



SCALING UP ENGAGED RESEARCH

THE SOCIAL ECONOMY PERSPECTIVE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	5
Abbreviations	7
A Note From The CEO Of The Wheel	8
Acknowledgments	9
About The RISE Project	10
Introduction: Engaged Research And The Social Economy	11
Project Timeline	11
Defining Engaged Research	11
The Role Of Social Economy Organisations	12
The Challenge RISE Was Built To Address	13
Project Rationale	14
Project Methodology & Co-Design Process	15
Gaps And Barriers Co-Definition Process	15
Findings Of The Gaps And Barriers Workshop	16
Course Development	17
Finalisation, Localisation, And Translation	18
Pedagogical Approach And Learning Recognition	19
An Overview Of The RISE Course	19
Pilot Implementation And Validation	22
Pilot Design	22
Pilot Delivery Partner	23
Pilot Analysis And Results	24
Methodology	24
Participant Profile	25
Capability Baseline Analysis	29
Training Outcomes	30
Achievement Of Target Indicators	31
What Changed Most	32
Feedback, Refinement, and Lessons Learned	34
Limitations	38
RISE Online Workshop	38
Conclusion Of Pilot Analysis	40
Case Studies And Testimonials	41

Case studies	41
Paper Planes E.V.	41
One Family	43
PULSE	44
La Fàbric@ SCCL	46
Testimonials	48
Sharing and Network Building	50
Creation of an Engaged Research Community	50
Project Website and Resources	51
Project Dissemination Through Partner Networks	52
Multiplier Events	53
Sustainability Plan	54
European Policy Context	54
Our Shared Commitment And The Audiences We Serve	55
Maintaining Project Outputs	56
Embedding RISE In Organisational Practices	57
Resourcing Our Commitments	60
Maintaining & Growing Our Community	61
Adapting and Using the RISE Training Materials	63
Who can use the RISE training programme?	63
Additional resources to support the RISE training materials	64
Risks, Constraints, And Mitigations	64
Policy Recommendations	66
Recommendations for Policymakers	66
Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions	67
Recommendations for Funders	68
Key Achievements	69
Future Outlook	70
Annexes	71
Ethical Framework	71
The Core Ethical Orientation Of RISE	71
Key Ethical Principles Evident In The Project	71
Ethics As A Learning Objective	71
Ethics As A Design Principle	72
Collaborative Research Competency Framework	73
References	75
Partners	77

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RISE - Engaged Research in the Social Economy - is a European cooperation partnership funded under the Erasmus+ programme, bringing together four organisations: The Wheel, Diesis Network, European Citizen Science Association (ECSA) and Science For Change (SFC). Social economy organisations (SEOs) [cooperatives, charities, social enterprises, and community groups] are organisations that focus on social and environmental concerns rather than profit maximisation. The project was built on the simple but important observation that SEOs, who work closest to the people and challenges that research often seeks to address, have largely been excluded from the research process. This is happening not because they lack knowledge or commitment, but because the research system has not been able to invest in equipping them with the skills and confidence needed to participate as equals in the research process. The RISE project set out to change that.

The project began with co-definition workshops, aiming to identify the gaps and barriers that SEOs face when engaging in research. These workshops engaged a range of stakeholders across the four partner countries - Ireland, Germany, Belgium and Spain. Multiple recurring issues emerged: limited familiarity with research processes and language, difficulty navigating funding systems, absence of connections with academic partners, concerns about exploitation and power imbalances, and a general sense that research was something done for communities rather than with them. These findings became the foundation for the RISE course.

The partnership developed a five-module training programme designed specifically for SEO practitioners with limited or no prior research background. The programme covers the principles and phases of engaged research, ethics and values, partnership building, data management and impact assessment, and funding and future planning. It was created through an iterative co-design process involving all four partners and further developed in two pilot phases across four countries, with 107 participants completing the course. The results of the pilots were clear: every measured capability improved, and more than 90% of participants said they would recommend the programme to other organisations wanting to start their engaged research journey.

Beyond the training programme, RISE produced a suite of resources such as an interactive Engaged Research Map showcasing examples of successful engaged research projects across Europe as well as a series of blog posts and podcasts on engaged research, all of which are freely available on the project website: www.engaged-rise.eu.

The project's findings carry clear messages for policymakers, higher education institutions and funders:

- Research capacity building for SEOs must be recognised and funded as a standalone priority.
- Academic institutions must invest in internal systems to better support equitable community partnerships.
- Funding mechanisms must be redesigned to accommodate the realities for SEOs that operate without a dedicated research infrastructure.

The EU Social Economy Action Plan, the European Research Area Policy Agenda, and Horizon Europe all emphasise the importance of meaningful community involvement in research. RISE has demonstrated how this ambition can be translated into practice by equipping community organisations with the skills and confidence needed to engage in research on equal terms.

Building on these achievements, the consortium remains committed to sustaining the training programme, growing the community of engaged research practitioners, and advocating for the systemic changes needed to embed community-led and collaborative research as standard practice across Europe.

ABBREVIATIONS

EU	European Union
SEO	Social Economy Organisation
ECSA	European Citizen Science Association
ERA	European Research Agenda
SFC	Science For Change



A NOTE FROM THE CEO OF THE WHEEL

This report is the culmination of RISE: Engaged Research in the Social Economy, a landmark initiative bringing together the social economy and the research sector to enable more socially impactful research and innovation.

RISE is built on a simple but powerful premise: that we need to level the playing field between researchers and the social economy. Charities, community groups, associations, and social enterprises have a vital role to play in shaping research that matters, but only if they have the skills, capacity, and support to engage as equal partners. Research done with communities, rather than for communities, produces better outcomes. That is what engaged research means in practice, and that is what we aimed to do with RISE.

RISE is the first initiative of its kind to focus exclusively on building social economy capacity for engaged research. Until now, most supports were aimed at academics, but RISE takes a significant step toward true, equal partnership between communities and academia, where each side has the skills and capacity to navigate research projects confidently. The results of this programme indicate the appetite for this kind of support, and the quality of what this partnership produced:

- 107 participants completed the RISE training programme across 4 countries
- 98% reported greater knowledge of engaged research after completing the programme
- 99% said they would recommend the course to other organisations

RISE was led by The Wheel, but these exceptional results were made possible through collaboration with our European partners: DIESIS Network, Science for Change, and the European Citizen Science Association. We also wish to acknowledge the generous support of the University of Limerick, and in particular Dr Maura Adshead, whose expert contribution to the development of the training programme was invaluable.

RISE has been an extraordinary opportunity to accelerate our shared engaged research ambitions. But this is just the beginning. We will continue to build on and share the outputs of this project, deepening partnerships at local, national, and European level to support the social economy's role in research and innovation. It is only by working together across the social economy and academia that we can effectively address our most pressing societal challenges and work towards a better, fairer, and more sustainable future.

Pat Watt



CEO - The Wheel

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ABOUT THE RISE PROJECT

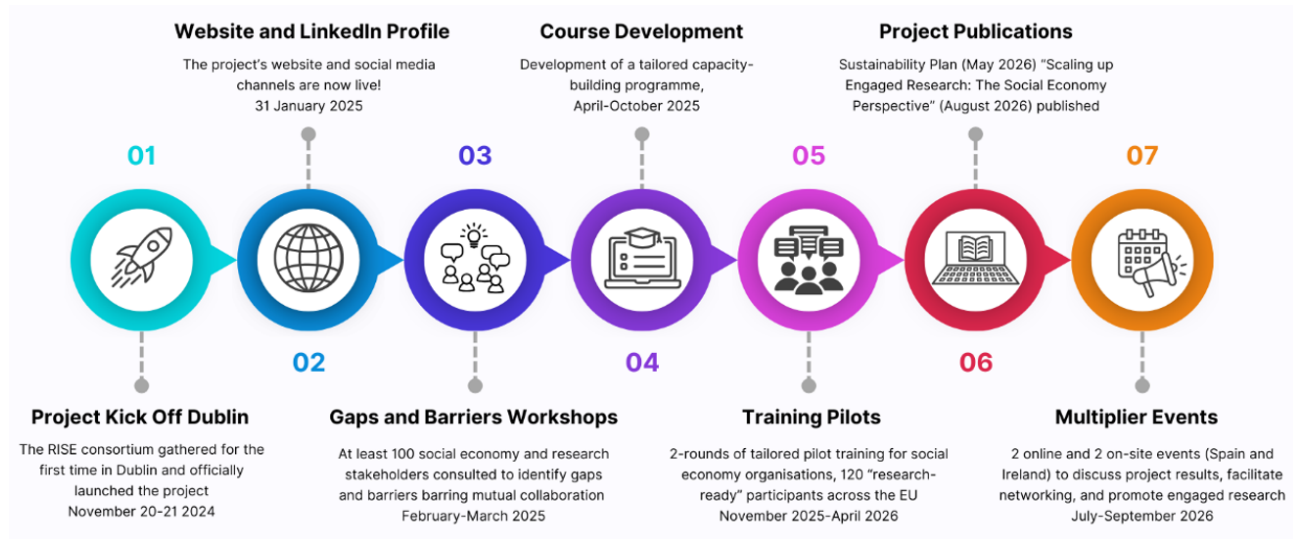
RISE - Engaged Research in the Social Economy is an Erasmus+ funded project. It was designed to solve a simple but important problem: SEOs have valuable knowledge and real-world experience that research needs, but most of them do not have the skills, confidence, or tools to get involved in research as equal partners with researchers and academic institutions. In response to this gap, the RISE project developed a practical training programme of five modules on engaged research to support SEOs in participating more effectively in research partnerships. The programme covers topics such as the principles and values of engaged research, research ethics, partnership building, communication, data management, impact assessment, and funding opportunities. These modules were designed specifically for people working in SEOs, with no assumption of academic background. The training programme was developed with input from the organisations it was built to serve, and piloted across Ireland, Spain, Belgium, Germany, and beyond. To support recognition of learning, completion of the pilot training was validated through a digital badge system giving graduates a portable credential for the skills and knowledge they acquired during the course. The data from pre- and post-pilot surveys show that participants left the programme with significantly greater knowledge, confidence, and readiness to engage in research as equal partners rather than passive subjects.

The RISE project brings together four complementary partners with strong experience in citizen participation, civil society, social innovation, and impact-oriented collaboration:

- **The Wheel**, Ireland's national association of charities, community groups and social enterprises, brings extensive knowledge of the social economy sector, including advocacy, training and support for organisations working for positive social impact.
- **Diesis Network** adds international expertise in the social economy, social entrepreneurship, and social innovation, supporting collaboration, capacity building, and cross-sector partnerships that prioritise social and environmental value.
- **The European Citizen Science Association (ECSA)** strengthens the consortium through its European network and mission to make science and research more open, accessible, and valuable for everyone.
- **Science For Change (SFC)** contributes expertise in citizen science, participatory strategies and co-creation to address social, environmental, and health challenges through evidence-informed solutions.

INTRODUCTION: ENGAGED RESEARCH AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

Project Timeline



Defining Engaged Research

Engaged research is an umbrella term describing research approaches that place collaboration between researchers and society at their centre. Rather than conducting research **about** communities or organisations, engaged research is conducted **with** them - involving non-academic actors in the co-design of research questions, the collection and interpretation of evidence, and the translation of findings into action (Arnstein, 1969; Boaz et al., 2018; Facer & Enright, 2016). The approach encompasses a wide range of practices and methodologies including citizen science, participatory action research, community-based participatory research, co-production, and public patient involvement, among others. However, all these approaches share a commitment to genuine partnership, with researchers and community actors engaging as co-investigators and collaborators rather than solely as experts and subjects. (Mercer et al., 2008).

Engaged research prioritises societally relevant research questions that emerge from real problems experienced by communities rather than from academic agendas decided at a meeting or in a lab (Pohl & Hirsch Hadorn, 2007). It values the knowledge and lived experience of community partners as valid and necessary contributions to the research process, rather than treating them as data to be collected and analysed from a distance (Facer & Enright, 2016). It prioritises the return of research benefits to the communities involved, rather than limiting those benefits to the academic institutions that conduct the research. (Engaged Research Europe, 2020).

This approach has become increasingly relevant as efforts to decolonise knowledge have brought greater attention to whose knowledge is recognised and whose is excluded. At the same time, urgent social and environmental challenges cannot be addressed by researchers working in isolation. They require the involvement of the communities, organisations and practitioners who understand these problems in practice. For these reasons, engaged research represents not merely a methodological preference, but a strategic necessity of our time.

The Role Of Social Economy Organisations

SEOs occupy a position in European society that makes them uniquely well-suited to engaged research partnerships. The European Commission defines the social economy as encompassing cooperatives, mutual societies, associations (including charities), foundations, and social enterprise organisations that place people and social purpose above profit, operate on the basis of democratic governance, and reinvest surpluses in pursuit of social, environmental or community objectives (European Commission, 2021a). As such, SEOs work directly with the communities most affected by the social, economic, and environmental challenges that research is increasingly called upon to address, and they do so from a position of proximity, trust and long-term commitment that formal research institutions typically cannot replicate (Borzaga et al., 2020). The European Commission further notes that the social economy represents a significant and growing part of the European economy, employing over 13.6 million people across the EU and accounting for approximately 10% of all businesses - a scale of presence in communities and in the labour market that gives SEOs both the reach and the relational infrastructure to be genuine partners in research, not merely participants in it (European Commission, 2021a).

The benefits of SEOs involvement in research are significant and increasingly recognised in European policy. The European Commission (2021a) explicitly acknowledges that SEOs generate knowledge rooted in community experience that formal research institutions cannot replicate, and that their involvement in research and innovation processes produces more relevant, more legitimate and more actionable outcomes. SEOs bring contextual knowledge that improves research design, provide access to communities that academic researchers would otherwise struggle to reach, and help translate findings into practice in ways that generate real societal impact (Nutley et al., 2007; Mercer et al., 2008). The European Commission (2021b) reinforces this, making co-creation with civil society and social economy actors a core condition of publicly funded research, reinstating that the quality and impact of research depends on the involvement of the organisations closest to the issues being addressed.

Participation in research also generates direct institutional benefits for SEOs themselves. It strengthens the evidence base they need to engage credibly with policymakers and funders, builds organisational capacity and learning, and creates cross-sector relationships that open access to European funding opportunities and strategic partnerships (European Commission, 2021a; 2022). As Borzaga et al. (2020) demonstrates, SEOs are already significant actors in the European economy and in communities

across the continent and what research partnerships can offer them are the tools and credibility to translate that presence into recognised expertise. This way, they can position themselves as knowledge producers in their own right rather than as subjects of research conducted by others.

The European Commission (2021a) calls explicitly for increased capacity among SEOs to engage with research, innovation and digital tools while placing open science and non-academic participation in research as a priority, framing community organisations as legitimate research actors rather than peripheral beneficiaries (2022). Through the Horizon Europe framework, the European Commission places co-creation and societal engagement at the heart of publicly funded research, creating a structural expectation of community involvement that SEOs are yet largely unequipped to meet (European Commission, 2021a; 2021b; 2022). Recognising all these aspects and the weight the European Commission has placed on societal engagement and co-development of knowledge – the RISE project was created to develop the capacity of SEOs to engage in research as its core objective.

The Challenge RISE Was Built To Address

Despite their potential and the growing policy imperative for their involvement, SEOs remain largely absent from formal research partnerships across Europe. The problem sits at the intersection of two well-documented and mutually reinforcing gaps.

The first is a skills gap within SEOs. The majority of SEOs across Europe lack the knowledge, confidence and practical tools required to engage in research partnerships on equal terms (Laforest & Orsini, 2005). They lack familiarity with research design, ethical frameworks, methodology, data management, and the institutional language and processes of academic research. This is a reflection of the fact that no systematic, accessible and sector-relevant training to build these capabilities has previously existed at the European level. The European Commission (2021a) acknowledges this, identifying the limited capacity of SEOs to engage with research and innovation as one of the key structural barriers preventing the sector from realising its full potential as a driver of inclusive growth and social change.

The second gap is a structural imbalance in how engaged research is initiated and led. Most engaged research initiatives across Europe are designed and driven by academic institutions, with community organisations recruited as participants or data sources after the research agenda has already been set (Arnstein, 1969; Cargo & Mercer, 2008). As a result, current practices do not always genuinely support engaged research and instead often reproduce the power asymmetries embedded in the formal research system. When SEOs are brought in after the research question has been defined, the methodology selected and the budget allocated, the resulting research may be more accessible than purely academic work but is still not sufficiently co-owned by the communities on which it focuses. The European Commission (2022) implicitly acknowledges this imbalance by calling for a fundamental shift towards open science and the participation of civil society in research processes recognising that the

current model of community involvement falls short of what meaningful partnership requires. These two gaps reinforce each other in a self-perpetuating cycle. When SEOs lack the skills to engage as equals with research partners, they are unlikely to challenge an invitation to participate on unequal terms. Because the model of community participation that most research systems offer is not genuinely equitable, SEOs that do engage often find the experience extractive rather than empowering. This in turn has reinforced their reluctance to participate in future initiatives [Greenhalgh et al., 2016]. The absence of SEOs from research is therefore not simply a demand and supply problem that better outreach can solve. It needs to be dealt with as a structural issue that requires deliberate capacity-building interventions at the community level complemented by institutional change in research systems.

