

# Within and Beyond the Ideas Lab

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## Defining the Ideas Lab:

- ‘An intensive workshop that brings together multiple diverse perspectives to focus on finding innovative cross-sector solutions to a grand challenge problem’ (National Science Foundation, 2024)
- Ideas Labs can run between 1-5 days and operate in person or virtually
- Seed Funding often available for participants to access

## Other similar initiatives include:

- **Sandpits:** ‘A highly multidisciplinary mix of participants – some active researchers and other potential users of research outcomes – to drive lateral thinking and radical approaches to address research challenges’ (UKRI)
- **Innovation Labs:** ‘Use diversity of participation (usually cross sector and including end user) to generate new ideas, and (product) design thinking to design solutions’ (London Southbank University)
- **Hack Days:** An event where people engage in rapid and collaborative engineering over a relatively short period of time such as 24 or 48 hours

*\*\*No one formulation for best practice in running these events, though joint principles of intensity, cross-sector working and seed funding are usually in place\*\**

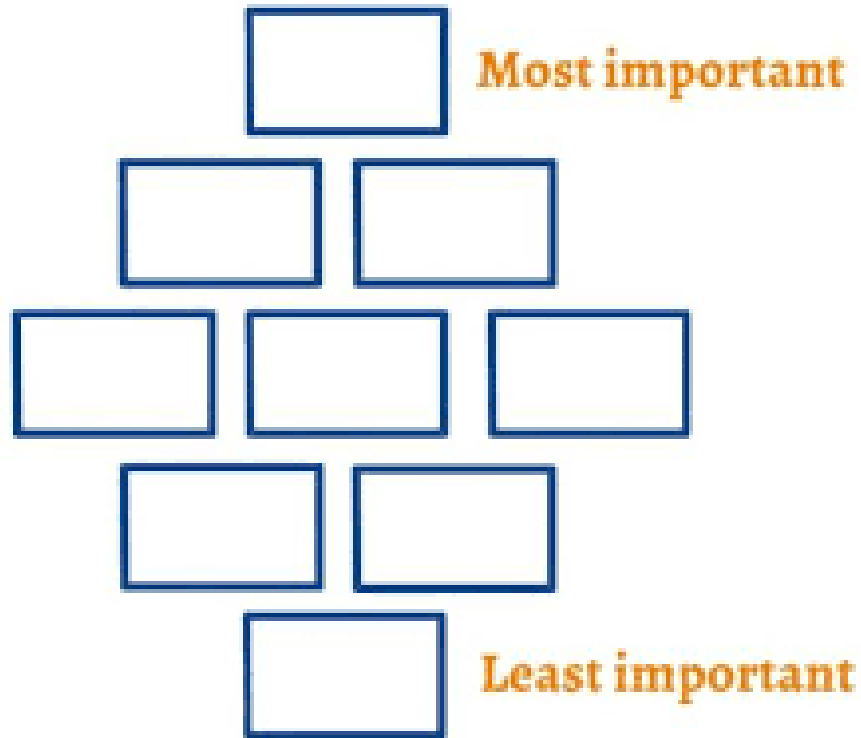
# Framing and Definitions

# Example Ideas Lab: Effective Partnered Practice

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- 2 days of workshops exploring partnership working principles and possible project ideas
- Challenge: Exploring ways to improve the lives of people in Southampton
- Co-developed between University of Southampton and community partners
- C.30 participants from university and community roles
- Seed Funding of up to 2k available for 2 cross-sector projects on a competitive basis
- Dragon's Den style competition at the close of the second day
- Application form disseminated after the event secured the funding

# Strengths and Challenges



- ‘An intensive workshop that brings together multiple diverse perspectives to focus on finding innovative cross-sector solutions to a grand challenge problem’ (National Science Foundation, 2024)
- In groups, consider 9 top strengths of the Ideas Lab format and prioritise (5 mins)
- Now consider 9 top challenges of the Ideas Lab format and prioritise (5 mins)

- Action led
- Solution focused
- New or unexpected ideas through cross-sector connections
- Non-hierarchical space
- Ability to reach new audiences and communities
- Discursive space for negotiation and consensus building
- Focused time and immersiveness for productivity
- Protected space away from day jobs
- Speedy project development
- The potential to create real impact outside the university
- Funding helps galvanise new ideas and include new audiences
- Resources can be shared
- Access to new and different cross-sector funding opportunities

## Strengths

- Time commitment excludes some people
- Can feel rushed and slap-dash
- Good ideas can get lost, quick ideas prioritised
- No time to build trust and resilience in teams
- Risk of project team churn
- Funding can be too minimal or have parameters which make it difficult to spend usefully
- Pressure on resources
- Formal and informal power imbalances
- Dangers of group-think
- Exclusionary sector-specific language
- Invitations which exclude groups or individuals
- Support can drop off after the event
- Can feel like tokenism, or exclusive if not made properly accessible across sectors and communities
- Risk of consultation fatigue
- Risk of reputational damage if not facilitated well
- University leading and choosing grand challenge can create unnecessary power dynamic
- Conflicting agendas and multiple motives risk failing to gain consensus, create tangible outcomes or find mutual benefit
- Difficult to adequately match skillsets and ask the right questions

