

Innovation Exchange Next Practice Programme and the NESTA Innovation Exchange Fund: Information

There is no shortage of good ideas in the third sector, but too few of them change the world. Innovations get a start, but struggle for the connections and resources to sustain or scale. Innovation Exchange exists to tackle this problem, bringing people together to grow third sector innovations. We are focused on two areas; independent living and excluded young people.

The Innovation Exchange works as an honest broker,

- surfacing opportunities for innovation;
- helping innovators, investors and commissioners to connect around them;
- and actively supporting groups to collaborate, develop and grow innovation

Our pitch to the third sector is simple; don't give your idea away, but don't keep it to yourself.

The following provides details of how you can apply to join the Innovation Exchange Next Practice programme and, through this, for funding from the NESTA Innovation Exchange Fund.

Innovation Exchange provides both a vehicle for innovation and fuel for innovation. Events like our Festivals of Ideas and our website provide a vehicle that helps people to identify opportunities and to connect around them. However, we also want to provide some fuel for innovation directly to some of the best innovators in the third sector. We will do this through the Next Practice programme.

The Innovation Exchange Next Practice programme is focused, like the rest of the Innovation Exchange, on independent living and excluded young people and it will only offer support for innovative work in those areas focused on service delivery and transformation. We want to help third sector innovators to develop, evaluate and grow their work in relation to these two areas of focus.

We will do this by offering a combination of generic support – advice, coaching and a small number of events – and bespoke support around the specific challenges innovators face. For example, projects may face challenges around accessing investment, protecting intellectual property or working in partnership with commissioners.

In addition, some of the participants in the Next Practice programme will receive funding of up to £50,000 from the NESTA Innovation Exchange Fund. This Fund is designed to provide additional support to the most significant projects with the greatest potential to grow to scale. Funding will support further work to develop and demonstrate an innovation and/or to rigorously evaluate it.

NESTA's support for the Innovation Exchange is focused on helping social innovators to develop their ideas and supporting the best ideas to scale. The funding comes through NESTA's Challenge programme, a practical, experimental portfolio exploring and analysing how best to stimulate, support and scale innovation in response to the complex problems threatening societal well-being.

Only applicants to the Next Practice programme will be eligible for awards from this Fund. We will ask applicants to say in their expression of interest whether they wish to be considered for the Innovation Exchange Fund. It is possible that an applicant may fail to win funding but nevertheless be invited to join the Next Practice programme. We believe that support through the programme can make a significant contribution to innovator's work and we know from experience with similar processes that innovators can find themselves in need of advice, support and connections as much as financial support.

What do we mean by independent living and excluded young people?

Excluded young people

Young people face potential exclusion at many different moments - leaving care, getting excluded from school, becoming homeless, becoming parents. The Innovation Exchange is focussing on young people that are excluded, marginalised or at-risk. Today, for example, there are more than 150,000 14-17 year olds not in education, employment or training and these levels of exclusion are attracting high levels of public interest and investment. However, it is also important to prevent exclusion by designing new kinds of services and support that are inclusive and effective for all young people.

Independent living

Disabled people (including older disabled people) have challenged the meaning of 'independence'. Building on the Government's definition, for the Innovation Exchange, 'Independent living' does not mean doing things for yourself, or living on your own.

Instead, it means:

- having choice and control over the assistance and/or equipment needed to go about your daily life
- having equal access to housing, transport and mobility, health, employment and education and training opportunities

What are we looking for?

We are looking for fledgling projects that are more than just one person's bright idea and which genuinely need our help to develop, evaluate and grow their work. So, you might be a social entrepreneur working in a single location or you might be a national charity, developing a new, innovative stream of work. However, we are also looking for projects with significant potential to grow to scale and to solve challenges faced by whole systems of services.

On the next page, you can see in detail the criteria we will use to evaluate expressions of interest to the Innovation Exchange Fund. Fundamentally, to be part of the Next Practice programme, you will have to show that you have done three kinds of things:

- Engage with evidence – how sure are you that you are not re-inventing the wheel and that your solution has real potential?
- Engage with users – how sure are you that your idea is popular and works in practice?
- Engagement – How do you know that your idea not only deserves to succeed but has a chance to succeed? Are commissioners and investors engaged in and excited by your work?

Over last few months, Innovation Exchange has been working with innovators, commissioners and social investors, using these criteria to identify opportunities for innovation. As part of our Festivals of Ideas, we generated sets of opportunities, one for independent living and one for excluded young people. You may find these sets of opportunities helpful as a record of where we think there are some opportunities, as examples of the kinds of projects with which we might work and to spark your thinking. However, you may equally have found a much better opportunity for innovation be able to demonstrate that.

It is very important to remember that we are interested in all kinds of third sector innovation under our two themes, **not only those we have already highlighted.**

We hope that we can provide invaluable support to your work, but we also ask for a commitment from you. We want you to

- Learn with us about your work and about third sector innovation, including participating in research and learning events
- Commit to working with us ensure you have a clear evaluation strategy and to following this through
- Share what you are learning with the broader Innovation Exchange community
- Commit to following through on your plans for the life of the Next Practice programme

However, this commitment does not affect the intellectual property of participants. Innovation Exchange has no claim on the intellectual property of participants, nor would it seek to force participants to share details of their work where it is not in their interest.

If you are working on a promising third sector innovation in relation to excluded young people or independent living and you are willing to make this commitment, we believe that this programme could be a fantastic opportunity for you.

What are the criteria?

Selection of projects for the Next Practice programme and Innovation Exchange Fund will be based closely on the following criteria. As stated above, whether participants in the Next Practice programme receive additional support from the Fund will depend on their potential to grow to scale

Is your work developing a new solution (or one that has been over-looked) to a problem faced around the country?

- Are you tackling a system-wide problem?
- Are you working to develop solutions that do not already exist elsewhere?
- Do you have a working model of a solution that you are working to develop and refine?
- Do you have some promising early results from your work?

Does your work have the potential to grow to scale and to affect practice nationally?

- Does your work have exciting potential to make a difference to the lives of significant numbers of people?
- Do you have evidence of interest in your work beyond your current location?
- To achieve this kind of growth, will you have to overcome barriers related to issues like governance, ownership, risk and investment?
- Do you have plans to take your work to scale and to make a national impact?

Are you collaborating with commissioners, social investors and other people in the third sector to develop your work and to ensure it is sustainable?

- Have you managed to lever in any kind of other assistance or investment from a third party?
- Are you working, either formally or informally, with anyone in the public sector to grow your innovation?
- Do you have other partners within the third sector?
- Have you used any of the Innovation Exchange's resources to connect with potential collaborators or supporters?

Is your innovation something that people really need and which exploits a real opportunity for innovation?

- Does your work respond to people's needs, as expressed through the interests of commissioners and social investors?
- Does your innovation respond directly to the needs of those people you are seeking to help and does it draw on their own energy and intelligence?
- How will you ensure that your innovation is developed in partnership with users?

What next?

If you need any help, advice or support between now and the closing date for expressions of interest, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Expressions of interest must be received before 5.00pm on 31st July, 2008.

We will sift submissions in early-August and the authors of the most promising expressions of interest will be invited to discussion days in London in early-September:

9th September - Independent Living

10th September – Excluded young people

We hope that this day will be of real value in its own right, offering innovators the opportunity to talk through their work with experts in innovation and in their area of work as well as service users and their representatives.

Final decisions about selection for the Next Practice Programme and the Innovation Exchange Fund will be made as quickly as possible during September.

All those invited to join the Next Practice programme will be invited to attend a conference in late-October, which will celebrate their work so far and connect them to one another and to other potential supporters and collaborators.

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