Project Rationale

RISE was conceived as a direct and innovative response to these gaps. Its central proposition was both simple and strategically significant: that the most effective way to shift the balance of power in engaged research is to invest in the capacity of the community side of the partnership. Existing efforts to promote engaged research in Europe have overwhelmingly focused on training researchers, developing institutional frameworks within universities, and designing funding calls that incentivise co-creation [European Commission, 2013; 2021b]. These efforts are necessary but insufficient. Without a corresponding investment in building the research readiness of SEOs, the structural conditions for genuine partnership cannot exist.

RISE addressed this by developing a training programme designed specifically for workers in SEOs with limited or no prior research background. The training programme targets people working in organisations without dedicated research functions, who require practical, accessible and sector-relevant guidance to engage in research partnerships with confidence. The programme was developed to address the actual barriers faced by practitioners rather than those that researchers might assume they face.

This orientation is reflected in the project's methodology and in particular, in its grounding in the findings of the project's gaps and barriers workshops, which involved mainly SEOs from across Europe, alongside other stakeholders from academia, and the public sector. The training programme was piloted, refined through structured feedback, and validated through a digital badge system, aligned with the EU's micro-credentials framework [Council of the European Union, 2022].

Through these activities, RISE aimed to support a shift in how research partnerships are structured, one in which engagement is not constrained by unequal capacity between partners. In doing so, RISE contributes not only to the organisations it has directly trained but to the broader European objective of embedding more inclusive, collaborative research practices that connect research more effectively with society.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY & CO-DESIGN PROCESS

Gaps And Barriers Co-Definition Process

The RISE project is driven by a participatory and iterative methodology grounded in the principles of engaged research it seeks to promote. Rather than following a linear design-then-deliver model, the project adopted a co-creation approach in which the knowledge, disparities, limitations, and lived experiences of social economy practitioners were treated as primary inputs at an early stage of the project.

The process began with the development of a competency framework for engaged research, which served as the conceptual and methodological foundation for the subsequent stages of the project. The framework was developed by SFC through an extensive review of existing competency frameworks such as The European Competency Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp) developed by the European Commission, The Competency Framework for Collaborative Work developed by Research and Innovation Escola d'Administració Pública de Catalunya (EAPC), and Guia per a la definició de marcs competencials developed by Escola d'Administració Pública de Catalunya. This review informed the adaptation of a RISE-specific framework, tailored to the objectives of the training programme to equip the employees and leaders of SEOs with the knowledge, confidence, and practical skills to engage in research partnerships as equals.

The resulting framework was structured around three complementary competency dimensions: personal competences, covering self-awareness, adaptability and reflective practice; relational competences, focusing on collaboration, communication, stakeholder engagement and partnership-building; and technical competences, addressing the knowledge and practical skills required to design, implement and evaluate engaged research processes. Together, these dimensions provided a holistic model of the capabilities needed to participate effectively in engaged research.

The framework was then co-defined and validated through a structured process involving all project partners, supported using the online collaborative tool Miro. This co-validation process with project partners was instrumental in refining the framework and ensuring its relevance to the realities of SEOs. Particular attention was given to strengthening the technical dimension of the framework, so that it could better capture the practical knowledge, tools, and governance issues that SEOs need to address when engaging in research partnerships. During the workshop, the language of the framework was also carefully discussed, with partners opting for terminology centred on SEOs rather than on the vocabulary of academic research methodology. Based on this feedback, SFC prepared the final version of the RISE competency framework, which is included in the annexes to this report.

Upon finalisation of the RISE Competency Framework, SFC created a co-design workshop aimed at SEOs. The framework served as the basis for a structured reflection process through which SEOs could assess their confidence, experience, and perceived level of competence across all dimensions of the framework. To ensure consistent implementation across countries, SFC trained project partners in the facilitation methodology and provided a set of practical guidelines to support participant engagement and workshop delivery. Each partner then carried out its own engagement activities with SEOs and implemented the co-design workshops in their respective contexts.

A total of 19 workshops were held across the partner countries and networks: Ireland, Germany, Belgium, and Spain. Across all workshops, a total of 105 stakeholders from 93 organisations participated, of whom 68% were SEOs, while 32% came from other sectors. The results gathered across the workshops were subsequently analysed to identify the most significant competency gaps and capacity-building needs among SEOs when engaging in research partnerships. These findings were then translated directly into the curriculum of the RISE pilot training programme, ensuring that the training responded to the realities, barriers and priorities identified by the SEOs themselves.

Across the co-definition and co-design phases, the RISE consortium followed an adaptive and evidence-responsive approach. Partners shared findings, discussed emerging interpretations, and adjusted the process in response to the needs and concerns identified. In this sense, the process itself reflected the engaged research principles that RISE sought to make more accessible to the social economy sector.

Findings Of The Gaps And Barriers Workshop

This section synthesises the main findings from the gaps and barriers workshops with SEOs and other stakeholders. The below findings highlight the recurring barriers that limit SEOs' capacity to engage in research partnerships and the priority areas that informed the RISE curriculum.

Collaboration with Academia

There is a significant disconnect between SEOs and academic institutions. Misaligned goals, lack of mutual understanding, and different working cultures (“speaking different languages”) hamper collaboration. SEOs often feel excluded from key parts of the research process and report concerns about extractive practices and limited long-term engagement.

Access to Resources

Participants highlighted major difficulties in accessing funding and building sustainable projects. Many organisations lack familiarity with funding platforms and are often dependent on short-term grants, making long-term planning and impact challenging.

Research Design & Stakeholder Involvement

Co-designing research that balances scientific rigour with practical relevance is difficult. There are gaps in methods for inclusive planning and stakeholder engagement. Communication challenges and misaligned expectations often lead to fragmented projects.

Data Management & Impact Evaluation

Limited capacity to manage, analyse, and interpret data prevents SEOs from fully understanding the impact of their work. A lack of standardised data practices and tools contributes to inconsistent evaluation and hinders learning and improvement.

Sustainability & Long-Term Impact

Projects often end with little continuity. Without follow-up or structured post-project strategies, many efforts fail to translate into long-term change or organisational learning. Short-term funding models exacerbate this issue.

Policy Impact & Advocacy

Translating research into policy is difficult due to political instability, shifting priorities, and a lack of strategic advocacy skills. Research is not always aligned with current policy agendas, and communication barriers limit its accessibility to decision-makers.

Communication of Results

Research findings are often too academic or inaccessible, reducing their relevance to stakeholders and the public. Some SEOs struggle with dissemination, while others lack the tools to reach broader audiences beyond their immediate networks.

Ethical Considerations

Ensuring respectful and inclusive engagement with communities—particularly vulnerable groups—is a key concern. Clearer ethical guidelines are needed, especially around data handling and the risk of exploitation in extractive research relationships.

Overall, the gaps and barriers workshops confirmed that SEOs require more accessible, practical, and sector-relevant support to engage in research partnerships on equal terms. The findings highlighted the need to strengthen not only technical knowledge of research processes, but also capacities related to communication, ethical collaboration, partnership-building, and long-term follow-up. These insights provided the basis for the design of the RISE pilot training programme, which is presented in the following section.

Course Development

Informed by the findings of the gaps and barriers workshops, the RISE training programme was developed through a structured three-phase co-design process. Grounded in collaborative partnership, this process resulted in the development of five comprehensive modules.

In the first phase, The Wheel took the lead in developing a clear framework and detailed outlines for each of the five modules. All partners were then invited to contribute ideas, activities, topics, and resources that would shape the content of each of the lesson plans. The application of this collaborative approach ensured that the curriculum was not designed in isolation by a single organisation but rather drew on the combined expertise of the consortium members. As the RISE consortium includes partners with sectoral knowledge and unique national contexts, this process ensured that the diversity of the social economy landscape across the partner countries was addressed in the course curriculum.

In the second phase of the development process, The Wheel consolidated partner contributions into a comprehensive draft of five concrete modules. This was then circulated to the partners for review and approval. This iterative review stage allowed partners to interrogate the content critically and identify gaps. This stage also ensured that the learning objectives and activities were appropriate, realistic, and relevant for SEO workers with no prior research background.

Finally, in the third phase, The Wheel produced the final version of all five modules. At this stage slide decks, lesson plans, and handouts were also provided for each module. This provided partners with a fully developed and validated curriculum ready for delivery in their respective countries and compatible for online or in-person format.

Finalisation, Localisation, And Translation

Once the modules were finalised, each RISE partner took responsibility for adapting and localising the training materials for their own national and organisational context. This localisation process went beyond straightforward translation; partners adapted the content of both the lesson plans and the accompanying slides to reflect the specific characteristics of the social economy sector in their country. This localisation activity focused on adapting the modules based on the regulatory and funding environment their participants operated within, as well as incorporating relevant case studies, practical examples, and contextual references to make the content more applicable to each pilot setting. In addition, partners addressed the linguistic and cultural nuances of their context. Where necessary, full translation of materials was undertaken to ensure that language was never a barrier to participation, as was the case for SFC, where the pilots were conducted in the local language.

This approach meant that all each partner's version of the RISE course shared a common architecture, learning outcomes, and methodological framework, but tailored to the context in which it was delivered. This ensured that participants in Ireland, Spain, Belgium, and Germany felt that the programme was designed for their reality rather than imported from elsewhere and imposed on them. As a result, the RISE course is a training programme that combines the rigour and consistency of a centrally developed curriculum, with the contextual sensitivity and practical relevance required for delivery at local level in partner countries.

Pedagogical Approach And Learning Recognition

The RISE training programme was designed around a participant-centred pedagogical approach that prioritised practical application, peer learning, and progressive skill-building over passive knowledge transfer. The focus was on positioning the pilot participants as individuals with lived experience and enthusiasm to learn and apply new research tools rather than passive recipients of knowledge on engaged research.

During the pilot training, each of the five modules focused on structured activities, facilitated group discussions, and practical exercises designed to enhance the capacity of the participants to apply engaged research tools and build their confidence to collaborate with the academic sector. Group activities and peer exchange were used throughout to support interactions between the participants, with tools such as Mentimeter and Miro used where trainings took place online.

The RISE learning recognition system was built into the programme through a digital badge system which was used to validate, incentivise, and reward module completion. Digital badges were awarded to participants upon successful completion of each module, through which participants also provided feedback on the module and their learning experience – allowing partners to assess course quality throughout the piloting process. An alumni badge was then awarded upon completion of the full training programme, providing a portable, verifiable, and publicly shareable credential that participants could use to demonstrate their skills and knowledge to employers, funders, and research partners.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE RISE COURSE



Module 1: Induction and a Deep Dive into Engaged Research



Module 2: Ethics and Values in Engaged Research



Module 3: Partnership Building, a Fundamental of Engaged Research



Module 4: Data Management, Impact Assessment, and Communicating Your Project



Module 5: Building Your Research Plan - From Funding to Implementation



RISE Training Programme Alumni Badge

The RISE training course begins with a preparatory webinar before moving on to the five core modules. The five modules were designed to provide 20 hours of training with an average of 4 hours per module. In addition, participants were provided with supplementary materials which accounted for a total of 3-4 hours of homework. Below is an overview of the learning outcomes of each module:

Pre-Course Webinar: Are You Ready for Research?

Participants completing the pre-course webinar gain a foundational understanding of what engaged research is and why it matters for social economy organisations. By the end of the webinar, learners will be able to:

- Explain what engaged research is with examples
- Explain the role of engaged research in the social economy
- Facilitate a process within their organisation to assess their readiness for engaged research
- Understand the RISE project and how it can help them

Module 1: Induction and a Deep Dive into Engaged Research

Participants completing Module 1 gain a solid conceptual and contextual foundation in engaged research. By the end of the session, learners will be able to:

- Understand engaged research and the context of the project
- Explain the principles of academic research
- Identify what makes research “engaged”
- Understand the different roles within the research process
- Navigate common obstacles in engaged research

“The module provided a practical and insightful understanding of how collaborative, inclusive, and impact-oriented approaches can strengthen research outcomes.”

“It was comprehensive and interactive lesson of core research ethics and practical steps required for practitioners of engaged research.”

Module 2: Ethics and Values in Engaged Research

In Module 2, participants will develop the awareness and practical understanding needed to engage in research ethically and responsibly. By the end of the session, learners will be able to:

- Understand the importance of ethical practice
- Be familiar with ethical principles guiding mainstream research
- Appreciate the extra ethical principles associated with engaged research
- Recognise the potential for power asymmetries in research
- Be aware of their role in addressing all of the above openly and transparently

Module 3: Partnership Building, a Fundamental of Engaged Research

In Module 3, participants develop the relational and practical skills needed to build and sustain research partnerships. By the end of the session, learners will be able to:

- Understand the different roles in a partnership for engaged research
- Create a partnership based on mutual interest and understanding
- Understand the benefits of partnership building for engaged research development

“Un ‘viaje’ (learning path) que equilibra contenido teórico con dinámicas prácticas e interactivas”

“A ‘journey’ (learning path) that balances theoretical content with practical and interactive dynamics.”

Module 4: Data Management, Impact Assessment, and Communicating Your Project

Participants completing Module 4 gain an understanding of the practical tools needed to manage, assess and communicate the impact of research projects. By the end of the session, learners will be able to:

- Understand what data is and how it relates to their projects
- Understand roles and responsibilities when it comes to data management
- Use a simple system for monitoring data
- Understand what impact means and what it implies
- Use practical frameworks to structure and articulate impact
- Identify the core elements of compelling impact communication

"I learned how different organisations approach data governance and impact communication, and gained insights into practical challenges and creative solutions for engaging communities ethically and transparently in research."

"I learned about practical tools for securing funding and where to look for it."

Module 5A: Funding for Engaged Research Projects

Participants completing Module 5A develop the foundational skills needed to identify and pursue funding opportunities for engaged research. By the end of this session, learners will be able to:

- Develop their basic grant writing skills
- Navigate EU funding with potential for ER
- Recognise key elements that support project sustainability
- Navigate national funding with potential for ER

Module 5B: Engaged Research Plan

After completing Module 5B, participants gain the skills to position their organisation credibly and strategically as a research partner. By the end of the session, learners will be able to:

- Develop a research profile for their organisation
- Present their organisation using their research profile
- Articulate their research needs, interests and strengths

Pilot Implementation And Validation

Pilot Design

The RISE pilot was designed as a two-part programme delivered across the project partner countries and networks. Each partner was expected to involve 15 members of the target group in each pilot rotation, meaning 30 learners per partner and 120 learners across the consortium. In addition to the learners, two trainers from each partner organisation were trained to deliver the pilot. The two-stage process allowed project partners to test the course once, review the feedback, revise the content and delivery approach, and then test the improved version in a second rotation before finalising it.

The pilot began with the development of a common methodology and a suite of data collection tools by The Wheel. These tools were created to ensure that all partners collected comparable data and followed a coherent approach to implementation. The methodology and tools were developed and presented during the transnational project meeting and train-the-trainer event in Barcelona in October 2025.

There, the partner trainers were trained on pilot delivery, digital badges, and data collection. The course was designed around a practical and applied pedagogical approach, rooted in expertise, experience, case studies, peer learning, individual and group exercises, and examples of engaged research in practice. Participants were expected to complete a pre-training survey, participate in all training modules, collect digital badges for completed modules, complete an Engaged Research Profile and Plan for their organisation, and complete a post-training survey.

“This professional development opportunity was extremely valuable. The focus on engaged research reminded me how essential it is for creating meaningful social impact. Understanding how to collaborate with communities, act ethically, and design research that truly responds to real needs is more than necessary in today’s context. I feel better equipped to contribute to positive change through my work.”

Elmedina Nikoçeviq-Kurti

Lecturer, Faculty of Education, University of Prishtina

Pilot Delivery Partner

Each partner delivered the RISE pilot in two rotations, using either online or hybrid formats. Pilot 1 was delivered in 2025, and Pilot 2 in 2026.

