Most of us were at the beginning of the road – young organizations, often without much experience. Thanks to him, we met others who had been working for a long time, and we could learn from them. For example, he associated us with organizations conducting similar activities so that we could exchange experiences.”

- participant of the first edition

Contacts with organizations outside Business Unusual turned out to be equally valuable, which in some cases resulted in concrete help. One of the participants mentioned the support of the Empowering Children Foundation, which provided practical advice and legal support in crisis. This intervention made it possible to quickly solve a problem that the organization could not otherwise deal with. Another participant, conducting activities for women, talked about the fact that contact with FemFund meant her organization was already recommended further by the Fund, thanks to which she established, among others, a relationship with Krytyka Polityczna.



photo: W. Radwański

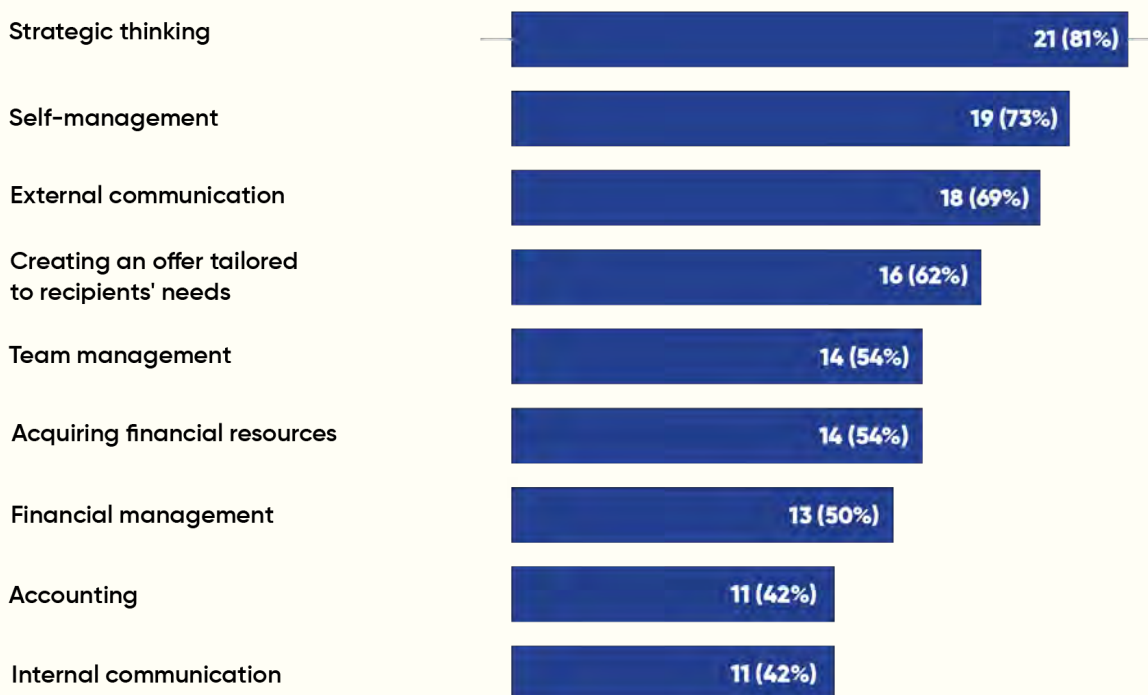
4. DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES

90% of the program participants declared to increase their competences related to management of an organization. In the case of people who are at the initial stage of working in the sector, it was a tremendous change that allowed them to actually start functioning independently.

In the survey, we asked our respondents what exactly they learned in the area of management thanks to participation in the program.

The vast majority of participants strengthened their competencies related to strategic thinking and self-management

The chart is based on participants' responses to the question about areas in which their competences or the competences of the organization increased thanks to participation in the Program. Participants could select more than one answer (n=26)



It turns out that the participants' competences, which are related to planning **their own work and time** (self-management) and **organizational strategy** (strategic thinking), have increased. More specific and tangible practical skills related to management (fundraising, accounting), as well as competences related to teamwork (team management, internal communication) have also developed, but to a significantly lesser extent.

This is probably related to character of the program, which was to equip participants with resources they actually needed. Therefore, not everyone wanted to develop specific skills, but everyone had to learn to manage themselves better – in this respect the program achieved complete success.

