

# The Womenabler Blog

Enabling women's entrepreneurship worldwide

## Mixing Purpose With Passion: Women's Enterprise in Scotland

Posted on **June 8, 2015**

Having recently returned from Scotland, I was struck by a new-found energy and optimism. Though the recent independence referendum was defeated, it brought out a renewed national spirit – which certainly carried over in the surge of support for the Scottish National Party in the recent U.K. elections.

This energy surge is also manifest in support for women's enterprise development in Scotland. Last year, Scotland launched a [Framework and Action Plan for Women's Enterprise](#), based on feedback from the women's business community and other stakeholders and containing a series of policy and program recommendations.

What took me over to Scotland was a Think Tank gathering, #WESMovingOn, in which best practices from within and outside Scotland and the U.K. were considered and discussed. The day was kicked off with a thoughtful presentation by futurist [Anne Lise Kjaer](#) on a more inclusive view of 'the good life' and the drivers of change in the future, incorporating the four P's of people, planet, purpose and profit.

Then we ("womenablers" from government, the private sector and the third sector, from the U.K., Europe and North America) all rolled up our sleeves and shared our views – from our countries and communities – of what's working, what lessons we've learned, and what recommendations we'd make for Scotland moving forward. I was asked to reflect on some lessons learned from the U.S. perspective, based on the 27 years of progress (and pitfalls) since the "big bang" of women's enterprise development in the U.S.: the passage of the Women's Business Ownership Act of 1988. Here's a brief summary of the ideas that I shared:



1. Policy is only the starting point. For progress and sustainability attention must be paid on three key levels:
  - In the public sector level, to set such frameworks AND to establish programs based on policies;
  - On the customers/clients of women's enterprise support: listen to them, then modify programs based on changing needs. This is something we do NOT do nearly enough of in the U.S.; and
  - On intermediary groups, such as implementing partners. This is the all too often forgotten link between policy and customer.
2. Don't "fence in" women business owners. By this I mean not isolate them, but don't limit their growth by setting policy sights too low. U.S. federal support for women's business centers is a prime example of this; they are hampered by restrictions on what clients they can serve with their federal grant money, which leaves many growth-oriented women business owners underserved;
3. DATA, DATA, DATA: it's critically important to measure. In the U.S. government, policy efforts are limited by restrictions on conducting research, so the Center for Women's Business Research (now defunct) was critically important in 1990's, as it monitored progress and showcased needs;
4. Private sector partnerships: Enlightened corporations and financial institutions need women business owners as customers and as suppliers, so they are stakeholders, too.

We also heard from several of WES' excellent women's entrepreneurship ambassadors: women business owners who give back by speaking to women and girls about what it's like to start and grow a business. One of them was Sylvia Douglas of MsMissMrs. You owe it to yourself to [CLICK HERE](#) to learn more about her enterprise ... and her empowerment pants. (Here's us posing with some during the Think Tank discussion.)

What's next for women's enterprise development in Scotland? I'd say that they will be a leader in the U.K., if not throughout Europe and beyond, for their inclusive, consultative approach, for thinking well outside the box and all along the size continuum, for being inclusive of diversity from the outset, and for bravely stepping out in front and leading the way. Keep an eye out for the report from this think tank event, and keep an eye on [Women's Enterprise Scotland](#) ... the Brave!

