student hubs

Guide to Incubation

Welcome

We are Student Hubs, a charity who worked in partnership with UK universities to deliver in-curricular and extracurricular activities championing student social action. We were founded in 2007 by students who wanted to provide a space to increase collaboration and conversation around social action at their university and find their place within the community.

Our work has been driven by our mission and vision statement. We strongly believe that when students are **supported to tackle social challenges, connect with each other, and learn about issues**, communities benefit, students develop skills and insights, and students leave university on the path to becoming **active citizens for life**.

As an organisation, our speciality was in facilitating youth social action and supporting young people to engage in social issues. We supported university students to engage in the issues most important to them, with a focus on accessibility of opportunities, skill development, and community cohesion.

Facilitating activities which help to develop students' skills for life exposes them to charitable organisations and others working within the voluntary sector. Our activities allowed them to learn about these organisations, the challenges they face, and provide a clear way to meaningfully impact and support these groups. By building students' knowledge and experience, they are more likely to engage with their community in the long-term and become what we would describe as an active citizen.

In the 16 years since, our work has developed and grown significantly. We have worked with...

20,000+ students across 10 Hub locations

100,000+ students attending training, events and conferences

1,200 community organisations, reaching 16,000 community members

Our legacy

After delivering student social action with university students and communities across England for 16 years, the Student Hubs Trustee Board and Management Team took the difficult decision to cease operations of the charity by January 2025. The reasons for the closure are complex and reflective of the current landscape for charities and the challenges facing the higher education sector over recent years.

The decision to close was also made in order to support our people, from our staff to all our wonderful volunteers, and to take a new approach to sharing our magic. By closing down thoughtfully, we can share what's worked for us, and create space for others to further our mission.

The higher education sector has made lots of progress over the past decade towards internalising our mission. Our aim is that our legacy work will continue to add to this, even amidst the challenging times and contexts faced by the sector.

This Toolkit

This toolkit was written for students acting as an introductory guide to incubation. It aims to provide comprehensive guidance for incubating a new activity, considering how to get from ideation, to delivering a pilot, and to scaling up or closing down activities. It provides a variety of frameworks and resources to support individuals to engage meaningfully with the process which we used to use with students in our local Hubs. You don't need to work through it in order - use the contents page to find the sections most relevant to you!

You might also be someone who supports others to incubate activities - this toolkit will show you the type of support students may require to ensure a deep level of engagement and to help move them forward.

The information provided in this guide has been cultivated from feedback, delivery experience, roundtable discussions, and other reports and frameworks from the sector over the past decade.

Quick Start Guide

This guide can be read from start to finish - it will give you a good sense of the process of setting up a new initiative, starting with coming up with an idea, how to build out the process, launch a pilot, and evaluate success and next steps.

The framework is as follows:

Innovation **Inspiration** **Incubation** **Experimentation** **Moving Forward**

However, it's likely that you've picked up this guide because you've already started and need some help. Identify the statement that best represents your position and skip to the relevant section to help you keep going.

Where you are	Go to Page
I know nothing about innovation or incubation and I want to find out more	4
I'm interested to learn more about models or frameworks of innovation	6
I have an idea for a project/activity but I don't know how relevant it is	18
I want to come up with an idea, but am unsure of where to start	8
I have my idea but I'm not sure what structure it needs	16
I have a project/activity designed and I want to launch it, but I'm not sure what I need to do	20
I've been running my activity but I'm not sure what the next steps are	34

Section one
Innovation

In this section, we'll be looking at some core terms, considering what they apply to and who can be involved. We'll also start exploring some frameworks to help us get started.

Innovation is the creating and use of new ideas or methods.

Social innovation is innovation which ultimately aims to improve the welfare and wellbeing of individuals and communities. There are lots of different examples of innovation, and social innovation you can take inspiration from. Ranging from James Watt, who developed the steam engine, to Tim Berners-Lee who built upon years of development to launch the World Wide Web, to the Open University, cooperatives and Park Run as examples of social innovation.

Incubation is the process of supporting a new initiative to grow - think of it like the idea is a seed which has been planted, incubation is the process in which we give the seed what it needs to take root and grow. At Student Hubs, a core element of our delivery was incubation - supporting student-led projects addressing community needs, specifically supporting social or environmental challenges. We like to focus on incubation, as it's all about getting the elements in the right place for a new activity to succeed. However you can also incubate new ideas within existing activities and opportunities, it's all about growing new ideas that support our wider aims.

A Student Hubs example:

Incubating a new programme	Innovating within an existing activity
Youth Theatre in Winchester In our Winchester Hub, we worked with a student who had identified the need for more arts based activities for young people. Our staff team worked with the student to understand community need, build out a recruitment process, manage health and safety, and set up a pilot scheme. After a few sessions, they evaluated to see what worked and what didn't to make improvements. At the end of the term, collectively with the community partner, we decided to keep running the programme full-time during term time, Youth Theatre had been fully incubated!	**Libraries Plus in Southampton** Schools Plus was Student Hubs' flagship programme which focused on addressing educational inequality through providing more support to schools with in-classroom and extra curricular support. Through feedback from schools and student volunteers, a gap in provision was identified. Young people needed support outside of the classroom as well, and so a new initiative was set up in local libraries to provide reading clubs for young people to practice their reading comprehensive and speaking skills, and a homework club where young people could access support. Libraries Plus ran in tandem with Schools Plus, with young people from the schools we worked with signposted to attend Libraries Plus as well.