„The goal is to empower these people in general. This is how I understand it, and I also worked in that spirit. A smaller focus on delivering a specific project result, and a greater focus on preparing these people for action, in any way they would eventually emerge. Because some have brought concrete cases, and some – that’s my impression – had a better understanding of what could be done, and what not. And it was okay, too.”

- supporting expert - Agnieszka Sikorska

In other cases, the increase in competences was more point-based. However, it still had a significant impact, as it allowed the participant to enter a completely different level of management than before. This applies, for example, to leadership competences that one of the participants of the program managed to develop.

„The most important thing to me in the March diagnostic meeting no.1 was to realize that I am the leader here. (...) when the experts asked who was in charge, that guys pointed at me. And I was immediately offended, like, how come? (...) I realized that I might have been hiding behind that democratic structure. And at the very end someone can be legally, formally responsible for all these signatures that I submit. I can’t escape it. The sooner I realize this, the better for the signatures made.”

- participant of the first edition



photo: J. Waszkiewicz

5. CREATING STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS – SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS

The extent to which participation in the program translated into strategic and life plans of the participants depended mainly on their situation at the start. For those who were at the beginning of their journey in the non-governmental sector, participation in the program was particularly beneficial. Financial, substantive and friendly mentoring support helped them to define specific goals and plan paths for their implementation from a scratch.

The strategy developed under the program has become a very important internal document of the organization defining the direction of its operation.

„None of people who formed our organization had any previous experience in running non-governmental organizations, so we had doubts about what we should do, what we want to do, which project first – we had a lot of quite contradictory ideas. (...) We knew we had to keep doing something. We wanted to see where we would be needed and where the needs of the community were. And we, in fact, together with Business Unusual program, formulated our goals as an organization.”

- participant of the first edition

„In general, this is our Bible, which is given to every employee who joins us. They need to get acquainted with it so that they know where we are heading together. So it's just something that everyone gets at the beginning. Yes. Plus, it helps us choose the projects we engage in wisely. So if one of us comes up with something, sees a cool project, gets inspired somewhere, sees something great, we take this mission and vision, and see if it fits in.”

- participant of the first edition

Other participants, with more experience in running associations or foundations, also benefited by modifying business models, creating additional elements of strategy or planning individual projects as a complement to their work in larger organizations. In these cases, the impact of the program was more subtle, but still significant. Participants who were already in the process of setting a new course of action could, thanks to the program, add small but important elements that supported their further development.

„Those I observe are drawing on those experiences somehow. For example, I can see how they write about their activities, or that they begin to implement these activities – they begin to talk about them outside in a quite specific and detailed way.”

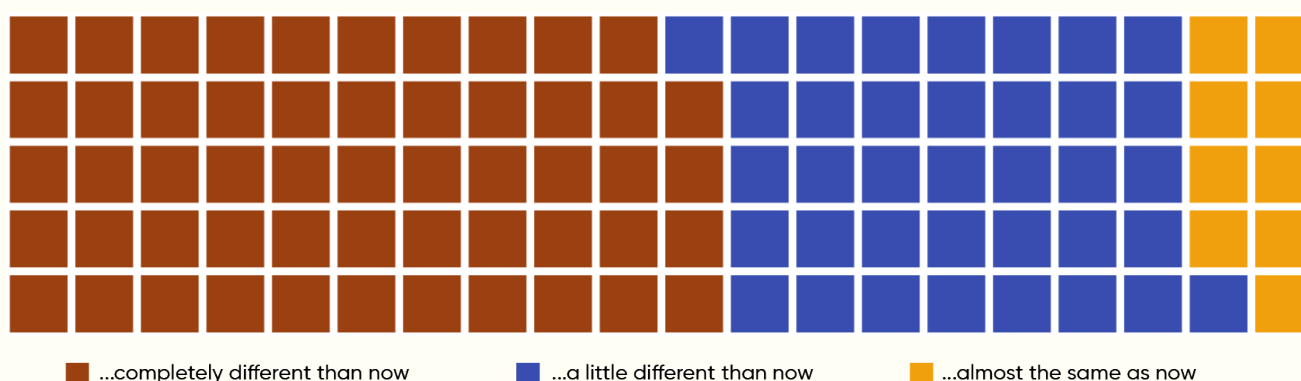
- supporting expert - Agnieszka Sikorska

SUMMARY – THE IMPACT OF BUSINESS UNUSUAL PROGRAM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTICIPANTS

The program had a real impact on all organizations and people participating in it. More than half of them believe that without Business Unusual their situation would look completely different than it does today, and according to another ¼, it would be slightly different. Only a small group of participants believe that the impact of the program (although noticeable) ultimately did not fundamentally change the situation of a given person or organization.