S.N	PARTNER	TARGET AUDIENCES
1	The Wheel	The Wheel employed a hybrid format. Pilot 1 began with an online webinar on 18 September, followed by in-person and online module delivery between 13 November and 4 December, over approximately four weeks. In Pilot 2, The Wheel delivered Modules 1–5b between 18 February and 11 March, over approximately four weeks.
2	Diesis Network	Diesis Network delivered both Pilot 1 and Pilot 2 online. In Pilot 1, Diesis delivered Modules 1–5b between 5 November and 17 December, over approximately seven weeks. In Pilot 2, Diesis again delivered all modules online between 17 February and 24 March, over approximately six weeks.
3	ECSA	ECSA delivered its pilot online. In Pilot 1, ECSA delivered Modules 1–4 and Module 5a&b between 2 December and 16 December, over approximately three weeks. In Pilot 2, ECSA delivered Modules 1–5b online between 20 January and 17 February, over approximately five weeks.
4	SFC	SFC employed a hybrid delivery format. In Pilot 1, the modules were delivered through a combination of in-person and online sessions between 14 November and 5 December, over four weeks. In Pilot 2, SFC delivered Modules 1–5b between 27 February and 20 March, over four weeks.

Table 1: Details on pilot delivery by partners

PILOT ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Methodology

The pilot analysis is based on 107 matched participants. Before the course, participants completed a survey about their background, organisational profile, experience with research, and confidence across key engaged-research capabilities. After the course, they completed a second survey that repeated the main capability questions with additional questions about knowledge gained, usefulness of the training, satisfaction with the modules, interactivity, peer learning, trainer performance, and the digital badge system. The evaluation was designed as a one-group pre-training/post-training study, comparing participants' responses before and after the course.

This method was appropriate because the purpose of the study was practical and evaluative. The question was not simply whether participants liked the training, but whether their confidence, knowledge and readiness to engage in research changed after taking part. Asking comparable questions before and after the course made it possible to measure this change directly.

107 individual respondents could be followed from the pre-training survey to the post-training survey. This strengthened the analysis because it allowed the results to show not only how the group's skills evolved overall, but also how individual participants' skills evolved.

The analysis used descriptive and comparative techniques. Positive responses were defined as scores of 4 or 5 on the five-point scales used. Eight repeated capability questions were compared using a matched pre/post analysis. The overall capability uplift score was calculated as the average of the eight matched capability items before and after training.

Participant Profile

The pilot focused on members of the RISE target group - SEO staff from each country or network who could benefit from becoming more confident and capable in engaged research, including staff who may guide, support, or lead research-related work within their organisations. A total of 107 participants took part in both pilot rotations and 8 attended an additional workshop organised in June 2026, making 115 participants in total.

Before the training, the participant group already had a strong educational and professional base. Most participants reported third level education, and the majority were paid members of staff. This is important because it indicates that the course was not working with a group that lacked professional experience. Rather, it was working with people who had organisational knowledge but wanted clearer tools, confidence, and mechanisms for engaging in research.

The organisational profile was varied. Some participants came from very small organisations, while others came from organisations with 51 or more employees. This variation is important to note as smaller organisations may need more practical support with funding, data systems, and partnership development. Larger organisations may be better placed to embed engaged research in strategy but may still need help with co-design, ethics and stakeholder engagement.

Participants' organisations also varied considerably in their prior experience of engaging with research. The most frequent response to *How much experience does your organisation have in engaging with research?* was *Some*, reported by 56 participants (43.73%), indicating a degree of familiarity but not deep or systematic engagement. A further 24 organisations (22.43%) reported having *A lot* of research experience, suggesting a smaller but well-established cohort of research-active organisations within the pilot.

Critically, nearly one in three participants came from organisations with very limited or no prior research experience at all. Twenty-seven participants (25.23%) reported that their organisation had *Very little* experience of engaging with research, and a further 6 (5.61%) reported *None* meaning that 33 participants (30.2%) represented organisations that were, in effect, entering the world of engaged research for the first time through RISE.

This is a significant finding. It confirms that the training reached precisely the organisations it was designed to serve - those that are most excluded from research partnerships and most in need of structured capacity-building support.

Overall, the pilot cohort represented an experienced and academically qualified group, but one working across a wide range of organisational sizes and research-engagement maturity levels. This diversity is important for training design because participants are likely to differ in their access to research infrastructure, funding-development support, internal data systems, available financial and human resources for research, and authority to embed research into organisational strategy.

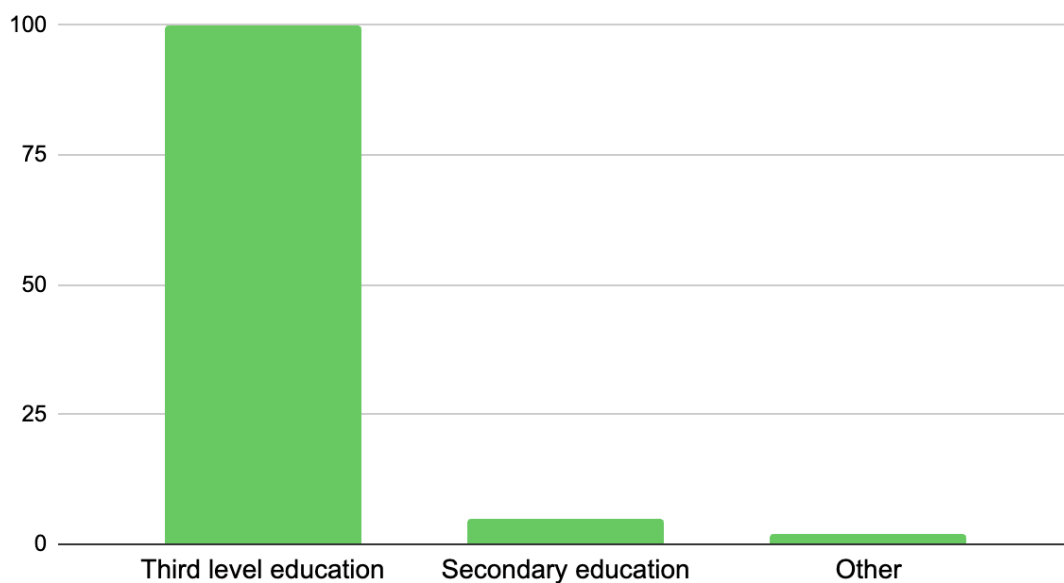


Figure 1: Educational background of the participants

As shown in Fig:1 The survey on *What best describes your educational background?* The respondent's frequent response was *Third Level education*. 100 out of 107 respondents answered this, which corresponds to 93.46%

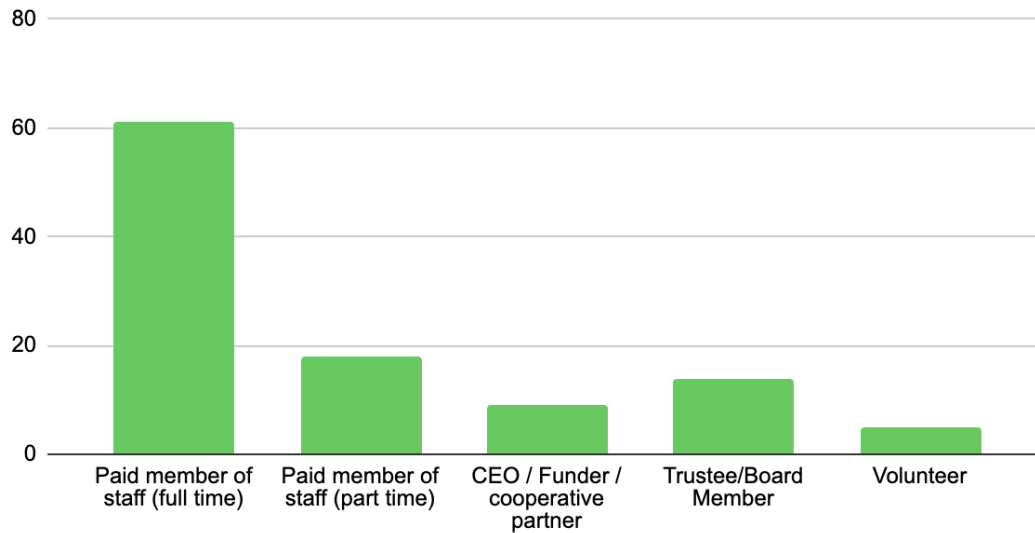


Figure 2: Respondents role in organisation

As shown in Fig:2 for *Which of the following best describes your role in your organisation?* The most frequent response was Paid member of staff [full time] with 61 respondents [57.01%].

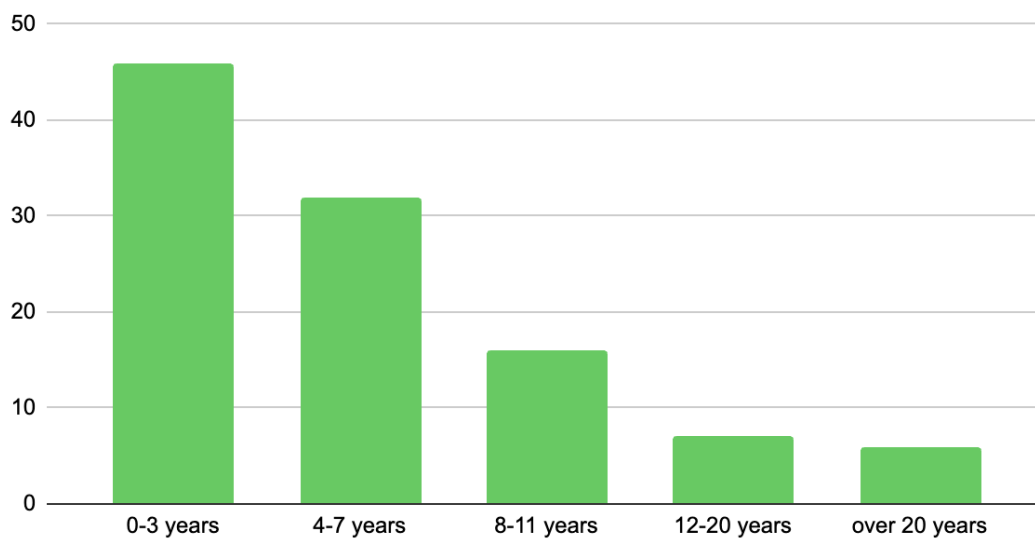


Figure 3: Years of experience current position?

As shown in Fig:3 when asked about their *Years of experience in their current position*, the largest share of respondents indicated they had between 0 and 3 years of experience, with 46 respondents [42.99%] selecting this option, suggesting that a considerable proportion of the survey participants are relatively new in their current roles.

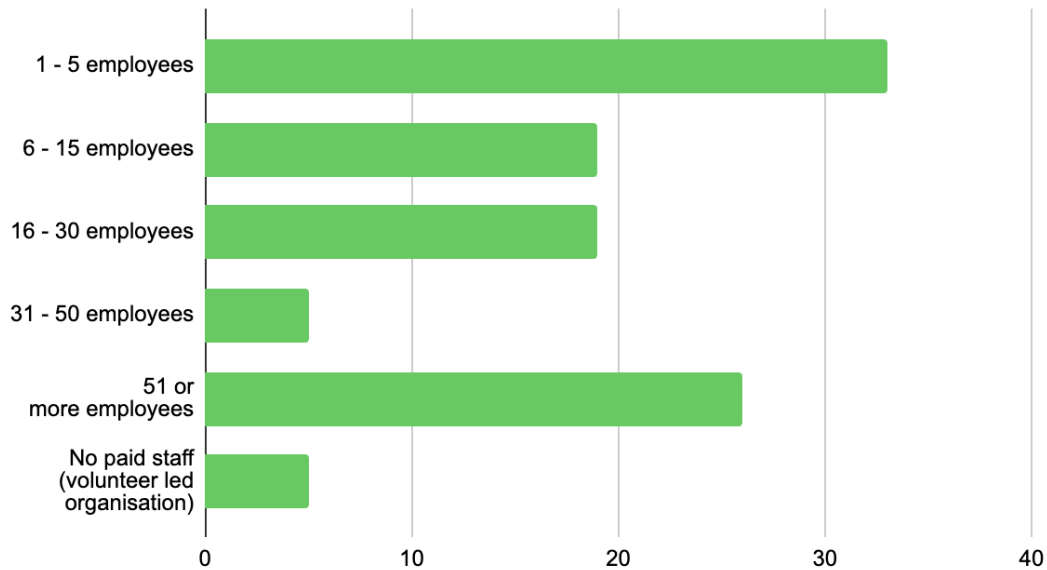


Figure 4: Size of the organisation

As shown in Fig:4 the most common response among survey participants was 1–5 employees, selected by 33 respondents (30.84%), suggesting that a significant proportion of those surveyed work within small organisations.

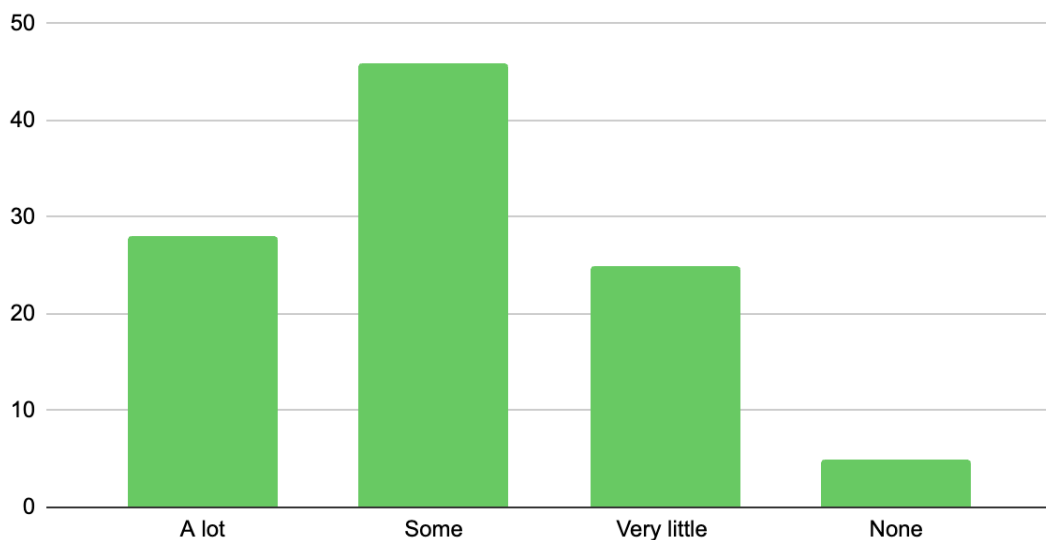


Figure 5: Experience of the organisation in engaged research

As shown in fig: 5 For *How much experience does your organisation have in engaging in research?* The most frequent response was *Some* with 56 respondents (43.73%).

Capability Baseline Analysis

Prior to the training, participants were asked to rate their confidence across eight engaged research capabilities to establish a baseline (Figure 6). The same questions were then repeated in the post-training survey in order to measure whether confidence levels had changed as a result of the training. Each item was measured on a five-point scale where 1 = not at all true and 5 = completely true. The combined average across all eight items, the overall readiness index, stood at 3.26 out of 5, indicating a moderate starting point across the participants as a whole.

To give a clearer picture of where participants were starting from: 42.52% of participants scored an average of 4 or above across the eight items, indicating reasonable confidence going in. A further 33.18% scored 3, suggesting some familiarity but clear room to grow. The remaining 24.30 % scored below 3 on average, indicating low confidence across most capability areas at the outset. This shows that the group was not uniformly inexperienced: some participants brought existing knowledge and confidence, but that a significant proportion entered the programme with limited readiness to engage in research as equal partners. This is precisely the gap the RISE training was designed to address. The strongest baseline area was *I am confident in my ability to communicate research findings to different audiences effectively*, which had a mean of 3.70/5. Participants also reported relatively higher levels of confidence in interacting with academic partners (3.53) and advocating for research in organisational strategy (3.24).

The more difficult areas were practical and enabling capabilities. The lowest baseline score was *I am confident in my ability to identify appropriate funding channels and navigate application procedures*, with a mean of 2.83/5. Only 30.8% of respondents gave a positive response (4 or 5) on this item, while 43.7% gave a low-confidence response. The next lowest-rated areas were understanding the key phases and roles in an engaged research process and developing basic data systems for project evaluation.

