

Short Guide to Recruiting, Retaining and Driving Growth for Women Micro- entrepreneurs – *Lessons from BWC*

Updated June 1st, 2021



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1. Why Women Need a Tailored Approach

TechnoServe strives to recruit and retain a minimum of 40% female beneficiaries in all programs



TechnoServe strives to contribute to global gender equality by ensuring that our programs have an impact on the lives of both women and men.

In order to do so, we strive to include and benefit men and women to achieve a **minimum of 40% female beneficiaries**

This guide provides **strategies for the recruitment, retention and growth of women-owned businesses in entrepreneurship programs**. It can assist **program directors, managers and field-level staff** to identify and encourage women to join their program, stay engaged with the program to its completion and drive growth in their businesses.

This Guide builds on the Entrepreneurship Practice's [**MSGB Acceleration Toolkit**](#), that supports program staff to **design, set-up, implement and monitor high quality entrepreneurship programs**.

1. Why Women Need a Tailored Approach

Many women face unique constraints that may prevent them from participating in a program...

These include:



Availability

Women are often expected to fill domestic responsibilities and have less time or flexibility in their schedule for their businesses or training.



Networks

Women often have more limited social and/or professional networks, lack exposure to high growth opportunities. Their businesses are often in low-margin sectors.



Technology

Women often have limited access to mobile phones, are unable to afford their purchase or data, and may not know how to use all their functionalities. Additionally, they may not know how to use technology to grow their business.



Decision-making power

Some women may need to seek permission from their husbands or others to participate in program activities or make decisions about their business.



Security

Women often have limited hours and locations where they can safely travel. They may also avoid keeping their shops open until late.



Literacy & education

Often, women have lower education and literacy rates than men, which pose challenges for reading/signing documents, book-keeping, etc.

1. Why Women Need a Tailored Approach

Like men, women entrepreneurs need access to business skills training but also face unique constraints that prevent them from growing their businesses



Access to financial products and services

Women have less exposure and access to these services, often due to lack of time, documentation, self-confidence, and these are rarely designed with a gender lens. As a result they have little trust in these services.



Social norms

Women can be successful entrepreneurs and pursue high-growth activities but lack role models that can break the norms that only associate women with being a wife or mother.



Family support

Women can face varying degrees of resistance from family members to pursue and grow their business.



1. Why Women Need a Tailored Approach

... lastly, program teams often fail to reach women due to critical oversights

These oversights include:



Perceptions and beliefs

Teams may have preconceived notions about women in business



Desire to reach a target

To achieve results, programs may only want to work with the “best” entrepreneurs.

They are often those who have the most resources (e.g., formalized, bigger businesses, more employees, collateral, higher income) and these tend to be men



Knowledge of best practice

Even the most well-intentioned teams may not be familiar with strategies to reach women



Understanding women's needs

Many programs do not understand that men and women have different needs, schedules, and preferences

1. Why Women Need a Tailored Approach

Gender-balanced teams that understand the needs of women entrepreneurs will have greater success.

Ensure your team is gender-aware

1. Build the capacity of the entire team to understand the different needs, opportunities, and constraints of women and men.
2. Change the 'default' of your program to work exclusively for women. This will reveal different strategies that work for women and still attract men.
3. Contact your gender champions and/or the Gender Practice to organize a gender awareness and analysis workshop

Build a gender-balanced team (at least 50% women)

1. TechnoServe aims to offer employment opportunities for women and men. Refer to TechnoServe's Recommendations for Gender Inclusive Recruitment Processes and engage with local HR managers to ensure you recruit and hire women.
2. Attract women business advisors and counselors to demonstrate that your program takes gender equality seriously.
3. In some places, women staff are necessary for working with women entrepreneurs.



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Programs can effectively recruit women by taking action at each stage of the recruitment process

1

Define the selection criteria

Fine tune selection criteria for greater results

2

Develop a communication plan

Develop and promote a “pitch” about the program

3

Engage key stakeholders

Inform community members of program activities

4

Conduct targeted outreach

Seek out women and other underrepresented groups

5

Conduct a formal application process

Encourage women to apply

1. Define Selection Criteria

One of the most crucial elements of any program is the selection of participants. In TechnoServe's entrepreneurship programs these participants are typically urban or peri-urban entrepreneurs and MSGB businesses.