The situation of most participants changed significantly for the better

The chart is based on participants' responses to the question: "If it were not for participation in the programme, your situation or that of people in your organisation would be..." (n=30)



In response to the open-ended question, the participants justified their answers. They shared a variety of benefits that can be classified into several key areas:

ACCELERATION OF DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ORGANIZATION

The program was often perceived as a decisive factor in the survival of the organization or acceleration of its development:

- "There wouldn't be my organization, just like that."
- „The development of our organization could be delayed by several years."

CONSCIOUS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Participation in the program provided participants with access to knowledge about the activities of non-governmental organizations, which enabled more conscious and professional management:

- „The program gave us a lot to think about and to understand how an NGO should work."

- „We would not have access to the latest legal solutions, we would not have the opportunity to exchange experiences with other organizations.“

BETTER NETWORKING AND EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES

Thanks to the program, participants established valuable relationships that strengthened their position in the environment of social organizations:

- „We wouldn't have so many fantastic acquaintances in NGO community.“
- „When building a team, we would make a lot of organizational mistakes.“

STRENGTHENING THE REPUTATION, LOCAL POSITION AND INCREASING PRESTIGE.

Participation in the program strengthened the position of many organizations at the local level, which translated into recognition among institutions and partners:

- „Our position has improved locally (we are invited to meetings in local government units and other institutions).“
- „We are also talking about your support to our sponsors and donors who notice and appreciate our development.“

INCREASED SELF-CONFIDENCE AND PREVENTION OF BURNOUT

Participation in the program allowed those involved to feel more confident and avoid the risk of burnout:

- „Uncertainty in decision making, we would be closer to burnout.“

To sum up, Business Unusual program not only supported development of participants' organizations, but also allowed them to act more effectively, professionally and consciously, as well as gain a better position and build valuable relationships within NGO sector.



photo: B. Bańka

IV. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM BUSINESS UNUSUAL?



PRACTICAL TIPS FOR SUPPORTING SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES

In the following chapter, we share what we considered good practice from the perspective of over two years of implementing the program and testing various solutions during this time. The experience of the team, our experts, as well as the clearly positive reception of the program among its participants leads us to believe that individual elements of the method adopted can be an inspiration for creators of other programs supporting organizations and initiatives in their development.

We consider most of the recommendations we formulate to be universal, i.e. independent of the characteristics of the target group of the program. In the case of Business Unusual, this group was largely composed of people with migrant and refugee experience and acting on their behalf, but we are sure that many of the following recommendations were born as a result of supporting people and organizations in development – regardless of the subject these entities deal with.

„Business Unusual is an organization support program. The methodology of this program can be an inspiration for advisors and all organizations involved in supporting development of other organizations – regardless of their area of activity. (...) It doesn't have to be mercedes like You. No one has that kind of money anymore. Sometimes, however, I get the impression that it does not require a large financial outlay to implement it in a more conscious way.”

- supporting expert - Karolina Cyran-Juraszek

However, due to the growing number of entities acting for migrants and refugees, we decided to distinguish among the general recommendations a section specifically devoted to programs with a target group similar to Business Unusual.

We devote separate attention to them in the section on resources and competences needed for the work of animators.

We encourage you to familiarize yourself with our recommendations, hoping that you will find inspiration and thoughts in them that will be helpful in supporting others in the development of their business.

1. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAM'S STRUCTURE FROM A BIRD'S EYE VIEW – PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVE

In the evaluation study accompanying both editions, we asked participants to assess various features that may characterize grant programs, including Business Unusual. Respondents had 100 points at their disposal, which they could distribute in any way between the above-mentioned features. Depending on their preferences, they assigned points to one, several or all elements. The most important elements received a lot of points, less important features – a smaller number or zero points.