# Challenges

**15 mins**

- **One key challenge** per group
- Find **5 practical and workable ways to mitigate this challenge** in future Ideas Labs (10 mins)

**How might we.....**

- G1: Match interests, themes and research areas
  - G2: Build trust and resilience in newly formed teams
  - G3: Ensure project ideas lead to genuine impact
  - G4: Use small pots of seed funding effectively
- ....to ensure Ideas Labs function as effectively as possible**
- **Present and feedback** to the group

**Wicked challenges: How might we...?**

## In preparation

- Information shared up front by participants
- Time spent matching interests and expertise

## During facilitation

- Develop shared sense of purpose in session
- Focus on development of discursive, safe space for communication and ideas sharing
- Translate between disciplines, use common language
- Invite the right people into the room
- Ensure mutual respect and shared purpose

G1: How might we effectively... Match interests, themes and research areas



- Build relationships beforehand
- Go to community spaces rather than using university spaces
- Set out expectations in advance
- Create mutual ground rules for session
- Offer framing to discuss roles, responsibilities, communication preferences, shared aims and governance
- Empower community research/science
- Plan relationship with university not particular person to ensure longevity
- Continue support after session to hold space for teams
- Expect trust-building to take time

G2: How might we...Build trust and resilience in newly formed teams

- Include clear next steps and milestones
- Ensure challenges are needs based and led by communities
- Write in tangible actions, deadlines & timelines
- Foreground community-generated measures of success
- Ensure teams have a good support network throughout the project timeline
- Nurture true representation and inclusivity in project teams
- Reality check on achievability – SMART goals
- Have a clear and bespoke evaluation plan written in from the start

\*N.B. the word impact needs to be challenged here – this could be exclusive – social good, social value might be better. Should be a point of conversation with partners.

G3: How might we...Ensure project ideas lead to genuine impact

- Include clear measures of success communicated from the start
- Build the small pot into a larger pot or research grant
- Use seed funding as a development stage supporting a larger application
- Think big, act small – consider short, medium and long term aims
- Pool resources or look for support in kind
- Un-attach funding from HE constraints to make it go further
- Look for match funding opportunities
- Discuss the challenges of seed funding with our institutions to improve provision

G4: How might we...use small pots of seed funding effectively

- Support before, during and after the event
- Care in preparation and facilitation
- Foregrounding community-led framing
- Time spent building trust and locating mutual benefit
- Clarity of project plan, outputs and team roles
- Inclusivity, equity and accessibility in invitation, language and project development
- Active work against formal and informal power hierarchies
- Achievability of project aims
- Evaluation to ensure social value
- Funding used to make one small step to further project resourcing

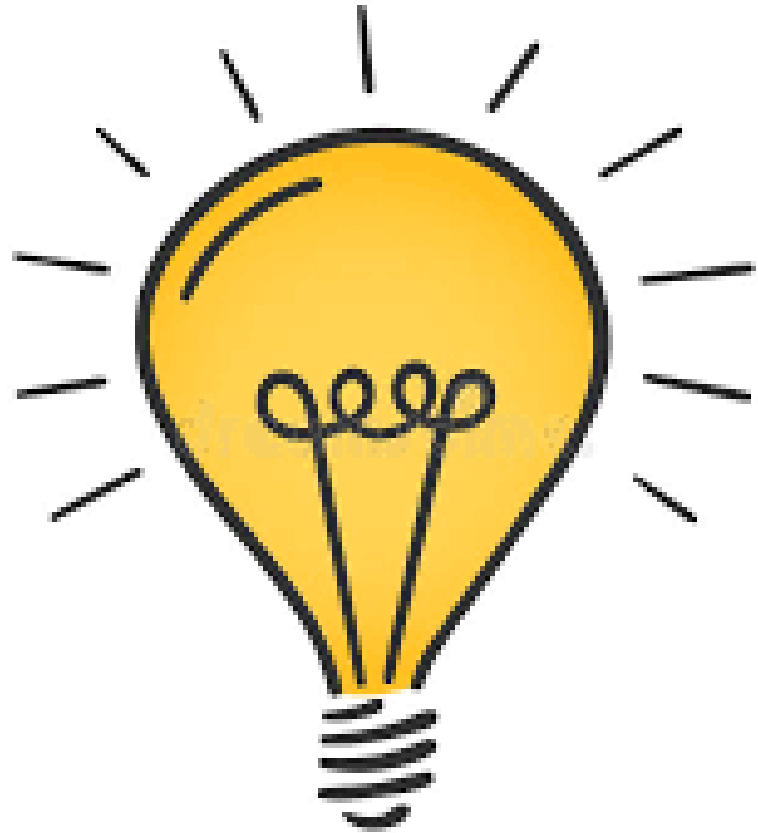
Key principles for success

# Example: Effective Partnered Practice

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Plans for 2024-5 include:

- Sector defined problems to be the route of the call out
- Invitations sent in good time and with a questionnaire indicating interests, skills and preferences
- Time spent on matching tables as part of pre-facilitation process
- Time spent directly discussing roles, responsibilities, communication styles and power relations within the project
- 2 stage funding process where development funds are allocated and a second application allows for a larger pot
- Scaffolded support for winning teams to manage emergent challenges



## Thank you! And Next Steps

- Findings to be circulated after the session

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