

Handbook for Women's Resource Centres

Starting up, organising and guaranteeing sustainability in a Women's Resource Centre

Starting up

How to start a Women's Resource Centre
Organisation

Management

Management and leadership
The operating plan and budget
Basic activities – the foundation for continuity
Special efforts
Premises
Financing

Guaranteeing sustainability

Success factors
In-organisation work
If conflicts arise

The structure of Women's Resource Centres

Local level
Regional level
National level
Europe
Criteria
The aims of Women's Resource Centres



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Starting up, organising and guaranteeing sustainability in a Women's Resource Centre

A successfully operating Women's Resource Centre is run by women on women's terms. The work needs to run smoothly, both in organisation and externally. Key concepts are goal orientation, openness, involvement and competence, as well as contacts, relationships, partnerships and, not least, communication.

Starting up

How to start a Women's Resource Centre

A group of women meet and establish that there is a need for efforts to facilitate development and for a meeting place for women. Together they itemise the need for a WRC in the local area, which could, for example be a village or a town. The task of a WRC might, in addition to providing support for individual women and their development, be to develop the local area, be part of a lobby group for equality or be involved in social and cultural efforts. The group also needs to establish cooperation and collaboration with other organisations, local government and public authorities.

There is a need to work in an organised and structured manner to ensure that women gain the same conditions and opportunities as men in matters of work, working conditions, scope for development and entrepreneurship.

The work of a WRC needs to be formalised with statutes or rules of procedure.

Organising

To earn legitimacy as a representative for women's interests and to obtain financial resources for their operations, it is necessary for the work to be organised in a formal fashion, for example as a voluntary association, an NGO. Other organisational forms could be a cooperative, or as part of another organisation's activities.

In order to guarantee the stability and continuity of the WRC's work, documents are needed that describe how and with what the WRC should work. A WRC that is run as a voluntary association must have statutes. Briefly, the statutes should describe:

- ❖ the purpose of the association, i.e. what the WRC is to work with
- ❖ how the operations are to be conducted
- ❖ membership, membership fees and voting rights
- ❖ the composition of the board
- ❖ the annual meeting

It is important that the basic principles for work in a WRC are taken into account when writing the statutes:

- ❖ the WRC must be open to all women in the geographical area, or professional/vocational group or branch of trade or industry
- ❖ the WRC must be run on democratic principles: one person, one vote
- ❖ the management must be by women for women
- ❖ men who share the same values of equality as the WRC are welcome to participate
- ❖ the WRC should work to promote an equal society, an equal labour market and an equal world of business and industry
- ❖ the WRC should work to promote equal and sustainable development.

When the group of women have formed their association at an inaugural annual meeting and confirmed the statutes, have appointed a board, auditors and elections committee, the association can register itself with the authorities. The regulations regarding associations and registration vary from country to country. For example, in Sweden the association is registered with the tax authorities and receives an organisation number that gives it legal capacity. Legal capacity means that the WRC can own property, enter contracts and run projects.

If the WRC's work is organised as part of another organisation's activities the WRC needs rules of procedure, which should be based on the same basic

principles as the statutes of an association. It is advisable to have a steering group for the work that corresponds to the work of an association's board and which guarantees the women's power to influence the operations.

Management

Management and leadership

The work in the WRC is planned and managed through an operating plan produced annually by the board and accepted by the members at the annual meeting. The annual meeting is the highest decision-making organ in the WRC and tasks the board to run the operations. At the next annual meeting the board produces a report on the operations and financial reports and reports on how the task of running the WRC has been performed during the past year. At the same time the board produces a new operating plan for the coming year that is accepted by the annual meeting. The operating plan, report on the operations and an annual financial report show that a continuous and stable operation is being run.

The board divides up work tasks among board members and agrees on decision-making procedures and work procedures to describe who has the right to decide about what and how the work is to be carried out. Often, an administrative leader or executive is appointed. The board gives the administrative leader the responsibility for the day-to-day work. The administrative leader reports to the board and on urgent matters to the chairperson. When there is other staff over and above the administrative leader, they work in accordance with the tasks the administrative leader assigns them. Ensuring there is organisational stability in the manner of working is essential to the ability to offer a good operation.

The board is elected by the annual meeting based on the needs the association has with regard to competence, experience, age and interests. The composition of the board should be constantly reviewed. The principle of democracy is essential in all work in a WRC. It is also very important to have a board of members who burn with enthusiasm for the WRC and who provide support for those working in the operations and represent continuity. The part the board plays in the visionary work and in planning operations cannot be emphasised too strongly.

The people who sit on the board and those who are employed and their competences are also important in giving the WRC legitimacy as an actor in development work for sustainable growth.