The answers show that the participants appreciated features of the program to the greatest extent, thanks to which support is personalized and comprehensive, and based on an individual relationship. That is why we pay attention to them in the first place.

For participants, the most important aspects were an individual approach and a wide range of activities that could be financed within the program

The chart is based on participants' responses about their preferred features that grant programs should have. Each respondent had 100 points to allocate freely (hence the high scores). The graph shows the total number of points awarded by respondents to each of the listed elements (n=30)



2. IMPORTANT DECISIONS BEFORE STARTING THE PROGRAM

A. INDIVIDUAL AND COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT AS THE KEY TO DEVELOPMENT

Business Unusual was founded as a program open to people with a diverse business profile, various goals and experience. **In order for the offered support to respond effectively to the needs of such a diverse group, it was necessary to base it on individual work in order to set goals and ways of achieving them adequately to the needs.** At the same time, the program was characterized by a wide range of offered support – from financial issues through strategic to image or closely related to the specificity of the participant's activity (e.g. consulting in the field of running an educational institution in Poland). **The diversity of support offered, as well as an individual approach to work, are – according to the participants – the most desirable features of this type of program.**

B. OPTIMIZATION OF SUPPORT

– EFFECTIVE GROUPING OF PARTICIPANTS

Some of the initiatives and organizations participating in the program faced very similar challenges, and their level of knowledge on selected issues was also similar. Therefore, we also recommend that the team creating the program identify profiles of participants and divide them into subgroups, e.g. with a similar level of knowledge (basic, advanced) in the area of fundraising, financial management or legal aspects. Another criterion for the division of participants may be the area of undertaken activity. Identifying such clusters would make it possible to provide more profiled knowledge, e.g. through the selection of an animator with given competences or the implementation of group training, thanks to which participants would acquire basic knowledge necessary for later work on their own development path. It would also be an additional opportunity to network participants. At the same time, we are convinced that group trainings should only complement the individual form of work, not replace it.

C. SYSTEMATIC DIAGNOSIS OF ENTRY NEEDS

The natural consequence of the decision to work individually with a participant in the case of Business Unusual was to obtain as much data as possible on the current situation of the organization or the reported initiative. The diagnostic meeting, which took place after admission to the program, lasted 3–4 hours and was conducted by at least three people: an expert and two animators. Such a framework has created conditions for obtaining a lot of diverse and relevant information about the needs and resources of participants. At the same time, our experience has shown that it is extremely important to con-

duct such a conversation in the most structured way possible. Therefore, we recommend that the diagnosis stage collects information in an in-depth manner in the areas crucial for stability of organization or initiative – financial, legal and accounting. Such a solution would require additional involvement of experts specialised in the given topics at this stage. One possibility is also to ask participants with legal personality to present at this stage the financial statements for the previous year and other documents that will allow the program team to better assess the situation.

D. APPOINTMENT OF A PROGRAM COUNCIL

Experts are people who have often taken an intensive part as animators in development of initiatives and organizations participating in the program. Taking into account their observations gives a chance for better, ongoing tailoring of offered support and other activities in the program to the needs of participants. Therefore, in the case of such programs, it is worth considering and appointing a board of animators and experts (program board), which, thanks to the diverse perspectives of its members, can help make current decisions regarding the course of the program.

E. PLANNING THE EVALUATION AS A PROCESS OF ONGOING REFLECTION

We recommend planning the evaluation understood not only as a study accompanying the program, but above all as a process of systematic reflection of the team on the implemented program and possibility of improving it during the program (both at the level of the entire structure and a single cooperation between an expert and participant).

F. EQUIPPING ANIMATORS WITH USEFUL COMPETENCES AND RESOURCES

Regardless of what target group the program covers, supporting others in development, especially in a close relationship, can involve various burdens – both emotional and substantive. Therefore, it is worth ensuring that the team accompanying participants throughout the program has appropriate competences, and can also participate in training or consultations to strengthen these skills. These include:

- **ability to cope with the sense of co-responsibility for the participant's development with limited impact on the final result.**

One of the sources of emotional burden for animators was a great sense of responsibility for participants' success. Close and committed relationships with them meant that animators really cared about their success. Animators had to face the experience of their limited impact on their situation, resulting from both external conditions and their own limitations (e.g. in terms of time resources, money, cooperation framework).