Why is this important?
Innovation and incubating new activities is important because we're learning all the time. In doing so, we can come up with new ways of addressing the social and environmental challenges facing our communities. It's not just about launching new projects or initiatives, we can take innovation frameworks and apply them to existing activities. This helps us to find ways to improve them, ensure they are continually meeting our needs, and increase our impact outcomes.

Who can do this?
It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that you don't have a particular expertise and that innovation can only be driven by individuals who have stacked up the right qualifications. But that's not true - anyone can innovate and incubate new ideas. We all have a wide range of experiences which allow us to understand the world around us. We might notice how a particular service is failing to meet the needs of people within our own lives, and as such, be inspired to make a change. It's important to consider the lived experiences of the people facing the challenge you want to address and building that into your framework for design.

Models for innovation

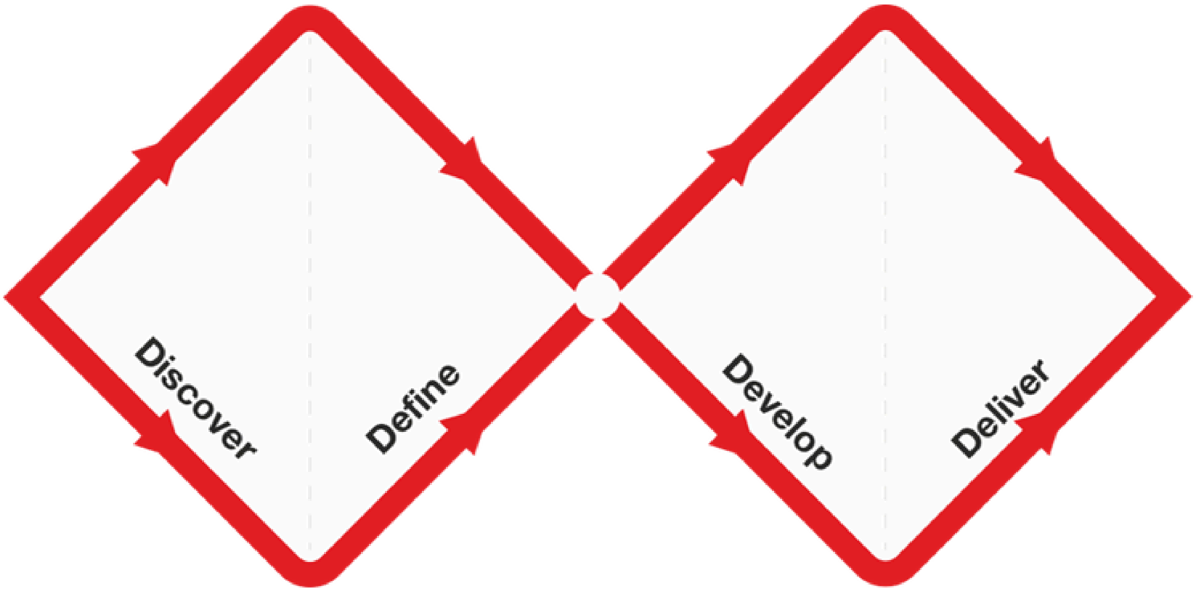
There are lots of different models for innovation - they all start by focusing on understanding the world around us and then building out to test and grow your idea.

Nesta's Innovation Framework
Nesta is a UK based charity focusing on innovation for social good. They map their activities against the seven stages of innovation.

Seven Stage Spiral by Nesta licensed under a CC BY 4.0 license.

The Design Council's Double Diamond Method

The Design Council looks more broadly at the impact of design and how design can be used to improve the lives of people. They use the Double Diamond method to visualise the design and innovation process.



The Double Diamond by the Design Council is licensed under a CC BY 4.0 license.

In both methods, there is a focus on exploring, generating ideas, and building knowledge before narrowing in on your focus and the ideas you want to take forward.

These models go well with a human-centred design approach. Human centred design is an approach to problem-solving that focuses on involving human experiences and perspectives in solution ideation. The process of problem solving is driven by the involvement of the people who are impacted by the challenge and it is their input which culminates in a solution. You would discover the scope, define problems, and create solutions with the meaningful input of those facing the challenges you seek to address. Throughout this toolkit, we've collated exercises and reflections based on a human-centred design approach.

Section two
Inspiration

In this section, we're going to start collating our thoughts on designing new activities, projects, or initiatives. We may already have some ideas on what we want to do, this may be influenced by our own experiences, or through problems and challenges we've seen in the world around us. However, we might also not have any ideas, or are looking for ways to evidence the purpose of our work.

The inspiration stage is all about listening. We are broadening out, diverging - through learning about the people involved with the challenge our innovation is seeking to solve.

In her book, Manifesto for a Moral Revolution, Jacqueline Novogratz shares "*Learn to listen with your whole body. Listen with your ears, your eyes, all your senses. Listen not to convince or to convert, but to change yourself, spark your moral imagination, soften your hardened edges, and open yourself to the world. When we fail to listen to those the world excludes, we lose the possibility of solving problems that matter most to all of us. But when we succeed at listening with all our attention and empathy, we have a chance to set others and ourselves free.*". This sets the scene perfectly for looking for inspiration, the first stage of human-centred design.

Building your inspiration

1. Collect your thoughts

You need to start by figuring our where you are building from. You don't need to have it all figured out to start with.

- [ ] Review what you already know;
- [ ] Define what you don't know;
- [ ] Review any constraints - and how to overcome them.

