

SOCIAL INNOVATION: A BOOST FOR WOMEN, WORK AND WAGES IN THE UK

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CROSS SECTOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

BOOST

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Microsoft London, Cardinal Place 80-100 Victoria Street

A 2.5 day collaborative event to develop projects to improve the lives of women on low income in the UK

 #OxfamBoost

 **OXFAM**

Special thanks to Microsoft for their support to this event 

Oxfam Cross Sector Social Innovation BOOST (BOOST) used a cross-sector approach to address the 'wicked social problem' of women's in-work poverty.¹ Participants were tasked with developing scalable, innovative, high-impact projects to address the 'challenge question': 'Over the next three years, how do we create the conditions for tens of thousands of women on low incomes to move into decent work that pays a Living Wage?'

Oxfam Cross Sector Social Innovation BOOST partners:



1 THE BOOST AIMS AND BACKGROUND

The BOOST supported Oxfam's strategy to alleviate poverty by addressing gender inequality,² by aiming to develop projects under Oxfam's UK Programme (UKP) theme of Women, Work and Wages. The programme is focused on seeking justice for women living with poverty, including the significant number of women in the UK who are currently experiencing in-work poverty.

The primary objective of the BOOST was:

- To bring together a cross-sector group of participants and facilitate an ideas-generation process to design and develop a small range of innovative, high-impact projects with the ability to go to scale

The secondary objectives were:

- To assist with UKP's approach to social innovation methodology and practical approaches to programme design
- To enhance existing relationships and develop new relationships with a range of external organizations to support future collaboration for Oxfam.

The BOOST background and approach

The BOOST project was commissioned by Oxfam GB and was delivered between November 2015 and March 2016. Oxfam retained the services of Sappal Consulting, in partnership with service design and innovation experts commonground and Social Innovation Camp, to develop and deliver the BOOST event. The project used the BOOST methodology developed by Bally Sappal with the support of the Big Lottery Fund,³ which adopts 'social innovation' techniques and tools, and a cross-sector, multi-agency approach to address 'wicked social problems'⁴ (social or cultural problems that are difficult to solve) which no single sector can address alone.

The BOOST builds on the principles of 'social innovation', which it defines as follows: 'Social innovation is a solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable or just, than existing solutions and benefits society as a whole rather than just private individuals.'⁵

Social innovation BOOSTs or camps are a recent, though not completely new, phenomenon. They are a means of bringing together a range of stakeholders to work on a social issue or problem, by taking them through an ideas-generation process to identify, prototype and test new projects or products. This type of ideas-generation process has also been used by Social Innovation Camp, Start-up Weekend, Govjam, and Global Sustainability Jam. The BOOST builds on learning from organizations including the Social Innovation Camp,⁶ Design Council⁷ and Nesta⁸ on 'challenge innovation' processes. The ideas-generation stage is shown in the context of the Social Innovation Spiral in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Social Innovation Spiral



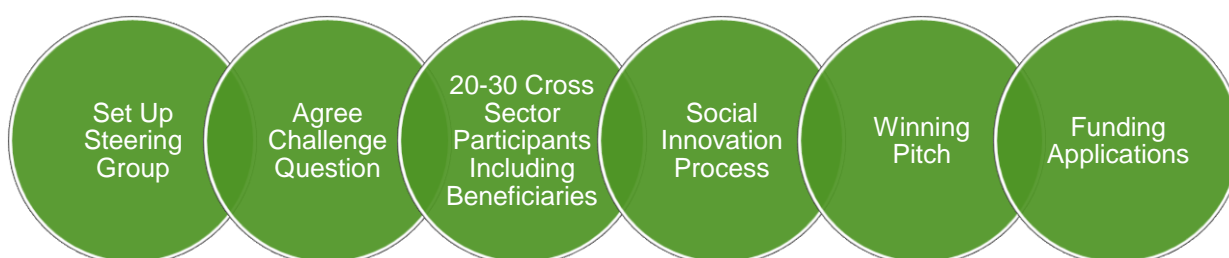
Source: An introduction to social innovation for NGOs (2016), Bond

Oxfam has significant expertise in this area, as evidenced by the recent report, *Unlocking Innovation*.⁹ This outlines Oxfam’s approach to innovation as follows: ‘Oxfam’s goal as an organization is not to be innovative per se, but to work with others to bring positive change at scale. The creative, collaborative process of achieving this often leads to new solutions that meet people’s needs and improve their lives.’