- **assertive communication skills**

In their work, animators had to face situations when relations with participants began to go beyond the limits conducive to the effectiveness of support. Some participants sought support from them in various, also very personal difficulties. The animators mentioned that sometimes, being recipients of emotional confidences, they felt like psychologists. Therefore, people working in such a role should be able to set their boundaries and, if the situation so requires, be able to formulate and communicate constructive criticism directed to the participants.

- **experience of working in the social sector and a wide network of contacts**

The contacts, gathered thanks to various professional and life experiences, facilitated the networking of participants and the selection of experts to meet their needs.

In addition, it is worth ensuring that the people who make up the program team (animators or experts) have knowledge in the following areas:

- **effectively supporting leaders**

Most of the participants of the program were leaders of their ventures. While working on their development, animators inevitably touched on areas related to support specific to people in this role. There are at least several excellent programs and organizations on the Polish market that support leaders. It is worth taking advantage of their achievements and preparing the program team to identify the needs of participants in this area and plan adequate forms and places of support for them.

- **internal diagnosis of the organization and analysis of its environment**

Well organised, even basic knowledge in these areas will allow for a better assessment of the situation of organizations and initiatives at the entrance to the program and adequate selection of support for them.

Moreover, the following competencies and resources are important in programs that support people with migration and refugee experience:

- **intercultural competences** – knowledge of social and linguistic principles and norms enabling communication with people from other cultures.
- **knowledge of the principles of an inclusive language**, enabling inclusion of diverse people, regardless of their origin, religion or gender.
- If possible, at least in some members of the program team, **basic knowledge of the participants' mother tongue** (who are often in the process of learning Polish) or the provision of interpreters supporting communication with people with communication difficulties in Polish.
- **basic knowledge of the principles of supporting people who have experienced war trauma**, which would allow them to better understand their needs and adapt the offered support model to them (so that it is safe and comfortable for them). An additional, but equally important issue is the ability to take care of the well-being of animators supporting people with this type of experience.

G. ANIMATORS' WORK CULTURE: COOPERATION, TRUST AND FREEDOM OF ACTION

We recommend creating a work culture that gives the program team autonomy in action and decision making. In case of Business Unusual, the animators themselves adjusted the support to the needs of individual participants and managed the budget assigned to their initiatives. When in doubt, they supported each other and consulted the decisions made. Such a work model was necessary for the implementation of the program to be truly flexible.

H. STRATEGIC LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

The escalation of war in Ukraine forced us to change our perspective and establish a program responding to the most current social challenges.

Looking back, we see the value of creating program strategies also in the spirit of future thinking – imagining the future based on current and future trends, opportunities and threats in the social environment. Using this knowledge, we give ourselves a chance to react to them – we strengthen beneficial phenomena, counteract adverse changes and create guidelines for public policies. Therefore, we encourage to take into account trends and other significant phenomena and processes affecting (positively or negatively) the surrounding reality when designing program strategies. For this purpose, you can use reports, analyses or trend maps published annually.



photo: W. Radwański

3. RECOMMENDATIONS AT THE STAGE OF PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

A. FRAMEWORK OF COOPERATION BETWEEN EXPERTS AND PARTICIPANTS

Business Unusual participants were supported by various types of experts. Some of them looked at the organization in a holistic way (they arranged its strategy or organized the legal and financial area), others focused on visual identification, website or other specialized topic. In the case of longer cooperation, which requires the work of both the expert and the participant, we recommend the development of short documents describing the scope of cooperation between participants and experts at the beginning of the process. This note should be prepared by the animator and may summarize common findings on:

- the expected result of cooperation,
- division of responsibilities (type and number of tasks) between an expert and participant,
- the number of working days of an expert at the disposal of the participants (which may be changed during the course if the situation requires so).

We suggest treating the resulting document as a tool supporting all parties in the conversation about the implementation of the planned steps and possible discrepancies in expectations.