2. Learn from people

To create something useful, inclusive, and accessible, you need to bring others into your design process. You can learn from others by bringing them together, or reaching our to others to better understand the challenges your ideas may help them overcome.

- [ ] Define your audience - what's your target, who will help, what is their spectrum of engagement?
- [ ] Plan the logistics of how you'll get their input.
- [ ] Recruit!
- [ ] Create a trusted atmosphere - how can you foster an environment where people feel comfortable? Pay attention to the environment and meet people in their context.
- [ ] Capture quotes - use people's own language to bring their voice to the project.
- [ ] Use photographs - use these as visual prompts and reminders as you move forward.

3. Learn from experts

In the 21st Century, it's unlikely that your idea is 100% unique. Parts of it will have been considered, designed, or implemented in the past. Setting up expert interviews and conducting secondary research will give you more context and history to your design.

- Expert interviews will help provide a systems level review, understanding recent innovations, success and failures, and provide a different perspective.
- Secondary research will help you identify what solutions have and haven't worked.
- You should also use this time to think outside of the box - don't be confined to the models and solutions that have come before!

4. Immerse yourself in context

You'll need to understand the lives of the people who will be impacted by your idea/solution. You should consider how you could hear directly from them, and how you can understand the rhythms of their lives (such as where they live and work, and how the challenge impacts their life).

5. Look for analogous inspiration

You should try to put yourself in different scenarios - think about parallel experiences in different fields or scenarios. This could look like exploring different sectors or workplace. This will allow you to think about your challenge in a different light. By looking at how other solutions are formed, you may be able to think of your challenge from a different perspective. An analogous situation will allow you to explore solutions which may other wise have felt not relevant or too idealised, thus opening new avenues of ideation.

Resources

Conducting interviews

We highly recommend **IDEO's The Field Guide to Human Centred Design** - this is an incredibly comprehensive guide to human centred design and social problem solving. There's lots of great resources and activities within it to help guide your actions.

In this section, we'd like to highlight their guidance on conducting interviews as a good starting point for learning from people, learning from experts, and looking into analogous experiences.

The first step in conducting interviews is to create your interview guide.

1. **Identify your objectives.** What are you trying to find out from these interviews? Having clear objectives will support you to lead the interview effectively and get the output you need.
2. **Generate questions.** Write down all of the questions you have which you think could give you useful ideas to support your objective.
3. **Organise questions**. Refine your list of questions, it doesn't have to be a script which you stick to in the interview but it should be a well organised list of questions which you can easily understand and use in the moment.
4. **Word questions**. Rewrite your questions so that they are accessible and don't lead the interviewee to a specific answer. Try question starters like "Tell me about...", "What are the best parts about..." and "Can you help me understand...".
5. **Create conversation starters**. These will give the interviewee the ideas and information they need to answer questions, they could include a sketch, a written description of a scenario, a 3D model of a place, etc.
6. **Confirm plans.** Make sure all of your logistics are in place - think date, time and location.
7. **Assign roles**. Ideally you shouldn't interview alone, if there is a team assign roles so that one of you is leading the interview, and the other is taking notes. If it is just you - record the interview and take notes later so that you can be fully present in the conversation.

Resources

Focus Groups

At Student Hubs, we tried to run regular focus groups to help us understand the experience of student volunteers on our programmes which acted as inspiration for new innovations or allowed us to learn from them to build our understanding of an issue we had already identified.

Focus groups are a helpful tool to getting more information from individuals who are at the forefront of your challenge and/or will be the most likely to benefit from your innovation or newly incubated activity. Individual interviews are great for getting rich data, however they can be very time consuming. Focus groups allow us to get wider input in the same amount of time, and often prompts the people taking part to think of reflections they might not otherwise have shared. There are some risks as well, such as individuals not sharing their truthful opinions, so it's important to set up a focus group well.

Outlined here are a few sections of our focus group protocol, a document which staff used to help them run focus groups, which you might find helpful.

The first step is to decide the scope, in the context of incubation and innovation this will have come from your inspiration, whether that's a challenge you have identified or an idea that has come from listening to others through other means. Once a gap, challenge, or idea had been identified we would stop to consider why it was important to research this further. We encouraged our teams to work through the YMCA George Williams College 'Asking Good Questions' framework which helped to ground the idea and ensure there was both a why and what to the work.

From here, you can then think about how you deliver the focus group. You should consider:

- How large the focus group will be - we would encourage no more than six participants and no less than 4. This allows for a safe environment in which everyone has a chance to be heard , and is easier to manage if there are potentially two more dominating voices within the group
- Who will be facilitating the group? It's important to know who will be attending the focus group and who they would feel comfortable talking to. For example, if a white person is leading a focus group for black students discussing their experience of university, this might influence the discussion that takes place. Try to consider the perceived position of power when talking about lived experiences for different groups.

Resources

Focus Groups

There should ideally be two people in the focus group who are helping it run smoothly:

- The facilitator - this person is guiding the session, ensuring every participant has a chance to engage and feel valued, and guiding the conversation if it veers too off topic
- The scribe - this person is in charge of writing everything down, this ensures that everyone's input is taken down and kept track of. It is likely they will record the conversation and transcribe it once the focus group is complete. They might be writing things on a whiteboard or piece of paper during the session to help the group stay focused, and they might highlight key points which the facilitator could draw back to.

Themes and questions

Before you run your focus group, it is important to create a 'topic guide'; a rough list of questions divided into sub-categories or themes. This will allow you to loosely structure the focus group and naturally lead the discussion through your research topic area. Try to keep the why in mind while you build your guide.