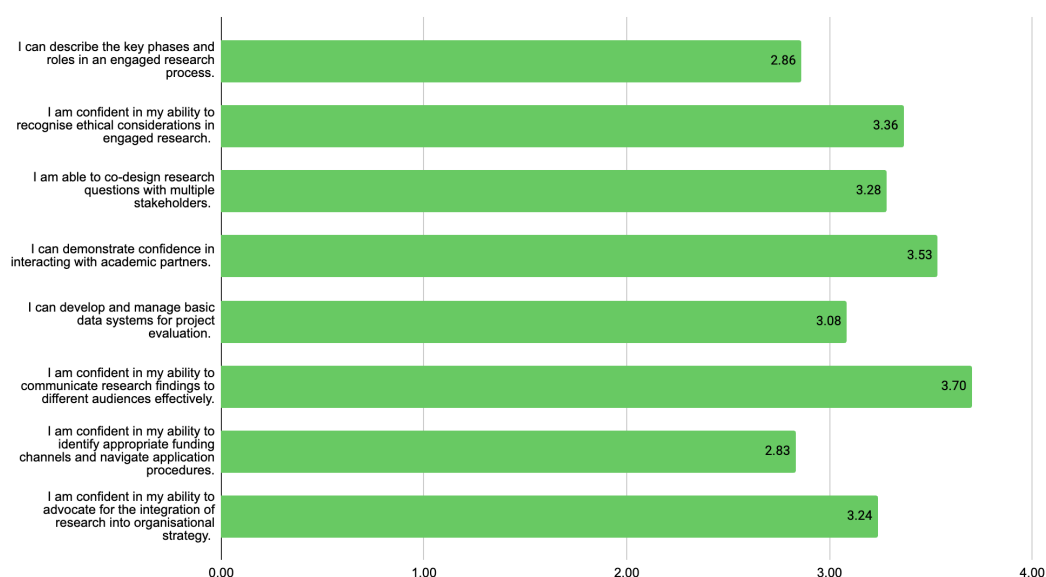


Figure 6: Pre-training capabilities of the participants

Overall, participants had greater levels of confidence in communication and partnership-facing tasks, but they were less confident about the practical elements that make engaged research possible in practice. Funding channels, application procedures, research-processes, and evaluation data systems were the areas where the training could make the greatest difference.

Training Outcomes

The most notable finding from the post training survey analysis is that participants reported clear gains across every area that could be compared before and after the RISE training. The overall capability index rose from 3.24 pre-training to 4.31 post-training, a substantial increase of +1.07 points. The trend was positive under all capabilities analysed.

The scale of the shift becomes clearer when looking at how scores were distributed across the cohort. Before the training, 24.3% of all responses across the eight capability items fell in the low range (scores of 1 or 2), 33.2% were in the middle range (score of 3), and only 42.5% were in the high range (scores of 4 or 5). After the training, the picture had transformed: low-range responses had dropped to just 0.5%, mid-range responses to 11.3%, and 88.2% of all responses now fell in the high range. In practical terms, this means the training moved the vast majority of participants from uncertainty or moderate confidence to a position of genuine capability across almost every area assessed.

The below Figure 7 presents the change in survey scores across the different capability categories.

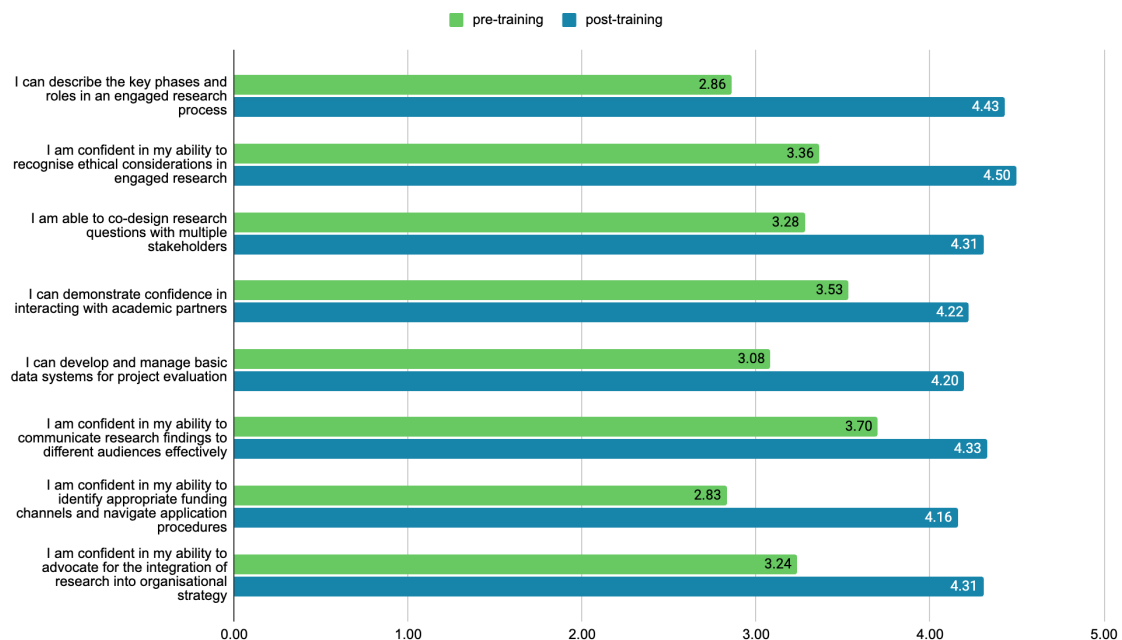


Figure 7: Capability of the participants pre- and post-training

Achievement Of Target Indicators

The evidence indicates that project targets were met and, in most cases, significantly exceeded across the areas of participant learnings, confidence, satisfaction, and engagement.

TARGET INDICATOR	TARGET	ACTUAL RESULT (N=107)	STATUS
Greater Knowledge & Confidence in engaged research	80%	99.1% reported greater knowledge 94.4% reported greater confidence	Exceeded
Satisfaction with Learning Experience	80%	99.1% were satisfied or very satisfied	Exceeded
Digital Badge Utilisation	80%	92.5% of pilot participants used the digital badge system	Exceeded

Table 2: Target Indicators for the pilot

All target indicators were exceeded. Participants reported greater knowledge and confidence in engaged research, satisfaction with the learning experience was well above the target threshold, and engagement with the digital badge system exceeded the required 80% benchmark. Together, these results provide clear evidence that the pilot achieved its key intended outcomes and that the training model has practical value for future delivery and scaling.

These findings were further reinforced by informal feedback gathered beyond the survey. Partners reported that during the training sessions and the multiplier event, participants spoke repeatedly about how useful the programme was and how much they were learning. In the post-training phase, several noted they had already begun applying the content in their day-to-day work, with some describing the training as a turning point in how they relate to and integrate research into their professional practice.

Collectively, these findings provide strong evidence of the quality of the training programme developed through RISE. The high levels of reported learning, confidence, satisfaction, and engagement indicate that the programme is both effective in achieving its intended outcomes while also remaining relevant, practical, and valued by participants. This gives confidence in its potential for sustained use and wider transfer across different organisational and national contexts.

What Changed Most

The largest change was seen in basic understandings of engaged research. For the statement *I can describe the key phases and roles in an engaged research process*, the average score increased from 2.86 to 4.43. The proportion of participants scoring 4 or 5 surged from just 25.2% before the training to 95.3% afterwards. In practical terms, this means that the course shifted a significant proportion of the cohort from uncertainty to a clear understanding of what engaged research involves. This is a foundational result; without this understanding, it is difficult for organisations to know how to enter research partnerships.

Confidence in ethical considerations also improved substantially. The mean score for *I am confident in my ability to recognise ethical considerations in engaged research* increased from 3.36 to 4.50 (+1.13). This is especially relevant for engaged research, where questions of power, participation, consent, representation, and responsibility are central to ensuring the integrity and quality of the research process.

There was also a clear improvement in collaborative skills. The item *I am able to co-design research questions with multiple stakeholders* increased from 3.28 to 4.31. This is an important signal that participants learned not only about research as an abstract topic, but they also reported an increased ability to take part in one of the most practical and collaborative stages of research development. The above demonstrates that the training programme succeeded in giving participants the tools to more effectively engage in research.

Two areas deserve particular attention for future delivery. The first is *I can develop and manage basic data systems for project evaluation* improved from 3.08 to 4.20, which is a strong result. However, it is one of the lower post-training averages. The second is the funding-related item *I am confident in my ability to identify appropriate funding channels* improved from 2.83 to 4.16 but remained lower than several other post-training measures (Figure 7).

This suggests that data systems and funding navigation are valuable areas for deeper, more applied support for SEOs. However, it is also important to note that these are highly technical areas where collaboration with researchers and specialised partners is particularly relevant. The aim may not be for SEOs to manage every technical aspect independently, but rather to strengthen their capacity to

"As a marine researcher focusing on small-scale fisheries, participating in the RISE programme was a great experience for me. It provided a clear and ethical roadmap for conducting research that is not only academically robust but also genuinely rooted in community needs and priorities. The sessions on engaged research ethics, impact measurement and strategic project planning were particularly valuable, because they offered concrete tools I can immediately apply in my current and future projects. I now feel much better equipped to co-create research with communities and to demonstrate its real-world value to funders, partners and stakeholders."

Ivana Jurin
Educator, Marine Explorers Society 20000 Leagues

understand, engage with, and contribute to these processes within collaborative partnerships. Substantial positive changes are also visible when looking at the proportion of participants giving high ratings (4 or 5). For several items, the share of highly confident participants more than doubled or tripled. For example, the proportion scoring 4 or 5 on *I can describe the key phases and roles in an engaged research process* rose from 25.23% to 95.33%, and on *I am confident in my ability to identify appropriate funding channels* from 30.8% to 80.4%. This indicates that the training moved most participants into the upper confidence range and is a strong indicator that the programme achieved its objectives.

How Participants Viewed The Course

Post-training responses confirm that participants viewed the course in an overwhelmingly positive light. The single strongest endorsement across all evaluated statements was for: *I would recommend this course to organisations that want to start their engaged research journey* with an average score of 4.81 and 99.1% of participants scoring 4 or 5. This is a remarkable result, and one that speaks directly to the quality of the course design. It is a clear validation that anchoring the curriculum in the findings from the co-design gaps and barriers sessions was the right approach - the course addressed what practitioners needed, and they recognised it. The post-training results suggest that the course was not only informative but also seen as relevant. *This training will be useful to my organisation* scored 4.48. As one participant put it: *“The RISE training program was a transformative experience that gave our organization the confidence to move from being subjects of research to active, collaborative partners. The hands-on approach to data management and impact assessment has equipped us with the tools to better communicate our social value to stakeholders. I highly recommend this course to any social economy organization looking to integrate research into their core strategy.”* Cristina Barrigas Viñuela, Junior PPIE researcher — Humanized Solutions

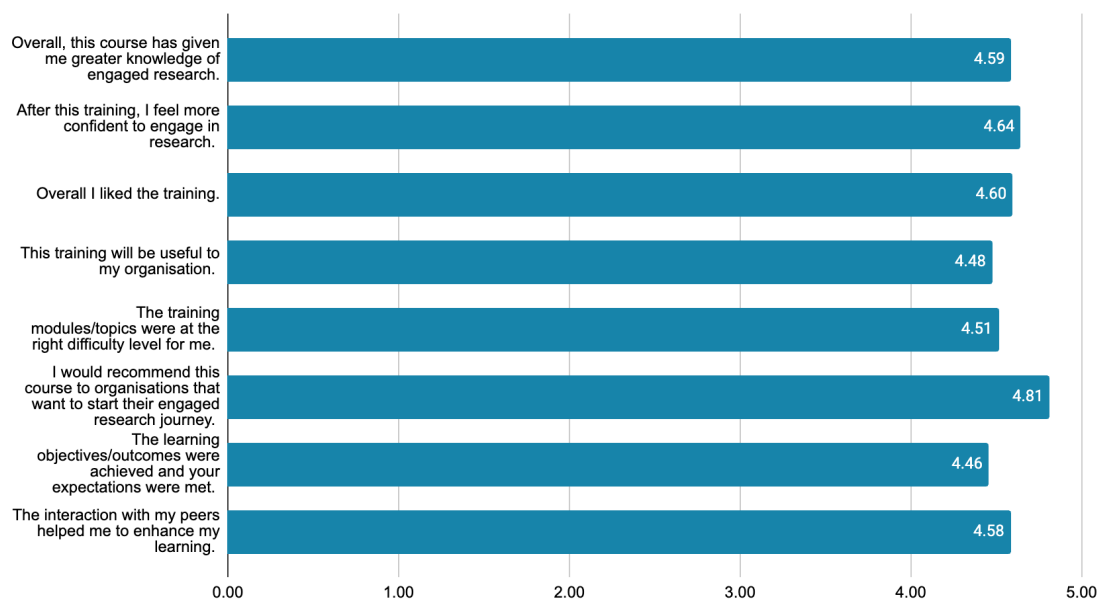


Figure 8: Participant's perception of the pilot training

This is a particularly important finding for policymakers, funders and institutional partners because it points to organisational value, not just individual satisfaction.



Figure 9: Satisfaction with learning experience

As shown in fig: 9 Pilot participants had highly positive perception about the trainings. 99.1% of respondents reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their overall learning experience. The strongest satisfaction rating was with the trainers, with a 100% satisfaction rate (*Satisfied, very satisfied*). The quality of the training modules also scored highly at *Very satisfied*: 80.37%, *Satisfied* 21%. As shown in Figure 9, satisfaction levels were consistently high across all aspects of the training, with the trainer receiving the greatest proportion of *Very satisfied* responses [88.79%].

These results suggest that participants valued both the content and the way the training was delivered. This is consistent with the qualitative feedback, where participants frequently referred to peer interaction, practical resources, and facilitation as useful aspects of the course.

Feedback, Refinement, and Lessons Learned

The open-text responses help explain the positive quantitative results. Participants most often described the course as useful because it gave them opportunities to interact with peers, discuss practice, and learn from others. They also valued practical resources such as checklists, templates, slides and tools.

The three strongest themes in response to *What aspect of the training did you find particularly useful?* were peer interaction, practical resources, and engaged research concepts. This is important because it shows that the training's value came from a combination of the content and learning environment.

Participants not only sought information; they also valued the opportunity to understand research through discussion, examples, and shared experience.

Participants also identified areas for improvement across several recurring themes, each of which points to a specific and actionable refinement for future delivery:

Content depth and tailoring

The most frequently raised suggestion was a desire for more advanced content, greater depth on specific topics, and better tailoring to participants' prior experience levels. Several participants noted that the introductory framing was appropriate for newcomers but felt too basic for those who already had some research background. Suggestions included offering differentiated pathways or pre-course needs assessments to calibrate the level of content to the cohort.

Concrete examples and case studies

Many participants expressed need for more real-world examples, detailed case studies, and applied exercises that would allow them to see engaged research principles in action. Participants wanted to walk through a full research project from start to finish, and to hear more from practitioners who had already completed engaged research projects.

Funding and grant writing

The funding module attracted specific feedback. Several participants felt that more practical guidance on identifying funding opportunities, forming academic-SEO partnerships, and developing grant proposals would be valuable. The desire was not just for information about funding channels in general, but for concrete, sector-specific examples and hands-on practice with proposal writing.

Session timing and length

A recurring theme was that individual sessions were too long, particularly those held online. Several participants suggested shortening sessions from four hours to three hours to maintain focus and

“Un curso imprescindible para entender qué competencias y habilidades se necesitan para formar parte de proyectos de investigación participativa. Las actividades prácticas y el material proporcionado, permiten acabar la formación con herramientas listas para usar y con confianza para participar en proyectos multiactor y no morir en el intento.”

“An essential course for understanding what skills and competencies are needed to take part in participatory research projects. The practical activities and materials provided mean you finish the training with ready-to-use tools and the confidence to participate in multi-stakeholder projects.”

Paula Escribano Velasco
CEO, Senda

energy. Others recommended spreading the content across more sessions rather than condensing it. The final all-day online session was specifically mentioned as intensive. The in-person sessions, by contrast, were consistently praised.



Online versus in-person format

Participants across all partner countries expressed a strong preference for in-person or hybrid delivery. While online sessions were acknowledged as more accessible, participants consistently noted that in-person days were where the deepest learning and relationship-building occurred. Several participants explicitly recommended that future cohorts include more face-to-face time.

Peer interaction and group dynamics

Some participants wanted more structured opportunities to interact with peers, including more varied breakout groups, more time in small-group discussions, and the possibility of continuing connections after the course ended. A small number noted that breakout rooms during online sessions did not always work well and could be simplified.

None of these suggestions undermine the overall positive findings. Rather, they provide a practical and specific agenda for improving future iterations of the delivery: one that the RISE consortium is well-placed to act on given the programme's co-design ethos and commitment to continuous improvement. But mostly, it provides guidelines for anyone who wishes to deliver the training programme in their country or organisation.

Three broad lessons emerge from the participant feedback. First, peer learning was not an add-on; it was one of the main sources of value. Second, practical tools helped participants translate concepts into organisational use. Third, participants wanted even more support in applying the learning to their own contexts, especially through examples, case studies, and follow-up opportunities.