A tool used to manage the work of experts with participants can also be a common (available to all parties) platform for reporting the hours used, activities carried out and recording the conclusions of completed meetings.

B. COOPERATION BETWEEN EXPERTS

During the implementation of the program, many participants were supported simultaneously (or at short intervals) by several experts from different fields. Often, the results of working with one of these people influenced the scope and effectiveness of subsequent cooperation. For example, organizing the legal and financial situation of the organization allowed to obtain relevant information for further work on the organization's strategy or individual ideas for activities. Both the animators and the participants tried to pass on the previous findings and experience of cooperation to subsequent experts, but this was not always carried out in a systematic way.

Therefore, in case of taking care of a participant by more than one advisor, we recommend that all involved experts be allowed to voluntarily exchange knowledge and conduct conversations about the current work with a given participant. This could take the form of a common platform with notes created by experts in the course of cooperation or expert meetings, during which, as in the case of a medical consilium, it would be possible to discuss the specific conditions and needs of a given participant.

C. MANDATORY CHECKPOINT (MID-TERM EVALUATION OF COOPERATION)

We recommend that the programme operators meet with their participants for the mid-term evaluation of the existing cooperation. During such a meeting, it is worth to:

- make sure that none of the participants' important areas of activity (such as their financial situation) requires new, intensive activities, without which it will be impossible to guarantee the stability of the initiative,
- consider together with the participants whether the implemented support plan (including cooperation with experts) responds to the challenges identified at the beginning of cooperation.

D. INVOLVING PARTICIPANTS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND BUILDING CO-RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE RESULTS OF THE PROGRAM

In order to strengthen the involvement of participants and a sense of co-responsibility for the results achieved in the program, **we recommend including them in all decisions made, from the conclusions of the diagnosis through the proposed support plan to its modifications.**

It is also important to clearly communicate to participants (both during recruitment and during the process) about their ability to influence, but also responsibility for what they can take from the program.

A motivating and complementary solution to an individual check-point can also be a meeting of all participants, during which everyone would be asked to tell others about the work done so far and plans for the rest of the program.

E. NETWORKING

Equipping participants with a network of contacts and personal acquaintances is one of the most important resources for developing social activities. **Therefore, we recommend organizing joint trips and meetings that allow participants to get to know each other, as well as using additional tools and opportunities for networking, such as creating and moderating a Facebook group (or in another environment), organizing online meetings, encouraging other participants to visit on their own or as part of the program.**

It is also worth considering the organization of meetings of participants with entities external to the program – representatives of business, non-governmental and public sectors, interested in cooperation with some of the developed initiatives.

4. THE END OF THE PROGRAM – WHAT’S NEXT?

A. MEMORY OF THE PROGRAM’S ALUMNI, FURTHER INVOLVEMENT IN ACTIVITIES

As a result of the long-term, close cooperation of the program team with its participants, a bond was established, which is difficult to break with the end of project financing. After closing of the edition, many Business Unusual students hope to remain in the orbit of Shipyard Foundation – they will be informed about current activities and invited to events they can benefit from. Some of them would also like to share their expertise with less experienced organizations facing similar challenges. One can also think about the continuation of support intended specifically for them, e.g. in the area of strengthening the business potential of the developed projects.

We recommend planning activities that will maintain relationship with attendees, and perhaps developing another advanced support path for them to follow.

B. COMMUNICATION POTENTIAL OF PARTICIPANTS’ STORIES

Both professional and personal experiences of people developing their organizations and social initiatives are often fascinating stories, full of inspiring twists and turns. In Business Unusual program, the socio-political context took on particular importance. Some of the participants, forced to leave Ukraine after the escalation of the war, or Belarus in connection with repressions, continued their activities with determination despite difficult situation. For others, the war became an impulse to change profile of operations, or to engage in humanitarian aid and social activities.

Stories of these activities and social successes can inspire and motivate other people and organizations in similar situations. Therefore, as part of the program, in addition to supporting communication and promotion, participants were given the opportunity – thanks to cooperation with a public relations agency – to share their experiences with the media. They brought their stories closer and told about methods of dealing with societal challenges.

We believe that in the case of other social programs, it is also worth using the potential inherent in the stories of participants. Promoting their experience, even if the target audience is different from Business Unusual, can eventually bring many benefits.

