

# WOMEN4IT 2021



## Successful Employer Engagement Methods

Iceland   
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## Women4IT Webinar: How to work with employers in skills-building initiatives?

### Interactive Session Summary

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The project Nr.2017-1-094 "YOUNG-ICT WOMEN: Innovative Solutions to increase the numbers of EU vulnerable girls and young women into the digital agenda" benefits from a 2.714.304 € grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment. The aim of the project is to increase the numbers of EU vulnerable girls and young women into the digital agenda.

Project implemented by:



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## Introduction

This document has been prepared by DIGITALEUROPE in the scope of the [Women4IT](#) project – an initiative which aims to **empower young women with digital skills training as well as support them in finding a digital job and kick-start their career**. The tips shared below are based and expand on the input shared with the Women4IT consortium in an interactive discussion during the event called: "Women4IT Webinar: How to work with employers in skills-building initiatives?" which took place online on 28 October 2021.

While we looked at the task of successful employer engagement from the Women4IT project perspective, the methods and approaches listed below can be replicated and adjusted for any type of employer engagement, especially in initiatives focusing on (digital) skills development and employability.

## Successful engagement methods

### Create a winning value proposition

When reaching out to companies to pitch your project and ask for their involvement, you should **clearly explain the added value** participating in the initiative can bring to the organisation.

On top of helping to create social impact by advancing gender equality and transforming the digital industry, for the employers engaged in projects like Women4IT, the proposed added value could be having, for example:

- immediate access to a pool of trained-for-the-job young talent,
- the possibility to shape the training curricula,
- the opportunity to co-create the agendas of national and pan-European events,
- articles, opinion pieces, podcast episodes and other content items published on the project website,
- greater visibility and recognition on the website (logo, boilerplate, etc.),

These are the **"selling points" for the initiative** and can convince the HR department or the company's management to engage with the project. This is why they should also be delivered in a written form, ideally in a short value proposition PDF document, which includes a brief description of the project, a summary of the value proposition and your contact details. At the same time, **one should be open to other forms of collaboration** in case the employer has something in particular in mind, as long as it is within the project's capacity.

Finally, different companies may have different priorities; thus, they may want to engage with your initiative with various intensity and across various stages of the project. For this reason, it may be worth **creating a value proposition with different engagement tiers**, where the added value expands as the level of commitment from the employer increases.

## Social media & online communities

Using social media to **establish your project's brand and having a strong online presence** helps attract stakeholders to the initiative. So what proves successful when it comes to reaching employers through social media engagement?

- Delivering **engaging and informative content** via independent social media accounts supported by your partners' dissemination efforts or using an established organisation's account for regular dissemination of project updates.
- Using **paid social media campaigns** with defined **target groups**.
- Posting informative, employer-targeting content in **closed community groups** where employers or – more widely – industry members exchange ideas and information (on social media, e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn or within communities of interest, e.g., [Digital Skills and Jobs Platform](#)). Ideally, one should target relatively small and active groups; otherwise, the posts may be lost among other shared content.
- Contacting **HR managers** through LinkedIn direct messages.

On the other hand, what should you avoid?

- Having inactive social media accounts, no social media presence or unengaging content.
- Not planning for any social media campaign budget in advance.
- Using paid social media campaigns but targeting too wide an audience.
- Implementing mass communication across big social media community groups or inactive community groups – you run the risk of your posts being overlooked or lost among other content.

## Networking at events

While the Covid-19 pandemic made it significantly more difficult to network at conferences and events, most of the tips described below can be implemented as much in online settings as when mingling at crowded face-to-face events. When given the opportunity to participate in an online one-to-one or group networking event, use the networking tool to **set up short meetings and introduce your initiative** to other meeting participants, explaining its core ideas and purpose. At the same time, be attentive to the people with whom you speak and **see if**

**your initiative can help them solve any of the problems** they might be tackling through their work or experiencing themselves.

Exchange contact details with the people you have met and **follow up the same or the next day** to start building a professional relationship. Use personal touch in the introduction and add a brief reminder of what your initiative is about, proposing a meeting (physical or virtual) to have a more in-depth discussion and see if and how you can collaborate in the future.