Consult the Entrepreneurship Practice's [Entrepreneur Recruitment & Selection guide](#) for a detailed step by step recruitment plan

PM/PDs & SBAs

Set a **target of 50% of Women Owned Businesses (WOB)** to ensure you reach TNS's *current* 40% goal

Review **selection criteria** to make sure it is **inclusive of WOB** (business turnover, maturity, ownership) and **particular constraints** women may be facing, such as digital savviness, limited resources (e.g. megabytes if doing a digital training program), little time or low literacy



2. Develop Communication Plan

Call both men and women's attention to program activities

PM/PDs & SBAs

Design **promotional materials** with:

- Positive and culturally sensitive depictions of women and messages
- Gender inclusive language (e.g., female examples and pronouns) to attract women to the program
- Direct quotes from other female entrepreneurs
- Simple language and visuals (for low literacy levels)

Develop an “**elevator pitch**” that describes the program in a gender-inclusive manner

Promote program through media and/or communication **channels with large female audiences:**

- e.g., TV/radio shows popular with women if program has resources and has an SME entrepreneur profile
- WhatsApp groups or Facebook for urban micro-entrepreneurs

Ask yourself: *how do women get information and how can you utilize this channel?*

3. Engage key stakeholders

Inform local leaders about the upcoming program before and during recruitment

All team members

*Where relevant, **early involvement and inclusion of local authorities** facilitates finding women entrepreneurs and fostering their trust in the program. It also facilitates meeting program targets and obtaining permissions to work in certain areas

Explain to all stakeholders that the program aims to **recruit both men and women** and why this is important (see: the “elevator pitch”)

Seek out **female community leaders** and enlist their support in identifying women to join the program

Promote the program using **female organizations or informal groups**

4. Conduct targeted outreach

With promotional materials in hand and the guidance of key stakeholders, outreach begins by identifying and meeting with potential participants

Consult BWC's Lessons Learned for more information on conducting targeted outreach

Field teams (BAs, BCs)

Promote the program in places where women meet, work, or congregate. Approach women while being **mindful of their constraints and the particular environment of their business** (busy day or time of day, which varies per sector)

Door-to-door recruitment works well to find women owned businesses. You may need to return several times to allow women to **ask husband's permission**

Be mindful of your approach when speaking to and recruiting women, taking into account the religion and culture (in some areas, male staff cannot speak with women on their own)

To show program is credible, gain women's trust and manage expectations, share number of beneficiaries reached by the program, training materials, graduation certificates and images/videos of graduation

Get referrals from previous beneficiaries

5. Conduct a formal application process

A thought through, targeted application process will help gauge women's motivation

Field teams

Use an **application form and brief interview to check eligibility and motivation**. Women who actively show interest in training (ask about costs, location, hour) are most motivated.

Ensure the application form is in a **language women understand**. Allow sufficient time for women to read all documentation and ask husband's permission if necessary

If needed, facilitate potential female applicants to **get support from leaders or family members** to apply (e.g., provide a formal invitation letter or communicate directly with her family)

Facilitate an introductory module (M0) to expose women to the program and its content; it will serve as a **filter to gauge women's participation and interest level**.

Use **women from previous cycles** – in person, video or text (depending on their availability) for this introductory module (M0) to increase motivation and trust

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Follow recommendations made below to retain women and maximize training benefits

Increasing retention of female participants is a particular challenge in programs (due to **availability, training content or methodology, resources, social norms**), but can be accomplished with a deliberate planning of the program activities and accessible and appealing materials to both women and men

1

Before training

Ensure training logistics and materials are gender-inclusive

2

During training

Create an engaging environment and adapt to women's needs

3

After training

Celebrate participants' achievement and evaluate lessons learned

1a. Before training: Logistics

Ensure trainings take place at an accessible time and location

Field teams

Arrange the schedule and location for training sessions to work for female participants, specifically:

- Set training times around workload of female participants
- Keep trainings short (~2 hours)
- Agree on training schedule (day and hour) in advance
- Provide child care for participants or allow children and babysitters at the training venue
- Select a location that is safe and easily accessible
- Introduce field team members to family or community members to ease any discomfort

Where both husband and wife run the business, extend invitation to **both**, and not just husband.

Prepare **necessary resources** in advance to **ensure early engagement**: megabytes (if implementing digital training), distribute training manuals and record-keeping templates at the beginning of program

1b. Before training: Content

Design a straightforward curriculum that shows women in positive roles

PM/PDs,
SBAs

Ensure the training content encourages:

- **Joint decision making in the household** between women and men
- **Confidence and leadership skills**, such as negotiation, goal-setting, communication, etc. which women can benefit from
- Where possible, include a **module on gender awareness** that explores social roles and benefits of joint decision-making and income earning for women

Ensure that all training materials use:

- **Positive images**, voices, and videos of women or women characters
- **Gender inclusive** language

Refer to TechnoServe's **CREATE methodology** in developing the training materials for adult learners: practical, interactive, and highly visual.