V. CONCLUSIONS



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1ST EDITION

Stowarzyszenie Inclusive.Buzz / Warszawa
Fundacja Integracji i Rozwoju Cudzoziemców w Polsce / Gorzów Wielkopolski
Fundacja NIEOBCY / Żory
Fundacja Kraina / Warszawa
Stowarzyszenie Mova - język bez barier / Warszawa
Daria Kharkova - then: Fundacja Diagnoza Akceptacja Rozwój / Warszawa
Tetiana Wyhowska / Katowice
Magda Sadura i Weronika Brączek / Warszawa
Fundacja YOUkraine / Szczecin
NOMADA - Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Integracji Społeczeństwa Wielokulturowego / Wrocław
Alena Kazakova - then: Fundacja Artel / Warszawa
Fundacja Po-Nad-To / Warszawa
Spółdzielnia Słuszna Strawa / Warszawa
Stowarzyszenie Patchwork / Kraków
Fundacja Kobiety Wędrownie / Sopot/Warszawa

2ND EDITION

Maryna Riabinina - then: Fundacja Centrum Wsparcia Migrantów „Resource” / Gdynia
Fundacja Współpracy Międzynarodowej Polsko-Ukraińskiej „FREE DOM” / Toruń
Fundacja dla Migrantów „DOBRY START” im. A G Farah / Warszawa
Viktoriia Savytska - then: sole proprietorship Sava Ria / Trójmiasto
Fundacja EMPOWERMENT / Warszawa
Fundacja Ukrainka w Polsce / Wrocław
Centrum Wsparcia Rodziny Labirynt / Gdańsk
Fundacja Migrant Info Point / Poznań
Fundacja Twarze Depresji / Warszawa
Fundacja DAR LOSU / Warszawa
MOST Media / Białystok
Fundacja Kocham Dębniki / Kraków
Barista Inclusive / Warszawa
Fundacja WeOk / Warszawa
Fundacja Jedność / Kraków
Żywiecka Fundacja Rozwoju / Dobre Sobie / Żywiec
Kolektyw No Hamina / Warszawa
Fundacja Splot Społeczny / Warszawa

*Due to discrepancy and abundance of non-translatable names of foundations and associations, in order to maintain consistency all names are given in their original form.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR EXPERTS:

Ewelina Bartosik, Karolina Cyran-Juraszek, Marcin Dadel, Agnieszka Deja, Zuzanna Dłużniewska, Tomasz Domański, Dagmara Gortych, Andrzej Grabowiec, Piotr Henzler, Marta Jaguś, Adam Kadenaci, Erik Kemp, Katarzyna Kielbiowska, Martyna Klamann, Joanna Kowalska, Magdalena Latuch, Małgorzata Lelonkiewicz, Virginie Little, Aleksander Młowiec, Weronika Paszewska, Katarzyna Sadło, Magdalena Sadłowska, Dorota Setniewska, Piotr Skrzypczak, Agnieszka Sikorska, Sergiy Skorycki, Katarzyna Stanisławowska, Michał Szymanderski-Pastryk, Piotr Todys, Marta Walkowska-Lipko, Aleksandra Więcka, Maria Wiśnicka

The program was implemented in two editions, between 2022 and 2024 by the Shipyard Foundation with funding from Google.org.





For over 15 years, we have been creating and supporting effective solutions to social problems, involving citizens in decision-making processes on public matters and helping organizations as well as local governments plan and implement social activities.

We develop and disseminate good practices, create tools to facilitate social activities, conduct social research, and train and develop educational materials. Our activities focus on three key aspects: social innovation, civic participation, research, and consulting.

Social Innovation

We believe that many socially important needs require a new approach. That is why – on our own or by helping others – we look for, refine and test in practice innovative solutions, i.e. social innovations.

- We looking for even better, innovative solutions that respond to social needs and contribute to repair even a tiny excerpt of reality.
- We support solutions – together with originators we look for the best ways to address problems given, and for the conditions in which our solutions would grow and work effectively.
- We network people and entities operating in this area, including innovators, entities running social innovation incubators.
- We disseminate and incorporate into practice social innovations that will work best during the trial.