2 THE BOOST MODEL

The BOOST model, and the proposed methodology at the outset of the project, are shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: The BOOST methodology



- **Steering Group:** a Steering Group is established, to include approximately 10 leaders from a range of sectors (i.e. funders, business, academic, voluntary, and statutory sectors). The Steering Group agrees the challenge or ‘wicked social problem’ and governs the project, including determining the exit strategy.
- **2.5-day BOOST event:** 20 to 30 cross-sector participants (a range of ‘usual and unusual suspects’) attend at least three morning sessions of the BOOST event. In the afternoons, the service designer participants develop projects further. Participants are facilitated to develop projects using tried and tested social design and innovation techniques and tools to address the ‘challenge question’.

- **Projects** are pitched to a panel of experts, outlining the innovative potential of the project and the resources required to implement it.
- **A winning project** is selected to be taken from the ‘ideas-generation stage’ into the ‘incubation stage’, where the idea can be tested and piloted prior to being rolled out at scale.

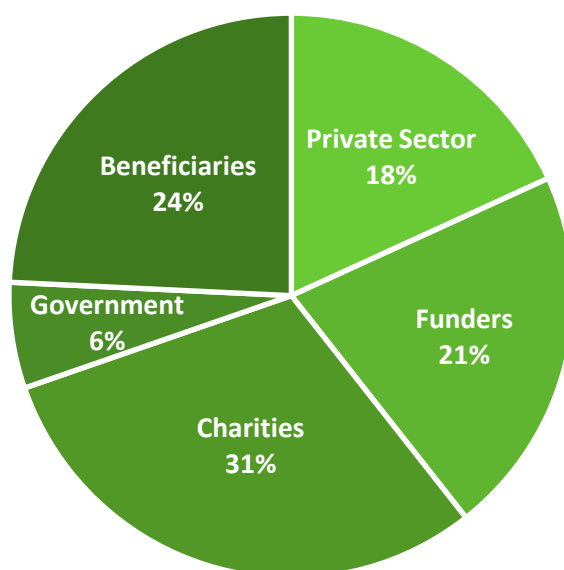
3 LEARNING FROM THE BOOST

A review of the BOOST methodology, delivery of the BOOST event, and the roles of various stakeholders, was informed by 27 evaluation questionnaires completed by BOOST event participants; a focus group with and questionnaires from the Steering Group; and interviews with Oxfam staff.

This review reflects the short-term impact of the BOOST, and notes that the ideas it generated are currently being ‘incubated’ and developed, and that new learning will arise from this process to complement and inform the initial learning. It would be useful to further evaluate BOOST in six to twelve months to test its longer-term impact.

Participants at the BOOST event included eight women directly connected with the lived experience of poverty in the UK, six participants from the private sector, seven participants from trusts and foundations, participants from 10 charities, and two participants from local government (see Chart 1). Participant numbers ranged from 26 to 36 per day.

Chart 1: Participants of the BOOST by sector



Feedback from the Steering Group

The Steering Group comprised members of Oxfam GB, Comic Relief, Big Lottery Fund, The British Council, Skills Network, Young Foundation, East London Business Alliance, HSBC, Timewise Foundation, Nesta, Imperial College and Microsoft.

Steering Group members welcomed the opportunity to share their expertise and provide access to their organization, networks and funding opportunities. The Steering Group identified the challenge for the BOOST event: **‘Over the next three years, how do we create the conditions for tens of thousands of women on low incomes to move into decent work that pays a Living Wage?’**

Some members who joined the group at a later stage said they would have liked a longer lead time. It may also have helped to agree the challenge question earlier in the process. While the membership of the Steering Group represented a broad range of interests, there was a clear common commitment to alleviating poverty and upholding women’s rights.

Consideration needs to be given by Oxfam to increase the inclusion of women on low incomes at the challenge conceptualization stage, to ensure that the process is better informed directly by those for whom it is designed – namely, women in low-paid employment.

Feedback from the BOOST event

The main motivating factors for participants attending the 2.5-day BOOST event were:

- A passion to end poverty and gender inequality
- To learn about social innovation processes
- To ‘collaborate to innovate’ and develop partnerships
- To be involved in an actual project that would be taken forward to ‘make a difference, have real impact and go to scale’.

Participants reported a good representation of different sectors at the BOOST event, and stated that it was a ‘great opportunity to meet people from other sectors and combine creativity and energy’. A number of participants said they made ‘good connections to continue beyond these three days’. For future BOOSTs, participants could receive further critical guidance to better meet the challenge, as some projects addressed the challenge question more directly than others.