- Decide on your broad themes. This will be based on your prior research and evidence and on what you are aiming to find out from this focus group.
- Decide on a set of questions within your themes. Have core questions (the 'must asks') and some questions you think may come up based on answers. Try to vary the questions between broad and more specific ones within each section.

Tips

- Don't start with large important questions - it will take some time for the group to feel comfortable expressing their opinions. Start smaller to build trust. You can start by asking about positive experiences before asking about negative ones.
- Only ask open-ended questions, unless you are asking for clarity. This will increase the details of the response and can be followed up on with clarifying questions.
- Be careful of your own biases - think about how you have phrased the question. It's important not to be leading in your wording and for the question to be neutral.

Resources

Focus Groups

In-person vs. virtual focus groups

We encourage you to run both styles of focus groups for each target group, as you'll have an increased chance of getting a more diverse and accurate range of answers, and be able to access a wider variety of students.

You can read more about the benefits and challenges of both styles below. If you can only do one style, it is important to weigh these out and decide for yours, which is more beneficial to start with.

In Person Focus Group	Virtual Focus group
+ Easier to read the room and take into account behavioural cues from individuals + Easy to engage in discussion and encourage conversation + Wider variety of activities to engage participants + Moderator can pick up on non-verbal cues and facilitate conversation more personally	+ Participants can come from anywhere (supporting commuter students or can be done during holidays) + Participants may be more comfortable in their own homes + Costs less: no travel expenses or room costs + Participants don't need to be physically seen - webcams can be off for comfort which could encourage more honesty
• More costly (travel costs and room rentals) • May reduce participation from groups that need to travel and take more time out of their day • Takes longer overall.	• Participants need to have a computer with a webcam and good wifi. This could limit who engages with us • There are less body cues and natural conversation flow online, and may end up having participants withdrawing more or not speaking up sporadically.

Resources

Focus Groups

Facilitating your focus group

Facilitating quality focus groups can be challenging, but incredibly fruitful and rewarding. There are a few things to keep in mind when you are running focus groups, to ensure the best discussion, gaining trust from participants to then gain rich data and to support everyone to contribute.

Top tips:

Be comfortable with silence

- People need time to reflect, and right away might need defrosting.
- Some techniques you could use: Say you will give them one minute to reflect before answering or asking a prompt question so they think of an answer or example to draw on.

Make connections and build relationships

- Part of the job of a chair is to pull out themes, take part in the discussion where appropriate and facilitate conversation. The more conversational it feels, the more time you can spend sitting and listening.
- Some techniques you could use: tie two thoughts together (e.g. '[person] said this, [another person] what do you think about it' or 'looks like [two people] felt the same, what do others think?'

Hearing from everyone

- Everyone brings a different and unique perspective to the group. No one is forced to share but it is important that everyone has the space to try!
- Some techniques to try: identify a quiet individual and ask their opinion, or say 'I wonder if we can hear another perspective on that thought'. You can also wrap up each section by saying 'does anyone have any points they would like to add'.

Managing your reactions

- Awareness and management of your own emotions is crucial in achieving ethical and 'unbiased' research. We are not saying to have no emotions during the focus group, but it is important not to let your emotions overwhelm you, especially when you may be dealing with difficult or sensitive topics.

In the case of dominant conversations, or tension in the group, try these tools:

- Challenge and close down dominant characters (politely at first);
- Keep an eye on quieter participants (if their body language suggests they may want to contribute open the floor to them);
- Introduce a reflection activity to work amongst themselves for a moment before re-engaging.

Section three
Incubation

Now we have our ideas fully formed, we can now get into the bulk of the work - setting up the structure of our activity. In this section, we're going to share resources and checklists to get you going in designing your activity.

Designing your activity

New Community Project Template - Once you've got your inspiration, it's time to start mapping your activity. Here is the New Community Project Template Student Hubs staff would use with students to help map out the key elements of an activity. You may find it helpful to work through to identify further research and actions.

Area	Key Questions
What is the problem you are trying to solve?	What is the current state: • Who is experiencing this problem? • What is the scale of the problem? • Why does this problem exist?
What is your proposed solution to this problem?	What is the change you are trying to bring about? What key actions can you take to achieve this?
How do you know there is a demand for this?	Who is your target audience? How could you assess whether your idea interests them?
What impact will you be creating?	How will you know that you are making a difference to the problem that you are trying to sovle?

Area	Key Questions
Does a similar project already exist?	Is there any unnecessary competition?
Will you work with a partner organisation?	How will you identify them? What are your requirements for successful partnership?
What resources fo you need?	Think about your needs in terms of space, equipment, materials.
What funding do you need?	How much money do you need to launch your project? Think about your start up budget and ongoing costs.
What team do you need?	Do you need team members, volunteers, or other people to get this project going?
What help and support do you anticipate you will need?	Think about the areas you may have less experience or knowledge about (e.g. policies, access to funding, managing and training others). Who in your network can you go to for this support?

Building your business model

Business model canvas - developed in 2009 by Alex Osterwalder the canvas is used to strategise, develop new ideas and build business models. It has nine building blocks, each of which defines a specific part of your idea to give structure to your business model.

One of the most important building blocks are your value propositions - the features of your idea which bring value to users and your community.