The operating plan and budget

An annual operating plan and budget are necessary to structure the work carried out. Plans for future activities and costs during the year then form the foundation for reports and the drawing up of the operating report. The operations may comprise general work, which can be called the basic operations, and of special efforts in project form. The operating plan and budget should list basic operations and planned projects separately.

The operating plan might include:

- ❖ How the basic operations are to function and what role those involved have, e.g. who the administrative leader is.
- ❖ Board meetings, how many and when.
- ❖ Members' meetings, open meetings and annual meeting, how many and when.
- ❖ What projects are being run.
- ❖ What project applications are planned, when they should be submitted and by whom.
- ❖ Lobbying activities, what and when.
- ❖ Marketing activities and contact with the media, number and when.
- ❖ How internet/website/social media are to be used.
- ❖ Budget for the operations.

The operating plan and budget must be based on realistic financial possibilities. In project work the budget is generally clear, since it is what the WRC has applied for and been granted project funding for. In project work the main difficulty might instead be to maintain the level of ambition in relation to the finances. The books should be balanced every month, and this reported to the board. At least four times a year the entire operational plan should be followed up by the board or steering group. The board/steering group then has an opportunity to correct operations that are not going according to plan.

Basic activities – the foundation for continuity

Basic activities are what provide continuity for the WRC. Arriving at a common focus and common goals is essential and it is based on giving all women inclusion in planning of the work in the WRC. A WRC is a democratic and learning organisation. It is necessary to continuously develop competence. The WRC maintains ongoing contacts with authorities and organisations that are important to them. Often the WRC has an administrative leader, who has the role of work leader and is the one who plans operations and follows them up for other co-workers. The administrative leader communicates with the board and the board makes the decisions about the ongoing work that must be done.

Special efforts

WRCs often work often in project form. Financially projects often represent the major part of the operations. Projects are managed in accordance with demands placed by the bodies that granted project funding. At the same time it is essential that a WRC's projects comply with the WRC's basic values and statutes.

Each project has to have a project organisation, which forms a part of the total WRC operations. Each project has goals that limit the scope and the work is based on a project plan. The project leader communicates with the administrative leader and/or board. Necessary supplementary decisions are made after this type of discussion.

Premises

The need for premises and office equipment may be limited or considerable depending on the scale of operations. Sharing premises with suitable collaborative partners might be a good solution.

Financing

A stable economy is essential for a WRC to be able to work actively and on a long term basis. The operations might be financed through:

- ❖ Membership fees
- ❖ Public support to the operations or projects
- ❖ Various support from collaborative partners, e.g. free premises, photocopying, telephone or access to a computer

- ❖ Participants' fees and admission fees to activities
- ❖ Voluntary work.

Projects might be local, regional or national. A WRC can work internationally in projects e.g. in the EU based on its own initiatives and contacts or participate in projects that are initiated by other organisations. There is also scope for participating in international projects in collaboration with other organisations.

Guaranteeing sustainability

Success factors

There are many ways to success for an operation. Some important success factors for resource centres for women are that:

- the equality perspective underlies all activities
- the activities are open for all women
- women's involvement is made good use of
- voluntary work is carried out and the involvement of people who burn with enthusiasm for the cause is put to good use
- legitimacy is reinforced through ongoing contacts with women, with decision-makers in the fields of regional and local politics and with other organisations/associations
- lobbying activities are carried out often
- partnerships and long-term alliances are formed to work with both the ongoing work to promote equality and with project work
- the board/steering group has an interest in and desire to work for equal conditions in the perspective of regional policies
- the goals of the organisation are visible and everybody strives towards achieving these.
- an operating plan and a budget are produced annually and followed up with reports on the operations and financial reports
- funding makes it possible to conduct operations

- the documents which steer regional policy work within the EU and in the WRC's own country, nationally, regionally and locally are familiar to those working with WRC
- the concept of sustainable growth is well known
- internal communication functions well, so that members, staff, the board and steering group leader have knowledge about what is going on in the WRC's activities
- external communication is lively, so that the WRC is a recognised force in society
- IT functions, so that everyone can get information via a website and that email and social media are used when it is possible and appropriate
- those working within the WRC receive training in argumentation, negotiation and rhetoric.

In-organisation work

Interesting meetings are arranged for the networks, discussions are encouraged and ideas, opinions and wishes are taken into account and utilised. New groups of people are invited to participate. When working in networks new and interesting angles often become clear. Innovative thinking is stimulated.

Participants should be involved from an early stage and methods chosen accordingly. Making sure everybody participates and is included is vital, so that everybody's resources are put to good use.

Those involved coach each other through giving and accepting opinions from each other, and acting as each others' sounding boards. You give feedback, listen actively and understand each other. And it is important to do things together that are fun.