At online events, **pay attention to speakers and contributing participants**. If the platform functionalities allow, send them a **direct message** expressing interest in their intervention, briefly explain your initiative and ask if they would like to connect via LinkedIn or email. If you cannot send a direct message during the event, **look up the speakers' contact details online**. Then, you can reach out to them via LinkedIn or their professional email shortly after the event, congratulating them on their intervention, explaining why your initiative could be relevant to them, and proposing a meeting if they are interested to hear more about the project and potential collaboration.

Finally, **allow yourself to be seen** – actively participate in interactive sessions, workshops, conversations. During facilitated discussions, contribute with useful content, using examples from your project. When asking questions, complement them with your initiative's context. If possible, have your name and organisation displayed, and remember to introduce yourself before your first intervention. Lastly, don't be afraid to **use the event's chat box**: say hello to other participants, and if it is relevant or aligned with the topic, share a short description of your initiative with a link.

At the same time, do **keep in mind the event participation etiquette**. Do not take attention away from the main discussion topic to talk about your project in a lengthy manner, and make sure that other participants also get to speak. If your project is not relevant to the event and the discussion, do not force-share the details about it, especially in the chat box – that way, the content you share appears a bit spammy and may discourage potential stakeholders from engaging with your initiative.

## Direct contact with employers

Do your research – **list the employers** with whom you already have an existing relationship and **look outside of your network for companies** that could be interested in working together on your project. You can look for them, e.g., in business rankings, on job search websites, across Chamber of Commerce or National Trade Association's membership, at industry conferences and job fairs.

**Reach out to the employers individually** via email, phone or LinkedIn. Ideally, aim to contact the HR department of the company. In the message, pitch the main goals of the project, ways for the employer to participate and the added value for the company, should they get involved in the project. **Leave an open invitation for a meeting to explain the initiative in more detail, understand the company's hiring strategy and current needs, and discuss potential collaboration.** Additionally, make sure to attach relevant materials in a PDF format, e.g., a project brochure or introductory document, an invitation letter, a value proposition one-pager, etc.

Once the company has expressed the will to participate in the initiative, it is a good idea to formalise the agreement in writing, e.g., in the form of a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** or a similar document. It is not as formal as an official contract between the parties but provides the structure for cooperation, at the same time creating a sense of commitment towards the project for the company and keeping the project representatives accountable to deliver on the value proposition.

## Working with multipliers

Another way of reaching individual employers is through your stakeholders-multipliers. This means that various **organisations, which share your initiative's vision and support its objectives**, may use their dissemination channels to inform their networks about your project, allowing interested employers to contact you directly. These can include NGOs, employment agencies, big media brands or project sponsors.

When communicating with potential multipliers, it is important to share with them both an information sheet about the project and the communications package, including various communication materials: social media copies, newsletter item drafts, hashtags, links, visuals and others – to **make their work helping you as simple and straightforward as possible**.

Additionally, you can engage **project ambassadors** in the outreach efforts. These can be role models successful in a specific area or sector, or a trainee who has already gone through the learning cycle and found a job placement. Their success stories, further encouragement and guidance can serve as inspiration to get involved in the project for the potential trainees and employers alike.

## Using engagement tools and materials

When contacting employers to boost their engagement in the project, it is always useful to back your request with more data-driven content and visual materials. Instead of writing a lengthy email, you can add these to your message as an attachment. Keeping the materials professional (proofread, formatted, project-branded, in a PDF format) will be an additional testament to you being detail-oriented and willing to make an effort to reach the project objectives. It also makes the job easier for the stakeholder with whom you are communicating as all the project-related information is presented in one place.

The documents worth preparing in advance include:

- Information pack with the project pitch (purpose, objectives, milestones) and contact information.
- Value proposition one-pager summarising the added value for the company.
- Documents like the [Employment Toolkit](#) explaining the training and hiring process within the project to the employer.
- Communication package containing communication materials like social media copies, short articles, visuals, links and other items which stakeholders can easily use to promote the project.

## Conclusion

This document is a compilation of methods and tips proven successful in Women4IT and wider DIGITALEUROPE project work. We encourage you to try them out in your own initiatives and let us know how effective they have been for you. Moreover, if you have any other ideas on employer engagement that were not tackled in this summary, we invite you to reach out to our team and help expand this – by no means exhaustive – list.

Should you have any questions about the Women4IT employer engagement strategy or the project itself, or would like to collaborate with us, please do not hesitate to reach out to DIGITALEUROPE Project Manager Katarzyna Udała at [katarzyna.udala@digitaleurope.org](mailto:katarzyna.udala@digitaleurope.org).

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