Trainers' Perspectives

All trainers completed a survey to share their assessment of the course and their experience delivering it. The trainers' survey results indicate that the RISE pilot was experienced overwhelmingly positively by the 7 trainers across the participating countries. All survey respondents rated enjoyment of delivering the programme at 4 or 5 out of 5 (4.58/5), and the same proportion agreed that the training structure made sense and that they were able to respond flexibly to participants.

Similarly, trainers felt able to cope well with challenging situations (4.42/5) and believed that participants learned a lot from the training (4.33/5). Trainers noted that the sessions supported useful discussion, participant engagement, and exchange of practical experiences between SEOs, researchers, and facilitators.

A strong outcome from the trainers' perspective was the value of peer learning, which aligns with participant feedback above. Trainers repeatedly highlighted that participants brought diverse backgrounds and experiences, which enriched discussions and helped connect the course content to real organisational challenges. Several trainers also noted that participants showed genuine interest in engaged research and that the training opened new ways of thinking about collaboration with research institutions.



"The RISE Engaged Research programme was an invaluable experience. As someone working in the nonprofit sector, I found the practical tools, guidance, and real-world examples incredibly relevant. The programme helped me understand how to meaningfully integrate research with community needs and how engaged research can strengthen our advocacy and impact. I would highly recommend RISE to any nonprofit seeking to build confidence and capacity in evidence-based work."

Anna Marie Bourke,
Policy, Research, and Advocacy Coordinator
Asthma Society of Ireland

The survey also identified specific areas for improvement, particularly concerning time. While 83% of responses indicated sufficient time for meaningful interaction with participants, only 67% agreed that there was sufficient time allocated to each topic to deliver the training in full: the lowest-rated item in the survey. Trainers felt that some topics were too compressed, that certain activities needed more time, and that long online sessions could be difficult to sustain. Suggested improvements included shortening or splitting sessions, adding more breaks, making online delivery more interactive, incorporating more case-study examples, and creating an online forum to strengthen peer learning and networking between sessions.

Learning Recognition System

Satisfaction with the badge system was also high. Of the 107 participants, 76 were asked about their experience (SFC did not include this question in their post-training survey), and all 76 respondents expressed satisfaction: 49 selected *Very satisfied* and 27 selected *satisfied*. As one participant put it: *I loved that every session came with a badge of achievement, which made the progress feel tangible*. This suggests that the badge system was a strong motivator for participants to complete the modules and that participants found it a valuable approach for learning recognition.

Limitations

These results provide evidence of immediate positive changes in participants' self-reported knowledge, confidence, skills, attitudes, and behavioural readiness for engaged research. The matched design strengthens this conclusion because the analysis compares each participant with their own baseline response.

At the same time, the findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution. The data is self-reported, which is best understood as evidence of perceived knowledge, confidence, and readiness. The analysis does not independently verify whether participants later changed organisational practice, secured research funding, built new partnerships, or implemented new data systems. There was no control or comparison group. This means the analysis cannot prove that every change was caused only by the training. However, the consistency and size of the improvements across all eight matched indicators provide a strong indication that the training was associated with meaningful short-term learning impact. The post-training survey captures immediate outcomes. A follow-up survey several months later would be valuable to assess whether the learning was sustained and whether participants were able to apply it in organisational practice.

RISE Online Workshop

The online 3-hour workshop conducted in June 2026 was a condensed introduction to the RISE training programme — a chance for participants to get a real taste of what the full programme covers. The session drew on the key content from all five RISE training modules: what engaged research is and who it involves, ethical considerations, how to communicate research findings to different audiences, preparing for funding applications, and how to articulate your organisation's research needs and strengths. It was not the full training, but it was designed to give participants something genuinely useful: a solid grounding in the core ideas and a clear sense of what the complete RISE curriculum has to offer.

Out of fifteen attendees, twelve participants completed the survey before the workshop. Of these, eight also filled in the post-workshop survey, and it is these eight whose responses are compared here.

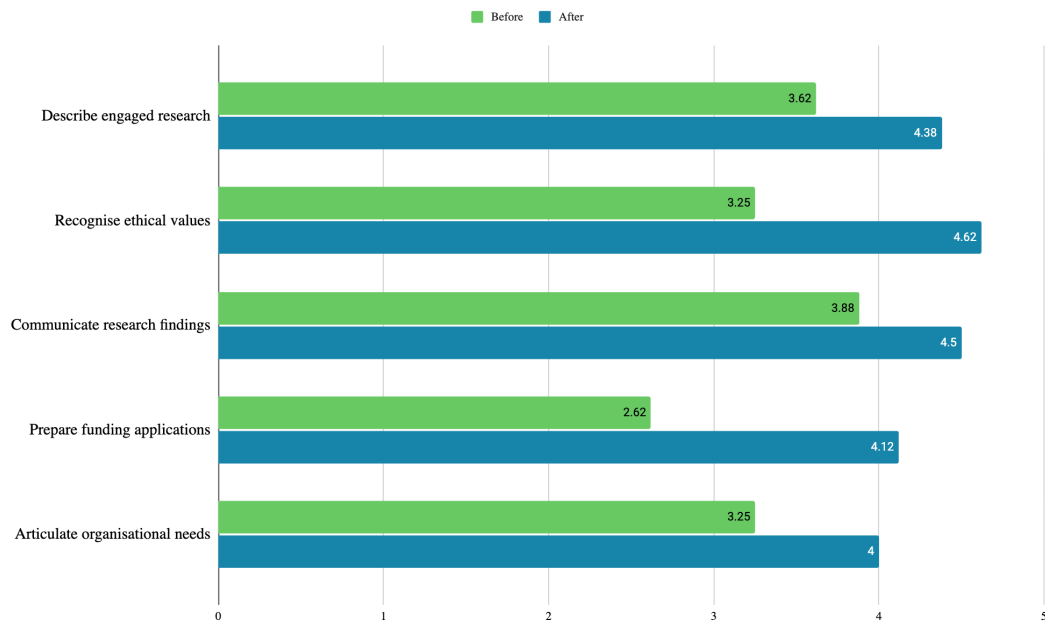


Figure 10: Confidence level of the participants before and after the online workshop

The other four only completed the pre-workshop survey and are not included in the comparison. Before the workshop, most participants came with some existing experience of engaged research: four said their organisation had *A lot* of experience, three had *Some*, and one had *Very little*, so the group was mixed in terms of background. Before and after the workshop, participants were asked how confident they felt across five areas, using a scale from 1 = Strongly disagree 5 = Strongly agree. Confidence went up in every single area.

As shown in Figure 10 average confidence scores increased across all five competency areas following the workshop, with the most notable gains in preparing funding applications (2.62 - 4.12) and recognising ethical values (3.25 - 4.62)

The biggest jump was in *preparing for funding applications*: this was also the area where people felt least confident going in. Before the workshop, 62% of participants said they did not feel ready to prepare a funding application. By the end, 75% agreed or strongly agreed that they could, with the average score rising from 2.62 to 4.12 out of 5 (+1.50 points). *Recognising ethical values in engaged research* also saw a large improvement (+1.38): before the workshop, 62% of participants were neutral on this - neither agreeing nor disagreeing that they felt confident. Afterwards, every single participant (100%) agreed or strongly agreed. Gains in the other three areas were smaller but still consistent: the share of participants who felt confident describing engaged research rose from 75% to 100%, confidence in communicating research findings to different audiences went from 62% to 100%, and confidence in articulating organisational needs increased from 38% to 62%.

Feedback was positive across the board. 88% of participants rated the workshop as useful (average score 4.38 / 5), 88% said it had given them greater knowledge of engaged research (4.25 / 5), and 75% felt clearer about what their organisation should do next (4.12 / 5). All eight participants (100%) said

they wanted to explore RISE materials further after the workshop — half were interested in the training modules, and the other half planned to also check out the podcasts and blog posts. Even as a one-off introductory session, the RISE workshop made a difference. Confidence improved across every area measured. The fact that everyone left wanting to engage more with the RISE programme suggests the workshop did exactly what it set out to do: give people a meaningful first look at engaged research and leave them wanting to learn more. The group was small ($n = 8$), so these results should be read with that in mind, but the consistency of the improvements is a promising sign.

When looking at the course offering, between the pilot courses and the overview of the course given during the workshop, the RISE consortium delivered a version of the training programme to 115 participants. These participants completed both the long pre- and post-training surveys and a more simplified version of these, allowing us to evaluate the quality of the course content.

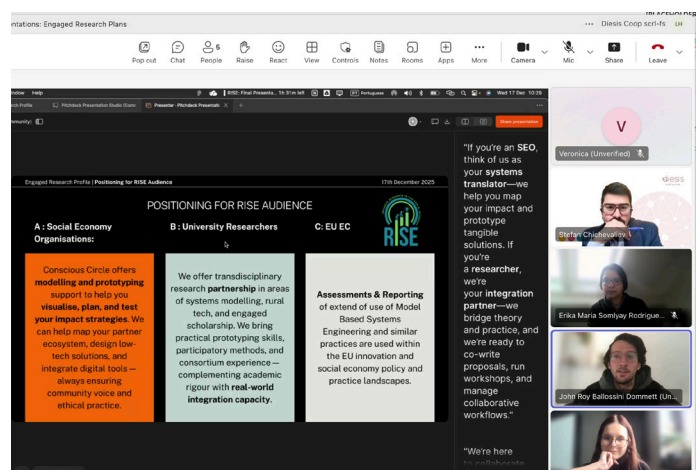


CONCLUSION OF PILOT ANALYSIS

The RISE training appears to have achieved its central purpose: participants left the programme with significantly greater knowledge of engaged research, measurably higher confidence across every research-related capability assessed, and a demonstrable readiness to apply what they had learned within their own organisations. The

improvements were consistent and substantial across all matched pre-training and post-training indicators, and satisfaction with the learning experience was overwhelmingly high for all pilots. The evidence shows that the programme produced real, self-reported capability gains that participants directly connected to the practical needs of their organisations and the communities they serve.

The most important message is not only that scores improved. The areas of improvement are directly relevant to the future of engaged research: understanding research roles, recognising ethical considerations, co-designing questions with stakeholders, interacting with academic partners, communicating findings, identifying funding channels, and advocating for research in organisational strategy.



The evidence therefore supports continued investment in the programme, with targeted refinements. Future delivery should preserve the strengths that participants valued most: peer learning, practical resources, accessible facilitation, and clear explanations, while deepening applied support for data systems, evaluation practice, funding navigation, and post-training implementation.



Overall, the findings show a programme that is both effective and useful: effective because participants' responses improved substantially, and useful because this progress relates to real competencies needed by organisations that want to take part in engaged research.

CASE STUDIES AND TESTIMONIALS

CASE STUDIES

We unfortunately did not have the space to feature all the amazing organisations that took part in the RISE training programme. However, this publication shines a spotlight on four of them: paper planes e.V., One Family, PULSE, and La Fàbric@. To discover more case studies, visit the RISE project website: www.engaged-rise.eu



Paper Planes E.V.

This Berlin-based organisation explores urban spaces and develops innovative concepts to address the challenges of today and tomorrow. As an independent, non-profit organisation, it is committed to maximising the common good through participatory approaches and radical creativity. Its work connects research, practice, and civic engagement to shape more inclusive and sustainable cities.

Engaged Research Interests & Future Collaborations

paper planes e.v. is interested in researching how urban spaces can be transformed into more sustainable, inclusive, and liveable environments. Our work focuses on exploring social and technological potentials, particularly in relation to mobility, public space, and climate adaptation, while developing visionary yet practical concepts for urban change. We aim to create knowledge that not only rethinks existing infrastructures but also supports cities in implementing innovative, community-oriented solutions that improve everyday urban life.

Engaged Research Plan: learnings from RISE

Through the RISE Engaged Research course, paper planes e.V. had the opportunity to reflect on its existing practices and situate them within a broader framework of engaged research. While the organisation already works extensively with participatory and practice-based methods, the course provided useful tools to further structure and communicate this work. Building on these learnings, we hope



to place greater emphasis on documenting and reflecting on projects in a more systematic way, making its methods and learnings more transferable. We also plan to deepen collaborations with academic partners. Overall, the course has reinforced the importance of transparency, reflexivity, and knowledge sharing in bridging research and practice.

Experience in Engaged Research

paper planes e.V. has several years of experience in engaged research, working at the intersection of urban practice, civic participation, and applied research. Our projects are grounded in close collaboration with residents, local initiatives, and public institutions, ensuring that diverse perspectives are actively integrated into both the research process and its outcomes. We use a range of methods, including participatory workshops, on-site interventions, stakeholder mapping, and qualitative research, to co-create knowledge and develop context-specific solutions. Our work not only generates insights but also translates them into tangible actions, contributing to more inclusive and sustainable urban development.

Perspectives and Expectations

Looking ahead, paper planes e.V. aims to further strengthen its role at the intersection of research, practice, and civic engagement. We see engaged research as a central approach to addressing complex urban challenges and plan to deepen our collaborations with academic institutions, public administrations, and civil society actors. A key goal is to expand our work on participatory formats and co-creative methodologies, while also improving how we document, evaluate, and share findings. In the long term, we are aiming to scale and transfer our approaches to other urban contexts, contributing to more inclusive and democratic planning processes beyond Berlin. We are also interested in developing more stable, long-term partnerships that allow for continuous knowledge exchange and joint project development.



One Family

One Family is Ireland's national organisation for people parenting alone, sharing parenting, or separating. Our mission is to create a society that values and supports one-parent families through specialist family support services, research, and policy work. Our vision is to create an Ireland where every family and child is respected and cherished equally.

Engaged Research Interests & Future Collaborations

One Family is interested in research that addresses the systemic inequities faced by one-parent families in Ireland. We are particularly focused on reducing child and family poverty, the housing crisis and how it impacts one-parent families, the social protection system, the legal systems and reform of the family law system. We advocate for evidence-based policymaking, to ensure that national services and legislation effectively address the diverse needs of one-parent families.

Engaged Research Plan: learnings from RISE

Through the RISE programme, we learned how to bridge the “research-practice divide” by moving beyond traditional dissemination toward a model of “research readiness.” A key takeaway was the Engaged Research Framework, which highlights that socially impactful projects require active collaboration with communities across

the entire research life cycle - from co-generating ideas to knowledge mobilisation. We gained the literacy and confidence to navigate the research landscape as a non-academic, specifically learning how to identify and overcome common obstacles, such as goal alignment and funding barriers.



We will use our learning to ensure our service users are not just subjects, but active partners in our work. Specifically, we will use stakeholder mapping and co-creation workshops to refine our research questions regarding child poverty and family law. By applying these methods, we will move towards “knowledge democracy,” ensuring that the lived expertise of one-parent families directly shapes the evidence-based policies we advocate for at a national level.

Experience in Engaged Research

We have over 50 years of experience using research as a tool for social change, acting as a lead researcher, commissioner, and collaborative partner. Our advocacy project creates space for parents to share their experiences, contribute to policy development and speak directly to decision makers. We use participatory research methods that enable parents to shape the topics we look at in surveys,

interviews and focus groups. It is rooted in the belief that those closest to an experience hold expertise in solutions. Notable collaborations include reports with University College Cork and Trinity College Dublin on lone parents' experiences in higher education and welfare, as well as the 2022 landmark report on contact time for infants and young children in separated families - highlighting the systemic lack of child-centred decision-making within the Irish family law system.

Perspectives and Expectations

The future of our organisation is rooted in using real-world evidence to drive change. We will deepen our research by analysing our own internal data - captured through our frontline services and national surveys - to provide a clear, impactful picture of the challenges one-parent families face. By collaborating with academic partners, and through our One Family Advocacy Project, we will ensure that parents are co-designing the solutions to the problems they live with every day. A key goal is to influence the family law system, advocating for specialist courts that put the needs of children first. Long-term, we are working toward a society where the stigma around one-parent families is gone, and all families have full choice and opportunity in their lives. We believe that if a policy works for one-parent families, it works for every family.



PULSE

Founded in 2006, PULSE is an association dedicated to supporting and promoting entrepreneurship as a driver of inclusive and sustainable development, with a focus on empowering women, youth, and

underserved communities who face barriers to accessing training, networks, and financing. To achieve this, we design and implement incubation and acceleration programs, strengthen the capacity of local support organisations to build more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems, and develop innovative tools, methodologies, and multi-country projects to improve and scale effective entrepreneurship support practices. Our goal is to empower individuals to create sustainable economic opportunities for themselves and their communities, while contributing to social and environmental solutions.