Building block	Key Questions
User segments	• Who are the users? Is there one type or many? Can you prioritise the different user groups? • What is their persona? What do they think, see, feel and do?
Value propositions	• What core value does your idea deliver to the user? • What's unique about your idea? Why do users prefer your idea to alternatives? • Which user needs are you meeting?
Channels	• How is your idea promoted, sold and delivered? Why? Is it working? • What are the best channels to reach your users? What resources do you need to use these channels?
User relationships	• How do you interact with the user through their 'journey'? How do they interact with you? • What is the relationship users expect you to establish with them?
Funding streams	• How can your value proposition secure you funding? • What are people willing to fund? • How does each funding stream contribute to your overall budget?

Building block	Key Questions
Key activities	• What uniquely strategic things do you do to deliver value? • What key activities do you need to do to deliver your value propositions? • What activities are the most important?
Key resources	• What unique resources do you need to deliver your value propositions? • What resources are the most important?
Key partnerships	• Who are your key partners? • What are your motivations for the partnership? What are your partner's motivations? • If you are focused on key activities, what can't you do? How could partners support with this?
Budget	• What are your major costs? Are they well aligned with your key value propositions? • What resources and activities are most expensive?

Understanding Impact

As you're bringing your idea to life you may be asking yourself 'how do I know if it is actually impactful?' Understanding the intended impact of your activity and the actual impact you are having is really important. In this section, we'll be discussing what impact and impact measurement is. We'll take a look at theory of change frameworks, and how to understand the information you might find in impact or annual reports of other charitable organisations. We'll also share more about how to find information about a charity.

What is impact?

***Social impact is the effect of an activity on the social fabric of the community and well-being of individuals and families* -** Social Enterprise UK

When we think about the impact of a charity or socially focused organisation, we're thinking about the change that is taking place over time due to the activities that organisation delivers. Impact tends to be quite high-level; the activities an organisation delivers will help achieve it, but it is rarely solely responsible for it.

What is impact measurement?

***Impact measurement assesses the changes that can be attributed to a particular intervention* -** World Bank

The aim is to measure an organisation's contributions to the overall impact, rather than attribute the entire impact back to their activities. We measure what effects a project, programme, or initiative is having, or has had, on an individual, community, or environment.

Charities need to measure the genuine impact of their work to prove their value and improve future delivery. Financial support and buy-in for charities come from a wide range of groups, each group demanding accountability and results.

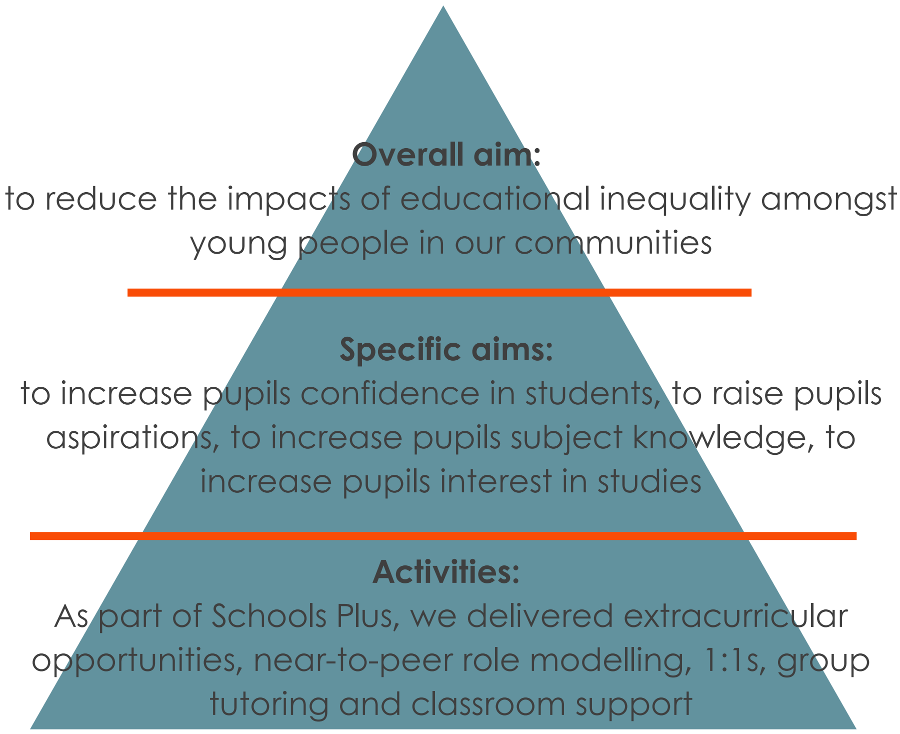
Proving Impact	Improving Impact
• To current partners, stakeholders, students, funders, and participants • To future partners, stakeholders, students, funders, and participants • Using impact reports, your website, social media posts, one pages • To motivate staff and volunteers • To share learning and resources with the sector	• To better understand the need you are fulfilling • To better understand and compare your performance • To better understand the unintended impacts, both positive and negative • To develop and improve programmes based on evidence • To make better, well-informed decisions

The Charity Commission

The Charity Commission is the government department that registers and regulates charities in England and Wales. They outline charity law and ensure that organisations are following them. They also house a register of all charities - you'll find information about their trustees, the number of staff they have, and their financial turnover. In the documents section, you can download their annual accounts. This is a legal requirement of all charities to complete every year. It outlines how the organisation is set up, their aims and objectives, their impact for the previous year, and explains in detail their financial position, including where they get their income from and how money was spent. If you are interested in learning more about how the organisation operates, their annual accounts is a good place to start.