Feedback from Oxfam staff

Interviews with Oxfam staff involved in the process provided the following insights:

- While engaging potential funders at an early stage is unusual to a degree, this is recognized as having potential for more collaborative approaches to finding solutions that address wicked social problems. The process also demonstrated the potential for a changed role for the philanthropic sector – i.e. in contributing to project design, rather than receiving a project proposal when the design phase has been completed.
- There is significant value in bringing different social actors together to develop projects, with everyone having an equal stake.
- The BOOST methodology does present some challenges, including a ‘rapid’ approach to ideas-generation within a tight timeframe.
- The inclusion of a diverse range of participants in the process, including women living with poverty, provides a useful co-design process that can raise the quality and sustainability of projects and ensure that they are grounded in ‘reality’.
- The BOOST process enhanced understanding of the ideas-generation stage of the Social Innovation Cycle, and has potential to provide new ways of thinking around project development and design.

- Encouraging innovation across Oxfam’s UK Programme and the delivery of another ‘social innovation challenge’ by UKP in 2017 is desirable to enhance learning from the 2016 BOOST and to continue to develop space for new ways of designing and delivering projects.

Post-BOOST outcomes

The BOOST event has had a number of outcomes:

- All ideas generated and presented as potential projects at the BOOST event are being developed. Oxfam GB is taking forward the two winning projects, which been fused into a single project called: **‘Elevate: in-work progression for women in low-paid employment’**.
- Many new and existing relationships have been created or enhanced for Oxfam GB as a result of the BOOST, including with Microsoft, City Gateway and Timewise Foundation.
- Many members of the Steering Group are committed to being involved post-project, and the Steering Group has now evolved into a Project Advisory Group.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

- The BOOST was a significant success and met its primary and secondary objectives within a very tight timeframe. The BOOST brought together a cross-sector group of people and facilitated an ideas-generation process to develop a small range of innovative, high-impact projects with the potential to go to scale. Oxfam was engaged and reported learning about social innovation methodology and practical approaches which will enable it to design better programmes in the future. Oxfam particularly valued the contribution from service designers.
- The BOOST enhanced existing relationships for Oxfam GB’s UK Programme and helped it to develop new relationships with a range of external organizations to support future collaboration and, potentially, additional funding. Key success factors included:
 - Recruiting a group of cross-sector senior leaders as ‘game changers’ to form the Steering Group, with the expertise and resources to create systemic change and take projects forward.
 - Developing projects with cross-sector participants, including beneficiaries.
 - Oxfam GB being an early adopter of the BOOST, and its commitment to further developing winning projects.
- The BOOST model can potentially create new opportunities for the social sector to generate cross-sector innovative projects and additional resources to address wicked social problems.

Recommendations

The BOOST created great momentum and impetus. It may be interesting to pilot the BOOST further with other sectors, or with more than one sector taking the lead, or in an international context. It would be beneficial to have a greater lead time (of at least four months) for any future social innovation challenge that leads to a new or revised way of challenging wicked social problems. This would allow additional time to:

- Build the Steering Group and other partner relationships.
- Produce additional targeted research to explore the challenge question earlier and in greater depth.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Partners commonground and Social Innovation Camp for their invaluable support.
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- Microsoft, especially to Sharon Jandu for providing the venue and refreshments for the BOOST event.
- The specialist panel, including Nesta, Comic Relief, Oxfam GB, Skills Network and Young Foundation.
- The speakers at the BOOST event, including representatives from HSBC, Timewise Foundation, Fawcett Society and Oxfam GB.
- Potential Productions for producing the BOOST film and photographs.
- All the participants of the BOOST for their energy, participation and hard work.

CONTACTS

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Videos of the BOOST event are also available.^{10 11}

NOTES

1 https://www.wickedproblems.com/1_wicked_problems.php

2 *The Power of People Against Inequality: Oxfam Strategic Plan, 2013–19.*

https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/story/oxfam-strategic-plan-2013-2019_0.pdf

3 <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/research/international/private-sector-collaboration>

4 https://www.wickedproblems.com/1_wicked_problems.php

5 Definition of 'social innovation', Stanford Graduate School of Business. <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/centers-initiatives/csi/defining-social-innovation>

6 https://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews-social-innovation-camps-labs_2014-01.pdf

7 <http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/Solutions.pdf>

8 https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/impact_of_innovation_inducement_prizes.pdf

9 *Unlocking Innovation: Enabling and blocking factors in developing innovative programmes in Oxfam GB.*

<http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/unlocking-innovation-enabling-and-blocking-factors-in-developing-innovative-pro-558453>

10 BOOST event video (short version). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCzCRtaP-TU>

11 BOOST event video (long version). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1ZB9ZITXCc>

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