Engaged Research Interests & Future Collaborations

As an organisation working directly with entrepreneurs and support ecosystems, we aim to turn field-based experience into robust evidence. Our research interests focus on three areas: measuring long-term impact (business sustainability, job creation, social and environmental outcomes) beyond simple output indicators; strengthening advocacy by grounding policy recommendations in concrete data to promote inclusive access to entrepreneurship and financing for underserved groups; and designing evidence-based interventions by combining academic insights with field experience to test and scale innovative approaches. Ultimately, we want research to continuously improve our programmes and ensure they genuinely respond to the real needs of the communities we serve.

Engaged Research Plan: learnings from RISE

The program has taught us that research is most effective when it follows the principle of “nothing about us, without us,” transforming beneficiaries from research subjects into active co-creators. We have gained a clearer understanding of our role as a bridge between academic rigour and community-based needs. To take action, we will implement the following:

- **Co-designing Research Questions:** We will involve our entrepreneurs and local partners in the co-generation of ideas to ensure research addresses real-world challenges.
- **Ethical Safeguarding:** We will adopt the Checklist for Community Practitioners to balance power dynamics and ensure that participation is voluntary and beneficial for the community.
- **Outcome-Oriented Measurement:** We will move beyond output tracking to assess long-term outcomes using Impact Statements and qualitative storytelling.
- **Data Governance:** We will implement data minimisation and use secure, encrypted storage to maintain high standards of privacy and trust.
- **Adapted Communication:** Translate research findings into accessible formats (community workshops, testimonials, policy briefs) to ensure that knowledge flows back to the community and drives systemic change.

Experience in Engaged Research

We conducted a study on social entrepreneurship in the Western Balkans. Developed by researchers Teo Petricevic and Jelena Andjelic and coordinated by the Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs consortium, the report provides up-to-date information on the current state of social entrepreneurship and youth entrepreneurship in the region. The document focuses on legislation, education systems, financial and non-financial support structures, networking structures, and emerging markets for social enterprises.

Perspectives and Expectations



The future for PULSE is centered on transitioning from tracking immediate outputs to building a robust evidence base for long-term socio-economic impact. Our vision is to ensure that our field-based knowledge is converted into measurable data that can influence both program design and public policy. Upcoming plans include: launching a specific study measuring the long-term outcomes of entrepreneurship programs

for young people from marginalised areas; using research findings to ground our recommendations to policymakers and funders; and establishing collaborations with academic partners who value community knowledge as much as scientific expertise - using formal Memorandums of Understanding to ensure transparency, fair role distribution, and appropriate funding for practitioner time.



La Fàbric@ SCCL

La Fàbric@ is a cooperative made up of four social science professionals with extensive experience in community building, as well as in the management of local programs, services, and facilities across Barcelona's neighbourhoods and districts. Our mission is to strengthen communities by identifying their potential and establishing strategic links between stakeholders involved in improving living conditions - embracing full diversity - in the face of the eco-social challenges impacting our territories and neighbourhoods.

Engaged Research Interests & Future Collaborations

We are interested in researching the potential for community-led management of energy and waste. We also seek to study the impact of local green spaces on the well-being of diverse groups (considering age, gender, cultural background, socio-economic level, etc.). Furthermore, we aim to measure the challenges of launching collective sustainable consumption projects and to demonstrate how women from diverse backgrounds effectively integrate systemic change challenges and actions into their daily lives. Our goal is to define the specific impact of our interventions within the Social and Solidarity Economy. We want to strengthen our projects with consistent results that ensure their success despite their small scale, providing a solid justification for maintaining, replicating, and expanding them to other territories and neighbourhoods.

Engaged Research Plan: learnings from RISE

We have learned the immense value that Social and Solidarity Economy entities bring to collaborative research. Because these organizations hold deep bonds of trust with local communities and stakeholders, they offer a unique entry point that is often more difficult for academic researchers to establish independently. Our plan is to clearly define our specific contributions and needs to find genuine synergies between both sides (practitioners and academics). We also aim to use collaborative research to concretely measure the impact of our actions. By defining our research profile and utilizing the various tools and documents provided in this course, we can identify which alliances serve us best and how to secure them. This allows us to explore the research dimension of our work without losing our identity or the essence of what we do within the SSE.

Experience in Engaged Research

Our experience in participatory research is beginning with this training program. While we have extensive experience in social intervention and community facilitation, we are now formalising our approach to collaborative research to better integrate data collection and community-led knowledge into our professional practice.

Perspectives and Expectations

Although we are new to formal research, our eco social intervention line currently includes projects centered on collective energy management (Local Energy Communities). Additionally, we are launching a pilot project for cooperative rental housing that will run from May 2026 to December 2027. Our primary role involves providing community support to 70 diverse households, representing a wide range of social profiles, ages, and interests.

Our challenge is to leverage our role as community builders to introduce sustainable habits - such as healthy eating, local green spaces, and energy and waste management - into the building's collective governance. To succeed, we must be able to measure our actions and outcomes through participatory research. This will allow us to demonstrate the tangible impact of our intervention in this pilot project, testing the challenges of adopting 'common good' practices within communities that aim to be sustainable and resilient in the face of current eco-social crises.



These four organisations offer a vivid snapshot of what engaged research looks like in practice across very different contexts and communities. Whether rooted in years of formal research partnerships or just beginning to formalise their approach, each brings something that no academic institution can replicate: trust, lived proximity to the issues, and a genuine stake in the outcomes. What unites them is a shared belief that the people most affected by a challenge are also best placed to help solve it and that research, when done well, is not something that happens to communities, but with them.

TESTIMONIALS

The written testimonials from the pilot post training surveys demonstrate the personal and organisational impact of the RISE training programme.

A central message from participants was that the RISE training helped build an understanding of engaged research as both a methodology and a values-based approach. One respondent expressed this clearly:

“If we are to truly embrace the concept of ‘experts by experience’, we need to do more and better engaged research so we can learn from that experience. All research Terms of Reference should be ‘engaged research’ proofed to ensure the voices of those most affected are not only listened to but heard.”

This idea was echoed in many reflections reflecting a core idea that was embedded throughout the course: *“Nothing about us without us.”* Participants recognised that meaningful research requires communities to be involved not only as respondents, but as partners in defining what matters, interpreting findings, and shaping action. In this sense, RISE strengthened a more democratic understanding of knowledge production.

The testimonials also illustrate a clear increase in individual confidence. Participants repeatedly described feeling *“better equipped,” “more confident,”* and supported by a *“clearer framework.”* For some, the course offered a first structured introduction to research. One participant wrote:

“As someone with no prior research background, I wasn’t sure this training was for me. But it turned out to be a genuinely valuable professional development experience. The engaged research approach connects directly to the work we do in the social economy sector; it gave me new tools and a clearer framework for something I was already doing intuitively.”

Participants especially valued the practical nature of the course, especially in relation to ethics and values, partnership building, data management, impact assessment, strategic planning, grant writing, and funding opportunities. One participant described RISE as:

“An essential course to understand what skills and competencies are needed to be part of engaged research projects. The practical activities and provided material allow you to finish the training with ready-to-use tools and confidence to participate in multi-actor projects.”

Another respondent similarly stated that the course offered *“a clear and practical overview of engaged research”* and helped them to develop *“a structured research plan”* for collaborative research with meaningful social impact. These reflections show that RISE successfully bridged theory and practice.

Participants also highlighted a range of organisational benefits arising from the training.

One respondent described the course as *“transformative”* because it gave their organisation confidence to move:

“from being subjects of research to active, collaborative partners.” Another noted that the course helped them understand *“how to meaningfully integrate research with community needs and how engaged research can strengthen our advocacy and impact.”*

Several participants linked the training to strategic goals and internal processes suggesting that participants identified clear organisational applications for the skills and knowledge gained through the training.

The learning environment of the RISE course was also indicated as a significant element of the project's value. Participants described the course as engaging, inclusive, well-structured, and energising. One respondent called it *“brain food,”* while another appreciated the opportunity to *“engage with participants from diverse backgrounds, exchange perspectives, and learn from their experiences.”* This peer-learning dimension matters because engaged research is relational. By creating space for dialogue and reflection, the course modelled the collaborative principles it taught. Taking part in the training programme was also a great networking opportunity for participating organisations, especially when delivered in person, where the trainers witnessed people exchanging contact details.

Overall, the testimonials show impact at several levels. For individuals, the RISE training built confidence, clarified concepts, and provided usable tools. For organisations, it strengthened research profiles, advocacy capacity, strategic planning and readiness for equitable partnerships. The strongest stories describe a shift in identity: from uncertainty to confidence, from being researched to becoming collaborative partners, and from intuitive community practice to structured, evidence-informed engaged research.

In this sense, participant voices confirm that RISE made engaged research both more accessible and actionable for SEOs, enabling them to engage more actively in research partnerships and to create more socially impactful projects.

SHARING AND NETWORK BUILDING

CREATION OF AN ENGAGED RESEARCH COMMUNITY

One of the most significant outcomes of the RISE project is its community. From the outset, the project understood that connecting the community of practitioners across partner countries, their networks and the two pilot phases of the training programme, could create a foundation for continued learning, exchange, and collaboration beyond the project's formal duration.

RISE's approach to building an engaged research community operated at two levels. The first refers to the direct community created through the training programme itself: the SEOs workers, employees and leaders who completed the training, built relationships with one another and with their facilitators, and developed a shared understanding of engaged research. As shown, participant testimonials identified peer interaction as one of the most essential aspects of their learning experience.

The second level refers to the broader European network built through the project's dissemination and outreach activities. RISE's [dedicated LinkedIn page](#), partner dissemination efforts, alongside the resources developed by the project helped connect researchers, SEO practitioners, policymakers, academic partners, and other stakeholders interested in engaged research across Europe.

Together, these networks ensure that the relationships, knowledge, and momentum generated through RISE can continue to grow beyond the project's lifetime. The activities, resources, and dissemination efforts that have supported this are outlined below.

“Ha sigut molt enriquidor conèixer i compartir amb altres entitats de l'economia social i solidària per poder ser agent important en la investigació participativa.”

Duna Ulsamer,
Founder, Vincore SCCL

“It has been very enriching to get to know and share with other social and solidarity economy organisations in order to be an important player in participatory research”

PROJECT WEBSITE AND RESOURCES

The RISE project website <https://www.engaged-rise.eu/> is the central hub for all project outputs, resources and community communications. It is the primary point of access for anyone seeking to learn about, apply, or replicate the RISE approach. Collectively, the materials produced through RISE provide a comprehensive, accessible, and practice-oriented knowledge base for engaged research in the European social economy. The core content areas of the website are outlined below.

- [The Training Modules](#) section provides access to the five-module RISE curriculum which is free, open, and accessible to all. The modules covering the basic principles of engaged research, ethics and values, partnership building, data management and impact assessment, and funding and research planning are available for free download and reuse. Facilitator guides, templates, as well as other useful resources are also included in a downloadable package. This will equip interested organisations with all the material required to implement the programme with its own audiences.
- [The Blog](#) section is a library of articles written by the RISE consortium contributors, covering key concepts, practical guidance, and case studies relevant to SEOs engaging in research. Some of the articles cover topics such as stakeholder engagement, making sense of research ethics for non-academic researchers, and understanding levels of participation in research. These articles are written for practitioners without research backgrounds serving as a bridge between the formal curriculum and the everyday questions that SEOs encounter when they begin to engage with research.
- [The Podcast](#) brings the voices of researchers, SEO practitioners, and engaged research advocates directly to practitioners through audio content hosted on the website and accessible via standard podcast platforms, further enhancing the reach of the RISE project. Each episode explores a different dimension of engaged research in the social economy context, covering topics which range from the practicalities of building research partnerships to the ethical dimensions of community involvement.
- [The Engaged Research Map](#) is one of the most distinctive and practically valuable resources produced by the project. It is an interactive map that catalogues engaged research initiatives from across Europe. This map allows users to explore real examples of how SEOs, research institutes, universities, and community groups have collaborated on research projects. The map includes a catalogue of projects including Horizon Europe initiatives, Erasmus+ partnerships, and national programmes. It can also be used as a networking tool: organisations viewing the map can identify projects with similar thematic interests and reach out to the organisations and research partners involved, fostering the type of cross-sector connections that the project identified as one of the most significant barriers to SEO participation in research.

PROJECT DISSEMINATION THROUGH PARTNER NETWORKS

Alongside the project's formal dissemination milestones and resources, RISE partners carried out a wide range of ongoing dissemination activities throughout the project lifetime, embedding the project within their existing networks and communication channels. At national level, each partner organisation integrated RISE into its regular communications channels, ensuring sustained visibility among their stakeholder groups. The Wheel promoted RISE outputs and opportunities through its network of over 2,600 member organisations, as well as through its regular webinars, training events, and its Access Europe programme, which supports engaged research by connecting Irish social economy organisations with European universities and funding opportunities.

In addition, The Wheel Summit annual conference featured the RISE project at the all-day “Wheel Hub” where team members showcased project outputs, distributed info sheets, and shared QR links to the website. Furthermore, RISE took centre stage during a parallel session titled “Doing Community Research: Book Launch and Discussion on Engaged Research.” This session launched a complementary guidebook on engaged research and highlighted RISE as a major milestone in The Wheel's ongoing mission to champion community-driven, collaborative research. The event was attended by SEOs, policy makers and funders, attracting over 500 participants.

SFC presented RISE at the 2nd Citizen Science Congress, held in Barcelona in November 2025, a key space bringing together researchers, practitioners, civil society organisations and public institutions working on participatory and citizen-led research. As part of the congress, SFC facilitated a short workshop linked to the RISE project, creating an opportunity to share the project's approach, discuss the role of social economy organisations in engaged research, and gather reflections from participants. SFC also supported the visibility of RISE through its communication channels, including social media and other organisational dissemination activities, helping to reach audiences connected to citizen science, participatory research and social innovation.

Additionally, Diesis Network disseminated the project through its participation in social economy conferences, while ECSA presented RISE at its ECSA 2026 conference in Oulu. Also, ECSA presented RISE at the final workshop on the Role of Intermediaries in Knowledge Network and Transformation of Horizon project FOSTER. Diesis shared the activities and results on its webpage, social networks, and mailing list, disseminating continuously to all its network during the project's duration. These activities helped position RISE within broader European discussions on engaged research and highlighted ongoing questions around who shapes and participates in the research process.

MULTIPLIER EVENTS

The RISE project partners will run four multiplier events to extend the reach of its outputs and methodology beyond the direct pilot participants and into wider sector, policy, and academic audiences. These - the project's formal final public events - are planned as the most significant single moment of outreach, designed to launch the final publication, showcase the pilot results, and convene stakeholders from academia, public administration, civil society and innovation ecosystems.

Beyond raising awareness of the RISE project itself, the events are designed to promote the wider potential of engaged research as an approach to addressing societal challenges and strengthening collaboration between research and practice. They will also provide a valuable forum for dialogue and knowledge exchange, creating opportunities for social economy organisations to connect with researchers, policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders to build momentum for future collaborations and contribute to the project's longer-term ambition of embedding and scaling engaged research across Europe.

- **The Wheel** will hold its multiplier event on 8 September 2026, bringing together approximately 50 policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders. The event will feature a presentation of the RISE project and the WP4 publication, alongside a panel discussion highlighting the project's outcomes and the value of engaged research.
- **Diesis Network** will organise two multiplier events to disseminate the results of the RISE project and engage relevant stakeholders in discussions on data governance for the social economy. The first event, to be held online on 20 July 2026, will focus on the role of data in the social economy, with particular attention to Data Cooperatives as an emerging model for democratic data governance. The webinar will include the presentation of the RISE project, the dissemination of its activities and preliminary results, expert contributions based on the project's research outputs, and an interactive discussion with participants. A second multiplier event will be organised in September 2026, targeting stakeholders from across the European social economy ecosystem. This event will further disseminate the project's activities, outputs and key results to a broader European audience, while fostering dialogue and stakeholder engagement around the themes addressed by RISE.
- **ECSA** will organise a multiplier event in early September 2026. For the event the aim is to bring together around 100 participants from different stakeholder groups such as SEOs, academic and research institutions and relevant policymakers. During the multiplier event, RISE's final publication along with its key results will be highlighted. In addition, the focus during the event will be to foster discussions among the participants on the topic of engaged research.

- **SFC** successfully delivered its multiplier event in June 2026, attracting approximately 50 participants. The event included presentations on the RISE project and its outputs, reflections from organisations involved in the pilot training programme, a roundtable discussion involving representatives from academia and the social economy, and a structured thematic networking session. The event generated high levels of engagement, with participants reporting valuable discussions and new connections that may lead to future collaborations.

SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

This section sets out how the RISE partners will together sustain and build upon the project's outcomes, resources, networks, and impact beyond the Erasmus+ funding period, ensuring that the knowledge, tools, training materials, and community established through RISE remain accessible, relevant, and active. The plan covers the period from project end through to at least five years post-project and details the partners' commitments to maintaining project outputs, supporting continued dissemination and engagement, aligning with EU Open Science principles, and contributing to wider European policy priorities to maximise the project's legacy.

EUROPEAN POLICY CONTEXT

The sustainability of RISE is not merely an internal partnership matter but is closely aligned with several European policy frameworks. These policies recognise the importance of strengthening collaboration between research institutions and civil society, increasing the participation of SEOs in research and innovation, and promoting more inclusive and engaged approaches to knowledge creation. By addressing these priorities in practice, RISE is well positioned to contribute to wider European policy objectives and support the long-term uptake of engaged research approaches. The most relevant policy areas are outlined below.

- **EU Social Economy Action Plan (2021)**: Calls for increased capacity among SEOs to engage with research, innovation, and digital tools. RISE directly addresses this priority by equipping practitioners with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to participate more effectively in research and innovation activities.
- **European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda (2022)**: Identifies open science and broader participation in research as key priorities, recognising the important role of non-academic actors in the research ecosystem. RISE strengthens the capacity of social economy organisations to engage as active research partners.

- **Horizon Europe – Missions and Partnerships:** Places co-creation and societal engagement at the centre of publicly funded research. Through its training, tools, and community-building activities, RISE prepares SEOs to participate as genuine partners in collaborative research rather than solely as beneficiaries.

OUR SHARED COMMITMENT AND THE AUDIENCES WE SERVE

The RISE partners share a common commitment to sustaining engaged research as a practice that connects SEOs with the research community on equal terms. Each partner brings this commitment from a distinct but convergent mission: The Wheel to equip its members with the skills and infrastructure needed to engage in research on an equal footing with academic counterparts; Diesis Network to strengthen capacity, research and policy engagement across the social economy ecosystem; ECSA to democratise knowledge production and deepen public participation in science; and SFC to enable more inclusive and impactful research through citizen science and co-creation. Across all four partners, the shared connection is apparent, RISE has created training resources, methodologies, and networks that extend beyond any single organisation's reach, and each partner has identified the sustainability of these outputs as a strategic priority, rather than merely a project obligation. The plan to do so draws on each organisation's existing local, national, and European networks, communication channels, membership infrastructure, and ongoing involvement in Erasmus+ projects, Horizon Europe projects and other relevant initiatives.

The audiences who stand to benefit most from sustained RISE activities span three interconnected groups. The primary group is SEOs. Through RISE, these organisations gain the research readiness, tools, and methodologies to engage more effectively in collaborative research projects. The secondary group is researchers, citizen science practitioners, and academic institutions who benefit from a wider and more capable pool of community partners, creating conditions for more participatory, ethical, and impactful research. The third group is policymakers and funders at local, national, and European level who have an interest in evidence-based participatory approaches.

The project's combined infrastructure - encompassing ECSA's membership and working groups, Diesis Network's stakeholder networks, SFC's co-design and engagement expertise, and The Wheel's 2,600-strong membership base and established policy function - provides substantial and diverse channels to reach all three groups consistently beyond the project lifetime. The commitments of each of the RISE partners are grounded in genuine institutional capacities and capabilities rather than aspirational intent. Each organisation has identified RISE as something that strengthens what it is already doing and not an add-on, but a positive extension of existing purpose.

MAINTAINING PROJECT OUTPUTS

The intellectual outputs of RISE - the training programme, digital badge system, and the project website - represent a significant body of work developed through co-design during the project lifetime. This section sets out how the project will ensure they remain accessible, current, and actively embedded in organisational practice across all partner networks.

- **The Wheel** will maintain the RISE project website for five years in accordance with the Grant Agreement. This will be ensured, through annual domain renewal and a yearly subscription to the website provider. The commitment goes beyond simply keeping the site online. The Wheel will also conduct regular content reviews to ensure all materials remain accessible and active throughout the five-year period, updating them where necessary. The site will be promoted through The Wheel's own online channels, with an embedded link on their organisational website. Project resources will be signposted at sector networking meetings and events through links and QR codes.
- **Diesis Network** will maintain a visible reference to RISE on their organisational website. Diesis Network will keep dedicated pages and news articles accessible and linked to the project site, sharing outputs through newsletters and LinkedIn. Diesis Network will share the project LinkedIn page across all partners to keep the community informed of follow-up activities and relevant events. Diesis Network will continue referencing RISE outputs in future projects, workshops and events related to social innovation and participatory research.
- **ECSCA** will maintain a visible reference to RISE through its website. It will maintain RISE in its project archive, referencing the outputs in ECS platform under the resources section. ECSCA will explore opportunities to host RISE training resources on the European Citizen Science Platform. Also, ECSCA will continue referencing RISE outputs in future projects concerning participatory approaches
- **SFC** will host a dedicated RISE page updated with key outputs and links at project end. SFC will use its digital channels to redirect audiences to the project website and, where relevant, will incorporate references to RISE results and learnings into future presentations, events and knowledge-sharing activities related to citizen science, participatory research and social innovation.

In addition to all the commitments from partners to maintain project outputs, having the RISE training programme on the website will act both as a self-access resource and a facilitated training. This will significantly extend the long-term reach of the programme among researchers, organisations, and social economy actors. Together, these commitments ensure that the project's online presence is not simply preserved but actively maintained and promoted across the distinct European and national networks.

EMBEDDING RISE IN ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICES

The RISE project outputs will be actively embedded into the ongoing work of each partner organisation.

- **The Wheel** will explore incorporating the five training modules into their annual training calendar as a series of recorded mini-webinars, hosted permanently on their website for on-demand member access. Meanwhile, templates created as part of the course will be made available to share with members for practical use within their organisations. Where demand exists for more tailored support, The Wheel's training team may develop bespoke sessions adapted to specific organisational needs, ensuring the programme reaches beyond standardised delivery into practical application. RISE podcasts will be added to The Wheel's existing playlist, and the final publication will be used in direct engagement with policymakers and funders to make the case for engaged research at sector and national level.
- **Diesis Network** will also incorporate RISE outputs as a complementary layer withing their existing capacity-building and methodological frameworks. It will also embed the engaged research methodologies, ethical frameworks and partnership-building tools into future training programmes and EU project work, applying a train-the-trainer model to ensure the materials travel beyond the organisation itself. Diesis Network staff will continue applying the participatory approaches introduced through RISE, with outputs reviewed and adapted periodically as new policy developments or partner needs arise.
- **ECSA**'s most distinctive sustainability contribution in this area is the development and maintenance of a database of SEOs with an interest in engaged research, with a particular focus on widening countries. Originally developed for RISE, the database is currently being used by the RIECS concept - a Horizon Europe project dedicated to build citizen science infrastructure in Europe. This database provides a living infrastructure for targeted dissemination, future collaboration and continued community engagement that extends well beyond the lifetime of any single project.
- **SFC** will integrate RISE outputs as a complementary layer within their existing capacity-building and methodological frameworks. SFC will incorporate relevant learnings, resources, and training components developed through RISE into its existing capacity building activities, mentoring processes and European projects, further enriching the co-creation methodologies and collaborative research practices that already form part of its regular work.

Together, these four approaches - structured programme delivery, methodological integration, train-the-trainer replication, and a maintained stakeholder database – represent a genuinely diverse and complementary set of mechanisms for keeping RISE outputs alive and in active use across the partnership's collective networks after project end.

REACHING NEW AUDIENCES

PARTNER	ACTIVITY	TARGET AUDIENCE	PLANNED DATE
The Wheel	Roadshows - a day of practical insights, expert guidance, and valuable networking opportunities, as well as information on The Wheel membership benefits and a presentation of projects and programmes. During these events, findings from the gaps and barriers co-definition workshops will be shared along with materials from the course, encouraging attendees to visit the project website	Targeted at members of The Wheel (SEOs) but it is free and open for all to attend.	Regional events taking place 3-4 times a year
	Planning for Engaged Research events organised by universities – The Wheel invited as guest speaker or co-organiser	Research organisations and academia, policy makers, SEOs	Ongoing and after project ends (invitation dependent)

Table 3: The Wheel - Partner activities to reach audiences beyond the project lifetime

PARTNER	ACTIVITY	TARGET AUDIENCE	PLANNED DATE
SFC	Presentation of RISE outcomes in external events and conferences	SEOs, policy makers, academia, civil society	Ongoing and beyond the project
	Integration of RISE methodologies into SFC's existing capacity-building and collaborative research activities, as well as future European projects where relevant.	SEOs, policy makers, academia, civil society	Beyond the project lifetime

Table 4: SFC - Partner activities to reach audiences beyond the project lifetime

PARTNER	ACTIVITY	TARGET AUDIENCE	PLANNED DATE
Diesis Network	Dissemination of news resources and events related to engaged research through LinkedIn, newsletters, and podcasts	European social economy and research communities	Ongoing and beyond the project
	Integration of RISE methodologies into future Erasmus+ and EU projects	EU project partners and practitioners	Beyond the project lifetime
	Presentation of RISE outcomes in external events and conferences	Researchers, NGOs, social innovators	Ongoing

Table 5: Diesis Network - Partner activities to reach audiences beyond the project lifetime

PARTNER	ACTIVITY	TARGET AUDIENCE	PLANNED DATE
ECSA	Dissemination of news resources and events related to engaged research through LinkedIn and ECSA's newsletter	European social economy and research communities	Ongoing and beyond the project
	Integration of RISE methodologies into relevant future Erasmus+ and EU projects	EU project partners and practitioners	Beyond the project lifetime
	Presentation of RISE outcomes in ECSA's webinar series and conferences	Researchers, NGOs, social innovators	Beyond the project lifetime

Table 6: ECSA - Partner activities to reach audiences beyond the project lifetime

RESOURCING OUR COMMITMENTS

Commitments are only as strong as the resources behind them. RISE's financial sustainability rests primarily on in-kind contributions from each partner organisation, alongside active monitoring of follow-on funding opportunities across national and European programmes. All partners are committed to contributing staff time as the main post-project resource. This will support activities such as dissemination, community engagement, the reuse and adaptation of training materials, and website maintenance. This will be based on existing organisational infrastructure rather than requiring dedicated new budgets. These commitments will be taken forward by each partner in line with their respective capacities and areas of work.

- **The Wheel** will provide the most concrete financial commitment, dedicating both staff time and financial resources annually to keep the project website open, accessible, and user-friendly for the full five-year period.
- **Diesis Network** will contribute staff time for dissemination, training adaptation, and partnership development.
- **ECSA** will involve its communications team in maintaining online visibility and resharing project content.
- **SFC** will present RISE at future conferences, workshops and events, supporting the continued visibility and uptake of the project results.

In addition to these activities, the consortium will actively pursue follow-on funding to expand the impact of RISE. Building on the partnership and resources developed through the project, partners will seek opportunities through successor Erasmus+ calls, Horizon Europe, the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme, the EU Social Economy Action Plan, ESF+ national social economy strands, and other relevant European and national funding mechanisms. These represent credible pathways to further develop the project's outputs, extend the training programme, strengthen support for social economy organisations engaging in research, and establish longer-term collaborative initiatives that embed RISE's approach within European policy and practice.

MAINTAINING & GROWING OUR COMMUNITY

One of the most significant outcomes of RISE is not a document or a platform, it is the community: the SEOs and practitioners who participated in the pilot, and the researchers and facilitators who worked alongside them. The project is committed to maintaining this connected group of people using the existing LinkedIn page managed by Diesis Network. After the project ends, partners have committed to maintaining and growing this channel with Diesis Network coordinating cross-partner content sharing to ensure a consistent and active presence. The access to this page will be shared with all partners to maintain and update the community with relevant events and to involve them in follow-up activities. This will ensure that the page remains a space for exchange on engaged research.

In addition to this, RISE aims to sustain its community of engaged research practitioners through a layered approach combining structured communication, preserving relationships built with the pilot participants, and targeted outreach across each partner's existing networks.

- **The Wheel** will add pilot participants to its established mailing list of SEOs interested in engaged research, ensuring ongoing access to relevant updates and opportunities. It will also explore a matchmaking mechanism with its Access Europe programme to facilitate direct connections between SEOs and university research partners, fostering engaged research partnerships.
- **Diesis Network** will maintain engagement primarily through LinkedIn, sharing relevant resources and opportunities across its European networks.
- **ECSA** will contribute through consistent communications sharing RISE-related updates, opportunities and resources through its website and social channels with a particular focus on audiences at the intersection of academia, civil society, and the social economy.
- **SFC** will maintain the close relationships it built during the project by facilitating continued exchange and identifying opportunities for collaboration. This will be done through direct follow-up with pilot participants and workshop attendees, sharing relevant opportunities through SFC's communication channels, and connecting interested organisations with future participatory research, citizen science and social innovation initiatives where appropriate.

Together, these commitments ensure that the community built through RISE continues to develop beyond the end of the project. This approach is realistic and proportionate, as it is grounded in existing infrastructure while remaining purposeful in its ambition. The Wheel provides the communications backbone, Diesis the European network reach, ECSA the bridge to the research and academic community, and SFC the relational continuity. The shared ambition of all the partners is that new collaborations and projects will emerge from this community as part of RISE's legacy.

Alongside sustaining the community established through the project, the partnership is committed to actively expanding it beyond the pilot participants. Through targeted engagement with social economy umbrella bodies, research institutions, policymakers and European networks, partners will continue to promote the RISE approach and encourage wider uptake of its resources and methodologies. Each partner will contribute to growing the RISE community in line with its institutional strengths, creating new opportunities for collaboration and ensuring that the project's knowledge, tools and relationships continue to reach new organisations across Europe.

This expansion will be supported through a range of partner-led initiatives:

- **The Wheel** will produce a position paper, co-signed by sector stakeholders, to build consensus around engaged research in Ireland and strengthen the sector's voice with policymakers and funders, directly supporting implementation of the Social Economy Action Plan's capacity-building agenda.
- **Diesis Network** will promote RISE through its European social economy networks and policy activities, helping embed participatory research within wider EU cooperation frameworks and contributing to the European Research Area's ambition to position non-academic actors as legitimate research partners.
- **ECSA** will promote RISE through its citizen science community network and through its working groups such as empowerment, inclusiveness and equity; sharing best practice and building capacity and policy, strategy, governance and partnerships. Utilising these established channels can support to attract wider audience and discussions on engaged research.
- **SFC** will extend the project's reach through participation in European initiatives and events, including the Biennial de Ciència and projects such as IMPETUS, ECS and CERBERUS, providing established channels through which RISE can inform cross-sector dialogue.

Collectively, these actions will build on the momentum created through the pilot training programme, moving engaged research beyond project-level experimentation towards sustained organisational practice and wider sectoral adoption across Europe.

ADAPTING AND USING THE RISE TRAINING MATERIALS

The RISE training materials have been developed to support SEOs in building their knowledge, skills and confidence in engaged research. Following extensive development, piloting and refinement, the RISE partnership is pleased to make the full training package publicly available for use across the European social economy.

The materials have been adapted for the Irish, Spanish, Belgian, and German contexts and are available in both English and Spanish. Stakeholders can download the complete training package from the RISE website and use the resources in a way that best suits their organisation, learners, and local context.

The downloadable package includes all five modules of the RISE training programme, together with the resources required to deliver the training, including:

- Lesson plans
- PowerPoint training slides
- Supporting resources and handouts
- Links for learners to claim digital badges on completion of each module
 - a. The lesson plans provide information on the suggested timing of each activity within a module and contains clear guidance on how to execute various activities and use the relevant materials.
 - b. Learners who successfully complete a module can claim a digital badge recognising the knowledge and competencies they have developed through the programme.

Rather than viewing the programme as a fixed five-module course, the RISE partnership encourages stakeholders to adapt the materials to meet their own needs. Feedback from pilot participants indicated that the training is particularly effective when delivered in smaller sections or as standalone modules. Organisations may therefore choose to deliver only those modules most relevant to their audience - for example, focusing on research ethics and communication, or on research funding and developing a research plan. As each module has been designed to stand alone, organisations can tailor delivery without requiring participants to complete the full programme.

Who can use the RISE training programme?

Although the training was originally designed for SEOs with little or no prior experience of engaged research, pilot feedback demonstrated that the materials also provide value for organisations with existing research experience. Participants reported that the programme strengthened their confidence,

enhanced their understanding of engaged research practices, and provided practical tools and resources to support more equitable participation in research partnerships.

The RISE partnership welcomes organisations at every stage of their engaged research journey to make use of these resources. Whether you are taking your first steps into research or looking to strengthen existing research practice, the RISE materials have been designed to be flexible, practical, and adaptable to a wide range of organisational contexts.