Where relevant, ensure content includes examples of **sector specific stories of women role models**, record templates and business models

3. How to Retain Women

1c. Before training: Grouping

Thoughtfully consider when to use single and mixed groups

All team members

Use the below chart as a guide. If sessions are going to be together, include sessions where women and men are divided for certain discussions

Single Sex



- Minimize the influence of men and women over each other's behaviors / participation
- Compare answers between groups of men and women
- Create a safe space for women and men to speak freely and learn at their own pace

- Cannot learn from each other (e.g. women cannot gain access to new, more lucrative networks)
- Speaking with women may require men's permission (primarily for data collection)
- Cannot see gender dynamics in action or have exchange of experiences between genders
- Can increase workload (e.g., logistics and time of field technicians)

OTHER TYPES OF MIXED GROUPS

AGE – mix younger women who are more dynamic and tech-savvy with older women so they can learn from them

SECTOR –this helps women to think outside the box, learn from each other's experiences, and inspires them to diversify and open new business

Mixed Sex

- Leverage differences and observe gender dynamics
- Encourage men and women to learn about each other and benefit from each other's insights, networks, knowledge
- Women and men often behave differently in each other's presence which can affect their answers and participation; women are likely to feel timid to speak in front of men/husbands
- Must be well facilitated to ensure that all participants feel safe and learn
- Certain sensitive topics will be harder to delve into

2. During training

Facilitate an engaging, inclusive environment

Field teams

Invite **women role models** (program graduates and/or successful business women) to share their stories with participants - especially during the Gender module

Create a **safe space and environment** for the training, specifically:

- Use simple, clear language; check for understanding
 - Ensure that women who may not feel confident in the language of instruction have someone who can **help translate**
 - Encourage women to **ask questions** and participate
 - Consistently **check in with women** to ensure training feels safe, engaging, and possible to balance with other responsibilities
-

Collect **data on attendance by sex**, analyze how and when women attend training and compared to men and adjust approach accordingly

Use class ambassadors to help manage participation and motivation levels of participants

If a **woman misses training**, seek to understand and mitigate barriers she may be facing

Use **women from previous cycles** – in person, video or text (depending on their availability) for the first module &/or the Gender module

2. During training

Ensure coaching quality and strategic advising for women owned businesses

Field teams

Conduct **regular coaching sessions** (bi-monthly if possible)

If distances are far, can **adopt small group coaching sessions** and rotate the businesses where coaching is held

Involve husbands (or older children) so they can give their wives extra **support in running their business** if it is at home, as well as learn what their wives are learning and achieving which has had a positive effect in BWC

Adjust coaching sessions and record-keeping **tools per need or sector** of women-owned businesses

Schedule the coaching day a week ahead and confirm at least an hour earlier, to ensure women can participate

2. During training

All team
members

Develop digital training taking into account women's constraints and needs:

- Share content through short videos & images if have WhatsApp, through SMS if not
- Include Q&A sessions to ensure women are participating and understand the content
- **Face to face coaching sessions to foster trust** and support business growth/survival
- Take into account timing and length of sessions to accommodate women's schedules
- Create smaller WA groups for greater participation

Reward active participants with megabytes to encourage participation

Create **sector-specific WhatsApp groups** to encourage networking, mutual support, share business tips and COVID-19 prevention measures (initially)

Create strategies to keep engagement:

- Send reminders and topics of the lesson in advance
 - Allow women to send financial records via WhatsApp
 - Have the group select a class leader to ensure higher participation and timely sharing of financial data
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2. During training

Field teams

Develop a strong M&E system:

- Conduct a **business diagnostic survey** at the onset of each cycle to understand the business health and needs of each businesswoman during the crisis
- Monitor **attendance and level of involvement** during class.
- Phone **survey after each module** to measure satisfaction, understanding and prevent dropouts.
- Track **impact in keeping women's businesses** open/ enabling them to re-open



3. After training

Celebrate women's participation and reflect on lessons learned

Field teams

Consider **positive incentives for finishing the program** (e.g., certificates for groups with high female attendance, flyers with top business tips)

Organize **festive graduation events that celebrate women's achievements**, allow participants to give testimonies

Create WhatsApp groups as a simple aftercare strategy. Be sure to tightly manage group participation to stay focused and engage through sharing of business skills



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What drives growth for (women-owned) businesses – *Lessons from Business Women Connect*

Field teams

Careful selection of motivated participants with growth mindset

Reiterate goal of training program to **drive revenue increase** and that this depends on women's efforts

Strategic support using CANVAS

- 1) Look at basic business management & health – **crucial for WOB who may not be aware of their business performance**
 - 2) Stabilize business through quick wins/action plans as homework; practice “be your own customer” to identify main challenges
 - 3) Business growth plans – test ideas, foster commitment of women for own growth
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Use M&E to understand trends per type of business, participant profile (sex, age); evaluate module to check understanding & measure satisfaction; and adjust programming

Use experience of team and sector specific tools to tailor recommendations

Share Success Stories & blogs on lessons learned with participants that **highlight women's successes** to inspire other women to grow their businesses.



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5. Concluding thoughts

We firmly believe that any program that purposely or accidentally excludes women will not achieve the overall goal of economic development in the places where we work.

Therefore, these efforts to recruit, retain and drive growth for women in entrepreneurship programs are crucial to our success as an organization.

Please refer to TechnoServe's Gender Policy or reach out to the Gender Practice for more information.