Understanding how we go from the big picture to our activities, we can visualise it as a triangle:

A Student Hubs example: We can apply this to our programme **Schools Plus**:



If you can find it, a **theory of change** is a useful resource for understanding what an organisation is intending to achieve. It's a way for them to map what they do and are hoping to achieve. It should also be the basis of assessing and monitoring whether an organisation is achieving what it set out to do.

A theory of change can range in detail, however they tend to include the following information:	At Student Hubs this looks like:
Outcomes are what could happen as a result of the activities. They are short and immediate changes which must happen for the intervention to work, and for your long-term goals to be achieved.	Our student outcomes are **skills, student experience, employability, wellbeing, critical engagement, and quality of experience.**
Impact is what you hope will happen as a result of your activities. This is about the long-term goal relating to the issues or what will result when the issue is removed.	Our impact for students is that they **become active citizens for life - continuing to contribute to their community after they graduate.**
Activities are designed to achieve your outputs and outcomes. The activities should follow outcomes.	Our activities for students included **practical volunteering, skilled placements, community engaged learning, and incubation support.**
Outputs are what happens as a result of your activities. These are the tangible results and deliverables of the activity.	Our outputs include but not limited to, numbers of **students engaged, hours, participants, projects, newsletter subscribers.**
Inputs include the tangible and intangible things that go into running activities successfully.	Tangible thing include: **staff, budget, venues** Intangible includes: **buy-in, subject knowledge, reputation, time.**

This is the Student Hubs theory of change:

Our theory of change is missing outputs and inputs! It also doesn't include our vision or mission statement. A vision statement outlines what the world would look like if everything was perfect, and a mission statement outlines the overarching work an organisation is doing to move towards that vision. The Student Hubs statements are:

OUR VISION	a society in which **every student** participates in **social and environmental challenges** during their education, supporting them to become **active citizens for life**
OUR MISSION	to **mainstream student social action** within higher education

Try writing down your own vision and mission statement for your incubated activity:
Vision: What would the world look like if the problem your activity solved happened?
Mission: what does your activity actually do?

Risk Management

There are always risks when it comes to delivering activities or creating products. As a project lead, it's your role to help work through challenges when they arise. Risk management is the process of identifying, assessing, and prioritising the risks facing your work. A risk register is a useful document that you can use to record the different potential risks to your work. A register will also contain information such as how impactful the risk would be if it happened, how likely it is to happen, actions to be taken to reduce the risk from happening, and who is responsible for ensuring these actions are taken. Not every risk is equal. Each potential risk is given a risk rating, this is its impact and its likelihood combined - the higher the number, the more severe the risk. This then allows us to prioritise the list - if something isn't very likely to happen and won't be very impactful if it does happen, we can spend less energy on managing it.

An example of a risk register can be seen on the following page. You calculate the level of risk by multiplying your likelihood score and impact score. Use the following table to assess your next steps:

Number	Colour	Descriptions
0-5	Green	This risk is unlikely to occur and will have a low impact. You should ensure all mitigation actions are taken as this should reduce the residual risk to 0.
6-11	Amber	The impact and likelihood has risen and the impact would be larger if this were to happen. You should ensure that the mitigation actions are clear and completed.
12 +	Red	It's very likely this will happen and it will have a significant impact on your work. Even if you complete all the mitigation actions it's still likely to have an impact on your work. You should work with your team to ensure all actions are taken or alternative delivery is implemented.

Your risk management work should be continuous - we recommend setting regular intervals to review your risks and update them. Different risks might arise or they might change in likelihood or impact over time.

Title	Description	Example
Risk	Name your risk	*Lack of attendees*
Description	In detail, outline what the risk is	*Not enough people come to the event*
Lead	Who is in charge of managing this risk?	*Mina F.*
Likelihood	Rate the likelihood of it happening on a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being the least likely to happen, and 4 as definitely happening)	*3*
Impact	Rate the impact of it happening on a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being a small impact and 4 as a significant impact)	*4*
Overall score	Multiply the likelihood score and the impact score to give a final score. Use the table above to judge its overall position	*12*
Mitigation actions	Here you should outline everything you would do to reduce the risk, including the reducing the likelihood and impact of it	• *Map all recruitment channels* • *contact comms team 10 weeks before event* • ... • ...
Residual risk	Taking into consideration the mitigation actions, you can now re-evaluate the risk score	*8*

Inputs

There are many different inputs you will need to consider. Listed here are some of the key things we would consider for our programmes:

Funding

It's likely that your activity will need funding - whether that's to reimburse volunteer travel, print resources or pay for specialist training for your leaders. In the long term you are also likely to need some paid staff capacity in order to ensure your impact continues year on year. In order to get started with funding, follow the steps below:

1. Create a budget

This is what you need to use money for in your activity. This could include:

- Advertising costs - such as printed publicity, fees to attend fairs and website costs.
- Event costs - such as food and drink, speaker fees, and venue costs
- Office costs - such as insurance, IT equipment, and postage
- Volunteer costs - such as DBS checks, travel, and celebration
- Staff costs - such as recruitment, salary, and training

2. Identify where the funding could come from

There are lots of different avenues of funding you might like to consider, some key steps to take include:

- [ ] Look at other similar activities to see who funded them
- [ ] Research awards funding at your institution and in your local area
- [ ] Search for grants or trusts and foundation funding in your local area, for example through your local Volunteer, Community, Social and Enterprise sector organisation (VSCE)
- [ ] Explore sponsorship through partnership with a business
- [ ] Ideate community fundraising activities such as a bake sale, sponsored run, or a pub quiz
- [ ] Use your network to identify organisations and individuals who might be interested in supporting your idea