Additional resources to support the RISE training materials

- The training modules are complemented by a range of additional resources available on the RISE website, including 12 podcasts, 12 blogs and 12 case studies showcasing examples of engaged research in practice. Stakeholders are encouraged to use these resources alongside the training to deepen their understanding and explore different approaches to engaged research.
- Organisations interested in connecting with others across Europe are also encouraged to engage with the RISE LinkedIn community and explore the interactive map of European engaged research projects, helping to build networks and share learning across the social economy sector.

Stakeholders who have questions about the training materials or their implementation are encouraged to contact the RISE partnership through the project website. The partnership looks forward to seeing how organisations across Europe adapt and apply the RISE resources to support impactful, collaborative research that benefits both communities and the social economy sector.

RISKS, CONSTRAINTS, AND MITIGATIONS

As part of the sustainability planning process, RISE partners identified potential risks that could affect the implementation of the sustainability plan. These risks have been consolidated into four categories: organisational, financial, engagement-related and external risks. The tables below present these risks alongside the mitigation measures agreed by the consortium.

RISK TYPE	RISK DESCRIPTION	LIKELIHOOD	IMPACT	AGREED MITIGATION
ORGANISATIONAL	Limited staff capacity to maintain RISE-related activities after the project ends	HIGH	MEDIUM	The focus will be on realistic, achievable actions, such as resharing relevant updates, maintaining website references, and integrating RISE into existing communications rather than creating new activities.
	Competing organisational priorities	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	Align RISE follow-up activities with organisations' broader strategic work on engaged research, citizen science, multi actor collaboration and social innovation, ensuring that its legacy remains relevant across future initiatives
	Staff turnover or reduced availability of key people	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	Ensure that RISE output, contacts, methodologies and lessons learned are well documented and stored internally, so they can be reused by new employees or other existing employees
FINANCIAL	Lack of resources (time and funding)	MEDIUM	HIGH	In-kind commitments cover minimum activity; content on low-cost platforms; diversified funding approach per partner
	Follow-on funding not secured – resource gap post-project	MEDIUM	HIGH	In-kind commitments cover minimum activity; diversified funding approach
ENGAGEMENT	Low community member engagement post-project	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	Use the final multiplier event to reinforce relationships; sharing content of genuine value; annual in-person or online gathering; clear benefit articulated at outset
EXTERNAL	EU policy priorities shift away from social economy or open science	LOW	MEDIUM	RISE methodology is adaptable across multiple policy frameworks; diversified advocacy strategy reduces single-framework dependence

Table 7: Organisational risks

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The RISE project generated a rich and convergent body of evidence about what SEOs need from the wider system to engage in research as equal partners. The recommendations below draw primarily on two complementary sources of the project: the gaps and barriers workshops conducted with 105 workers from 93 stakeholder organisations prior to programme development and the matched pre- and post-training survey analysis of 107 pilot participants across two pilot phases.

The recommendations are directed towards three key groups of actors: policymakers, higher education institutions and funders, each of which holds a distinct but essential position in the engaged research landscape.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

The RISE workshop findings establish clearly that the barriers faced by SEOs are structural rather than motivational. Participants engaged through the four partner countries and their wider networks expressed genuine interest in, and commitment to, engaged research. What emerged was not a lack of willingness, but a lack of institutional literacy, resources, and connecting infrastructure to enable SEOs to act on that commitment. Data from the two pilot phases confirms that appropriate training can help address this capacity gap: 99.1% of participants reported increased knowledge of engaged research after completing the course. This demonstrates that the gap can be addressed, but doing so requires deliberate policy investment.

Building on these findings, the following recommendations identify the policy changes needed to strengthen the role of SEOs in engaged research and ensure that their participation is supported in practice, not only encouraged in principle.

1. Invest in research capacity building for SEOs as a standalone and recurring policy priority. The RISE co-definition workshops identified the difficulty of navigating funding systems as one of the most significant knowledge gaps faced by SEOs. The EU Social Economy Action Plan (European Commission, 2021a) explicitly identifies the limited capacity of SEOs to engage with research and innovation as a structural barrier. Addressing this gap requires dedicated funding streams within Erasmus+, ESF+ national social economy programmes, and EU funding frameworks, alongside accessible sector-relevant and validated training programmes such as that developed by RISE.
2. Address the structural mismatch between research timelines and SEO funding cycles. One of the most consistently reported barriers in the workshops was the disconnect between the long-term timelines of academic research and the short-term, project-based funding on which

most SEOs depend. This mismatch undermines both the quality of research partnerships and the sustainability of any gains made. Policymakers should create multi-year funding mechanisms, bridge grants, and seed funding instruments that accommodate the needs of community organisations, with a focus on relationship building.

3. Formally recognise SEOs as legitimate research actors in EU research governance. The ERA Policy Agenda (European Commission, 2022) makes civil society participation in research a structural priority. Translating this commitment into practice requires a common European framework that defines the role of SEOs in publicly funded research, establishes minimum standards for community partnership in co-funded projects, and creates accountability mechanisms ensuring that community involvement is substantive. The pilot evidence is instructive here: 94.4% of participants reported feeling more confident to engage in research after the RISE training. 88.8% said the training would be useful to their organisation indicating that the appetite and the capacity for genuine partnership exists and can be developed when there is sufficient support in place.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The RISE project outputs produced some of the most pointed and consistent evidence about the role of academic institutions in perpetuating the barriers to SEO participation. SEOs reported feeling excluded from research conversations and decision-making processes due to their unfamiliarity with the language and conventions of academic research.

1. Invest in internal systems for equitable community partnership. Higher education institutions should develop internal training, guidelines and incentive structures that equip their researchers to enter community partnerships with the orientation of genuine co-investigators rather than data collectors. This includes formally recognising community engagement and co-production as valid academic outputs in promotion and tenure criteria, allocating dedicated budget lines within grant applications for community partner capacity building and establishing ethical review processes that explicitly address power asymmetries in community-based research.
2. Formalise pathways for SEO involvement in research from the outset. The pilot data shows that confidence in interacting with academic partners improved from a mean of 3.53 to 4.22 after the RISE training, this is a significant gain, but one that cannot be fully realised without reciprocal openness from academic institutions. Universities should establish formal community research offices, partnership registries, and expression of interest processes that make it straightforward for SEOs to identify and approach academic collaborators.

3. Integrate engaged research ethics into researcher training as a core, not elective component. Ethical considerations emerged as both a significant gap in the workshops and an area of strong improvement in the pilots. Pre-training confidence in recognising ethical considerations in engaged research had a mean of 3.36 out of 5; while post-training this rose to 4.50, which is a rise of 1.14. This improvement reflects what is possible when ethics is taught not as an abstract principle but as practical guidance for navigating power, consent, representation and responsibility in real community contexts. Higher education institutions should embed this approach in all researcher training, with explicit attention to the ethical dynamics of research involving vulnerable communities and SEOs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

The workshops and pilot evidence together point to several ways in which current funding structures inadvertently reproduce the barriers they purport to address.

1. Design funding calls that genuinely support community co-leadership. Our findings from pilots suggest that practical funding navigation requires more applied support than a training programme alone can provide. Funders should review application and reporting requirements to ensure they do not systematically disadvantage organisations without dedicated research infrastructure. This should explicitly value community knowledge and relational assets as legitimate project inputs.
2. Fund the preparatory and relational work that makes genuine partnership possible. A recurring theme in both the workshops and the pilot feedback was that building genuine collaborative relationships takes time - SEOs that are under the daily pressures of operational delivery and cannot afford to do this without dedicated support of funders.
3. Invest in follow-up and sustained impact. Our pilot data demonstrates that there is a strong immediate learning outcome for the participants. However, due to the nature of the project, assessing long term impact is very difficult. Funders should develop and fund impact frameworks capable of capturing the slow, cumulative changes that engaged research generates in community organisations over time.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The RISE project has delivered a set of outcomes that extend beyond the successful delivery of project activities. It has established a practical, evidence-based model for strengthening the capacity of social economy organisations to participate in engaged research, while demonstrating how collaboration between researchers and communities can be supported through structured training, open educational resources and cross-sector partnership.

A major achievement has been the development and validation of a training programme specifically designed to build research readiness among social economy organisations. Grounded in the needs identified through the project's research and co-designed with stakeholders, the programme was piloted across partner countries and refined through participant feedback. Evaluation demonstrated improvements across all eight capability indicators measured through matched pre- and post-training surveys, providing robust evidence that the programme strengthens participants' knowledge, confidence and readiness to engage in research. More than 80% of participants also completed the project's digital badge pathway, exceeding the project target and supporting the wider European objective of recognising and validating practice-based learning.

Beyond the training itself, RISE has created a lasting body of openly available resources, including multilingual training modules, the Engaged Research Map, podcasts and supporting guidance, all published and freely available through the project website. These resources ensure that the project's knowledge, methods and learning remain accessible to organisations, researchers and policymakers long after the project concludes, supporting continued uptake across Europe.

Perhaps the project's most significant achievement, however, has been the creation of a growing European community committed to strengthening engaged research within the social economy. Through collaboration between social economy networks, universities and intermediary organisations, RISE has established relationships, shared language and practical approaches that position social economy organisations as active contributors to research rather than passive beneficiaries. This collaborative foundation provides the basis for future partnerships, policy engagement and continued capacity building.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

The RISE project ends with a strong foundation and a clear direction. The training programme is validated, the resources are openly available, the evidence of impact is robust, and the commitment to maintain the community of engaged research practitioners is established.

In the immediate term, sustainability is supported through concrete commitments from all partners that do not depend on securing additional funding. The Wheel will maintain the project website, while each partner has committed to embedding RISE outputs within its ongoing activities. Together, these commitments ensure that the project's resources remain visible, accessible and actively used by new audiences across Europe.

The project's evaluation findings also provide a compelling evidence base for future policy and funding discussions. RISE has demonstrated both the demand for and effectiveness of its approach. The pilot results strengthen the consortium's ability to advocate for wider investment in engaged research and to position the project as a scalable model for supporting social economy organisations across Europe.

Looking ahead, the consortium will seek follow-on funding to extend the RISE model. Future investment would enable the partnership to expand the training programme, strengthen the European community of practice and further embed engaged research within policy, practice and research systems.

Ultimately, RISE contributes to a longer-term vision in which social economy organisations are recognised as equal and valued partners in the European research ecosystem. By strengthening organisational capacity, promoting open and inclusive approaches to knowledge creation and building lasting connections between researchers and communities, the project supports the ambitions of the European Research Area and demonstrates that more participatory and socially responsive research is not simply an aspiration, but an achievable and sustainable model for the future.

ANNEXES

ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

The Core Ethical Orientation Of RISE

The RISE project treated ethics as genuinely important, not just a box to tick. The project recognised that when research involves SEOs and the communities they work with, there are real responsibilities that go beyond the standard rules. These include being honest about who holds power in a research relationship, making sure everyone involved has agreed to take part on the basis of clear and appropriate information, ensuring communities are represented fairly, and actively preventing situations where organisations or the people they serve end up feeling used rather than valued.

Key Ethical Principles Evident In The Project

Based on the findings from the gaps and barriers workshops, RISE's ethical framework was built around a core principle: ensuring that participants feel respected and that their opinions are valued. This was described by workshop participants as

- a) empowerment or feeling confident;
- b) ensuring informed consent and the responsible collection, storage and use of data in compliance with GDPR
- c) addressing the ethical dimensions of stakeholder engagement, particularly with vulnerable communities, to ensure that participation is genuinely voluntary and non-coercive
- d) ensuring transparency about research objectives, roles and mutual responsibilities from the outset of any partnership

Ethics As A Learning Objective

Ethical awareness was embedded directly into the training programme through Module 2, which was dedicated entirely to ethics and values in engaged research. This module addressed the ethical principles governing mainstream research, the additional ethical considerations specific to engaged research and community-based contexts, and the recognition and management of power asymmetries. The pilot data shows that this was one of the most impactful elements of the programme: confidence in recognising ethical considerations in engaged research rose from a mean of 3.36 to 4.50 out of 5, the second largest improvement across all eight measured capability indicators.

Ethics As A Design Principle

Beyond content, ethics shaped how the project was conducted. The curriculum was developed through co-design rather than designed by academics and delivered to communities. The gaps and barriers assessment was conducted through participatory workshops rather than extractive surveys. This reflects the project's commitment to the same values of shared ownership and equitable participation that it teaches.

Finally, the RISE ethical framework is a set of substantive principles that includes respect, reciprocity, transparency, informed consent, power awareness, and data responsibility. The above-mentioned principles, along with a commitment to enacting them, was used by the partnership when carrying out project activities and designing the modules.

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

PERSONAL COMPETENCIES

Cognitive Abilities

Abstract Thinking

Conceptualize complex ideas and relationships beyond tangible details.

Critical Thinking

Evaluating information objectively to make reasoned judgments and decisions.

Analytical Thinking

Breaking down problems into smaller parts to understand and address them effectively.

Strategic Thinking

Planning long-term approaches to achieve goals with clarity and foresight.

Systemic Thinking

Understanding how components interconnect within larger systems.

Problem Solving

Identifying and resolving challenges through creative and practical solutions.

Creativity

Generating innovative ideas and approaches to advance research.

Strategic Vision

Envisioning and guiding progress toward overarching objectives.

Self-Reflection

Learning from past experiences identifying areas for improvement.

Self-Management

Manage Personal Professional Development

Continuously improving knowledge and skills for career growth.

Show Entrepreneurial Spirit

Demonstrating initiative and innovation in pursuing opportunities.

Time Management

Plan and organize tasks effectively by setting priorities and allocating time efficiently.

Cope with Pressure

Maintaining focus and resilience under challenging circumstances.

Flexibility and Adaptability

Adjusting approaches to respond to evolving situations.

Self-Awareness and Boundaries

Set clear boundaries to maintain wellbeing. Understanding one's capacity and making conscious decisions.

RELATIONAL COMPETENCIES

Develop Networks

Building and maintaining connections with individuals and organizations to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Promote Inclusion & Diversity

Fostering an equitable environment that values all perspectives.

Promote a Healthy Work Environment

Prioritizing physical and mental health to foster psychological safety and create a supportive work environment that promotes overall well-being.

Teamworking

Collaborating effectively by leveraging others' knowledge and experience to enhance outcomes.

Orientation Towards the Common Good

Focusing on shared benefits, ethical practices, and a commitment to social justice and democratic principles.

Communication

Sharing ideas clearly to build understanding and collaboration, adapting the communication strategies to different stakeholders.

Leadership

Inspiring and guiding individuals or teams to achieve shared goals and drive progress.

TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES

Research Design and Management

Project Management

Organising tasks, resources, and timelines to achieve objectives efficiently and effectively.

Mobilise Resources

Identify key relevant funding sources and prepare research grant applications in order to obtain funds and grants.

Build Strong Teams and Partnerships

Identify key expertise profiles within the team and potential project partners.

Negotiate

Balancing interests to reach a mutually acceptable agreement by facilitating discussions, and mediating between differing viewpoints.

Promote Accessible Publications

Identify the appropriate publication channel(s) and publishing your research with open access in free and easy to find platforms to reach a broader audience.

Promote Engaged Research

Actively involve diverse stakeholders in the research process, ensuring that research is relevant, accessible, and impactful. Fostering collaboration, addressing societal needs, and promoting the practical application of findings to benefit communities.

Develop Engagement Strategies

Create strategies to actively involve and connect with key stakeholders, ensuring their participation throughout the whole process.

Evaluate Research

Reflect on research activities and learn from successes and failures. Assess progress, impact and outcomes.

Making an Impact

Disseminate Results to Target Audiences

Publicly disclose research results by any appropriate means, including training, conferences, workshops, etc.

Advocacy Actions

Communicate about your research to influence policy or sensitise the general public about your topic.

Sustainability Plan

Explore ways for usability and scalability of results beyond the project's lifespan.

Doing Research

Have Disciplinary Expertise

Demonstrate deep knowledge and complex understanding of your specific area of work.

Conduct Interdisciplinary Research

Work and use an interdisciplinary approach when doing your research, considering different areas of knowledge related to your topic.

Perform Collaborative Research

Implement the appropriate scientific approach, techniques and methodologies for developing your project according to your objectives.

Apply Research Ethics and Integrity Principles

Apply fundamental ethical principles and legislation to research. Including principles of inclusivity and transparency and following privacy and GDPR requirements.

Intellectual Property Management

Ensure proper citation and acknowledgment of others' work, while protecting one's own intellectual creations from unauthorized use.

Manage Research Data

Collect and analyse research data. Store it and maintain it in research databases, support the re-use of data. Be familiar with FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) data management principle.

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