If conflicts arise

Deal with conflicts by first identifying the nature of the conflict. A substantive conflict means that you do not agree about the way of solving a problem. This is solved through discussions whereby you reach agreement on how to tackle the problem. Role conflicts arise when you do not agree about who should do what. Such conflicts are solved by drawing up work, responsibility and action plans. Pseudo conflicts arise when you misunderstand each other. When this happens you have to talk it through. Conflicts of interest arise when there are

'conflicting needs. Then the position has to be made clear to everyone. Value conflicts are about our basic values and these can be difficult to resolve, but matters are helped if you talk about them.

The structure of Women's Resource Centres

Local level

Women's Resource Centres are based on local needs and interests and are designed by women for women. One of the fundamental premises of resource centres and networks is that they develop and grow out of local needs and prerequisites.

Regional level

WRCs cooperate over large or small areas to reinforce their work, benefit from each others' competence and experience and to e.g. run mutual projects. Regional cooperation can be organised through a regional WRC, in which local WRCs are members.

A regional WRC should stimulate and support the development of local resource centres and networks. It starts activities that can act as a model for work in other WRCs and can conduct various sorts of measures, e.g. to promote women's entrepreneurship in collaboration with WRCs and other actors locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. A regional WRC can initiate and support development work geared at encouraging growth, with a focus on business and occupations for women.

National level

A National Women's Resource Centre should coordinate and support regional and local resource centres and networks. It aims, through influencing and cooperating with organisations and authorities, nationally and internationally, to promote a society in which women's potentials, rights and obligations are upheld. A National WRC works to ensure that women and men have the same conditions and opportunities concerning work, working conditions, development potential and entrepreneurship and to promote an equal gender division in respect of power and influence. It is important for the National WRC to lobby public opinion and spread information about women's life situations.

Europe

The European WRCs are organised in WINNET Europe, the European Association of Women's Resource Centres, which was established in 2006. The mission of WINNET Europe is to support and reinforce the activities of WRCs and to strengthen the role WRCs have as key actors of regional growth and support the participation of women in regional development.

Criteria

Running a Women's Resource Centre is based on five key categories of criteria which at the same time are the basis for the quality certification of WRCs:

1. Legitimacy
2. Continuity
3. Organisation
4. Competence
5. Financing

A National Woman's Resource Centre is an organisation that

- Works in accordance with the aims of the WRC
- Operates at a national level
- Has its basis in the demand from regional and local WRCs
- Is open to the regional and local WRCs existing in the country in question
- Forms a meeting place and support for regional and local WRCs
- Has activities that are designed by and carried out by women
- Is firmly established in or with the support of national authorities and organisations
- Is governed by a operating plan and budget, and has an annual report and follow-up
- Has a board/steering group, or equivalent, and an executive responsible for administration
- Is a non-profit organisation

A Federal State Regional, a Regional or corresponding Women's Resource Centre is an organisation that

- Works in accordance with the aims of the WRC
- Operates at a federal state or regional level
- Has its basis in the demand from regional and local WRCs
- Is open to the regional and local WRCs existing in the federal state or region
- Forms a meeting place and support for regional and local WRCs
- Has activities that are designed by and carried out by women
- Is firmly established in or with support of federal state and /or regional authorities and organisations
- Is governed by a operating plan and budget, and has an annual report and follow-up
- Has a board/control group, or equivalent, and an executive responsible for administration
- Is a non-profit organisation

A Local Women's Resource Centre is an organisation that

- Works in accordance with the aims of the WRC
- Works on a local level and takes part in local development
- Has its basis in the demand from women
- Is open to women and/or WRCs in its geographical area
- Forms a meeting place and support for women in the area
- Has activities that are designed by and carried out by women
- Is firmly established in or with support of local and or regional authorities and organisations
- Is governed by a operating plan and budget, and has an annual report and follow-up
- Has a board / steering group or equivalent, and an executive responsible for administration.
- Is a non-profit organisation.

The aims of Women's Resource Centres

Within the framework of the criteria governing WRCs there is great scope for moulding the profile of the work based on the target group and needs. Work tasks and corresponding goals might include the following:

- To empower women
- To be a neutral meeting place for networking groups of women
- To be a centre for information and documentation
- To give women advice (counselling & mentorship) as to the way of getting on with their projects or business ideas
- To mediate contacts with women's networks
- To integrate regional and local development plans with the desire of women to take part in regional and local development
- To create new permanent jobs by developing women's own ideas, concerning production of goods and services
- To increase women's influence in the labour market and in society
- To participate in opinion building and communicating female experiences
- To mobilise local and regional resources
- To support a more equal distribution of economic resources between women and men.



Swedish National Federation
of Resource Centres for women



SWEDISH AGENCY FOR ECONOMIC AND REGIONAL GROWTH