3. Make your pitch

Your pitch may be written or spoken, but it is your opportunity to share your passion for your activity and get others on board! Some top tips include:

- Do your research. Be prepared and study the organisation to tailor your pitch
- Grab their attention. Demonstrate your passion and explain how your activity is unique
- Be clear. Appeal to the head as well as the heart using a mixture of evidence, key messages and stories
- Listen as well as speak. If you can, generate a conversation
- Follow up. Create the opportunities for further engagement with new contacts you meet

Volunteers

Your activity may involve volunteers. Supporting volunteers is a great way to add capacity, energy and expertise, give development opportunities to others and create a pipeline of future leaders to secure the longevity of your activity. You need to follow a clear volunteer management process to ensure that volunteers in your activity have their needs met. This includes supporting them on their journey through recruitment, training and beyond. Great volunteer managers are good communicators and motivators. They prioritise their volunteers' development and are disciplined in their approach. The following checklist will help you reflect on your skills as a volunteer manager:

Communication

- [ ] Practice active listening
- [ ] Be consistent
- [ ] Be approachable
- [ ] Facilitate communication between others
- [ ] Be persevering

Motivation

- [ ] Make sure people have productive and challenging roles
- [ ] Understand the unique motivation of all volunteers
- [ ] Predict when motivation might need a boost
- [ ] Offer reward and recognition
- [ ] Build a team

Development

- [ ] Know your volunteers
- [ ] Use your experience, listen to theirs and learn from each other
- [ ] Give clear roles with room for challenges and growth
- [ ] When delegating set specific goals - focus on the what, not the how
- [ ] You can choose to step in or step back

Discipline

- [ ] Be consistent, firm and fair
- [ ] Be constructive not obstructive
- [ ] Set expectations and hold accountability
- [ ] Focus on the team
- [ ] Make the most of face-to-face time

The lifecycle of a volunteer outlines seven stages in every volunteers' journey, the following prompts will help you to ensure you are managing effectively throughout:

Advertising

Which platforms and methods are you using? What's been most effective and how are you tracking this? Are your materials audience appropriate? Does your advertising make the right impression?

Recruitment

What is the activity? What is the value of the activity, to both the volunteer and the service user? How do volunteers get involved, and is the process clear and accessible? What experience is necessary? Where can volunteers get more information? Is there an opportunity for volunteer development, for example taking more responsibility as a leader? How much time are volunteers expected to contribute and when? Where is the activity held? What costs might volunteers incur? What training and support is provided?

Selection and training

How many sessions do volunteers have to come to? And how long will they last? What do volunteers get to evidence their training? What extra resources do volunteers need? Is the venue used accessible?

Induction and retention

Think about the length of time between training and induction; the information shared at the induction; key points of volunteer drop out, and what you can do to mitigate against this and prepare for it; clarity about activity logistics including expected commitment, expenses reimbursement, communication expectations and more.

Participation

Be sure to make volunteers feel welcome; get to know your volunteers personally; have a key contact point and method of communication; build a team, with dedicated time for socialising; set and celebrate small goals; set boundaries for yourself, thinking about your working hours, how you can delegate and where you can get help and support.

Personal development

How can you help your volunteers become more confident? How can you upskill your volunteers? Who is showing leadership potential? And how can you offer them more responsibility?

Moving on

Be sure to celebrate volunteers who are moving on; encourage volunteers to take leadership responsibility in the future; signpost to other opportunities, networks, and support; make it easy for volunteers to opt out of communications; take time to understand why volunteers are moving on; end things on a good note, word of mouth is key!

Training

Depending on the activity you have designed and plan to deliver, you and your volunteers may need support to develop skills through training.

Some training you may want to consider includes:
- [ ] public speaking
- [ ] fundraising
- [ ] financial management
- [ ] risk management
- [ ] leadership
- [ ] comms and marketing

Depending on your activities, you may also require more specialised training such as safeguarding if your activity works with children or adults at risk.

There are lots of ways you can develop these skills - you can speak to your university careers team to see if there are any training sessions happening which you could join, or you can find sessions online. You can find support for these sessions by getting in contact with your local VCSE membership organisation - the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise sector will have a local membership organisation within your area, and will likely hold free or paid for training sessions throughout the year. They will also be able to connect you with other individuals and organisations working on similar aims.

Section four
Experimentation

Now we have the basic blocks in place, we can start to deliver and improve our activities. The first step is to trial the your activity and then use feedback to improve your delivery.

Delivering a pilot

A pilot can be used to get feedback and see how all of your plans and assumptions work in the real world. It tests three things; desirability, feasibility, and viability.

If your activity is desirable it means people want or need it. If your activity is feasible it means it works in practice and can be delivered using the resources you have available. If your activity is viable it means it delivers the outputs and outcomes you have hoped for.

Your pilot often uses less resources than the full activity, so that risk can be managed and feedback can be collected efficiently. This could look like:

- a one-off event showcasing some elements of your activity (e.g. a one-off volunteering opportunity);
- a short time frame version of your activity (e.g. six week version of a programme which would usually take an academic year);
- working with fewer partners (e.g. a one partner version of a programme which would usually work with multiple).

Monitoring and evaluation

The main priority of your pilot is collecting timely, meaningful feedback from a variety of places. In the non profit sector feedback is often referred to as monitoring and evaluation, or M&E. Monitoring is the collection of information, and evaluation is the analysis and use of that information.

Feedback should be both quantitative and qualitative, so that you have statistics and stories you can use to demonstrate the value of your activity - and to make improvements. Collect feedback from:

- **Your team.** You and your team should reflect on what's going well, and what could go even better next time.
- **Partners.** This could include delivery partners in the community, referral partners who identified service users to take part, or funding partners. You should collect their feedback on wins and improvements, as well as feedback on outcomes they have seen in service users and their community for example improved motivation in the classroom, or improved communication skills.
- **Volunteers**. As with partners this should include feedback on wins and improvements, and outcomes they have seen in service users and their community. You may also have outcomes for volunteers you would like feedback on, for example increased awareness of the social issue you are tackling, or increased confidence leading a team.
- **Service users.** You should get feedback from service users directly to hear about their experience of the activity. Make sure any surveys or conversation starters are age appropriate, and accessible.

Top tips for collecting great feedback:

- **Be open to constructive feedback.** Feedback can sometimes be hard to hear, especially constructive feedback, but when you're collecting it step back and be curious. If there's something which could have been done better it's best to record that so that improvements can be made next time! Don't take the feedback personally and instead use it to make changes to training sessions, activity content, or other support.
- **Listen**. Be careful not to put words into others' mouths, instead you are there to listen and record their reflections accurately. By all means use prompt questions to try and get more information but at the end of the day it's important that feedback is honest, so that it supports activity development.
- **Stay focused.** Try to get through all of the questions you had planned. You can run through them quickly if needed, or make feedback collection more conversational to get some richer reflections without it feeling so structured.

Section five

Moving Forward

At this stage, it's likely you've been delivering and experimenting with your activity, tidying up practice, and problem solving along the way. It's now time to decide what happens next.

Scaling up and out

Your programme or initiative might be running really well - your feedback from service users and partners is positive, and you are seeing a demand for your solution grow. If this is true for you then scaling up might be the next step.

Scaling up is the point where you start to think about how your activity can grow. You may want to consider:

- is interest in/attendance to my activity consistent?
- is there evidence that more of the activity supplied would provide greater impact?
- what capacity do I/my team have for providing more?

Scaling up is about adding more resource to what you already offer - this might include running more activities, widening group sizes, or launching tandem activities to increase capacity or deepen the experience for service users.

However, you don't want to scale up too soon or too quickly. Scaling will come at a cost - either financially (it will cost more to do more of what you already do) or at a cost to the quality of the experience you are providing (trying to do more with the same amount of resources can put a strain on those resources). If you scale too quickly and don't have a sustainable and solid foundation for your original activity, this could create a risk and jeopardise your overall activity.

Scaling out could look like adding different solutions to meet your need. For example, if you run a memory club for those living with dementia on Mondays you could add a new activity on Thursdays which is a walking group for those living with dementia. They both support people with dementia but focus on different outcomes.

Alternatively scaling out could look like you passing the management of the activity to a different person or organisation who will have the capacity and finances to keep the activity going for longer. Here you'll need to consider what is needed to keep your activities running and who is best placed to keep it going. If there's a wellbeing organisation in your community that runs lots of activities for people over the age of 60, they might have better resources to reach more people who would benefit from your memory club.

Losing support

New ideas are exciting, and often have a lot of momentum at the start - there is motivation, a strong team and financial support. Although it's a shame, this might not last for ever. The following tips may help you navigate a dip in support:

- **If your team is no longer engaged,** hold a semi-informal chat with them and get to the bottom of why they've left, there might still be a chance to work with them if you know what the problem is, or you can take their valuable feedback on board.
- **Don't be afraid to recruit new members of your team,** make sure you have a clear role description so that they understand what they are getting involved with and a clear induction or handover so that they can get started with confidence.
- **Develop training, and/or facilitate a space, for your volunteers, team and partners.** This might help you all skill up, get back on the same page and revitalise the activity.
- **Mix up incentives for engagement.** For example you might be able to offer certificates for volunteers, references for your team, free refreshments at activity sessions, etc.
- **Look for alternative sources of funding.** Think about how you can diversify your income through using a number of different sources - for example an annual pub quiz, a grant from a local trust and foundation and sponsorship from a local business. This can include in kind donations such as a cafe offering free or discounted drinks to your volunteers, a community centre offering a free space for your activity, or a local organisation delivering discounted training for your team.

Closing up well

Not all activities will carry on year on year. It may be because your activity was intended as a one off, it may be that the need identified has been met by your activity, or it may be that the idea is no longer viable. To make a decision on whether to close your activity ask yourself:

- Is the activity in line with the vision, mission and intentions set?
- Is there sufficient support for the activity? In terms of expertise, capacity and money.
- Is the activity effective? i.e. is the time and money being put into it creating impact, or would it be better placed elsewhere.
- Are there other activities or projects which are more needed? Think about what is most meaningful and impactful for your community, partners and service users.

If you make the decision to close things down, it's important to do it well.

- [ ] **Communicate with everyone.** This includes volunteers, partners, service users and any other people who have been involved with or interested in your activity.
- [ ] **Collect final feedback.** You could write your reflections and learnings up in a report so that they are useful for future teams setting up similar activities.
- [ ] **Celebrate.** Have a social to celebrate the impact your activity has had, this may include giving certificates to volunteers or a thank you note to partners.
- [ ] **Signpost to other opportunities.** The partners, service users, volunteers and team you have met through your activity have passion and interest. Try to find other similar activities they could get involved with.

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Visit www.studenthubs.org to learn more about our legacy work