

# Social Labs: **planners guide**

Welcome to our guide on how to plan and host a Social Lab!

If you're looking to create positive change in your community or organisation, a Social Lab is a great way to bring stakeholders together and develop effective interventions. Whether you're a corporate employee or a social entrepreneur, this guide will support you to plan a fun and impactful Social Lab.



# Getting started

## Timing

The timing of a Social Lab can range from a few days to several months, depending on the complexity of the challenge you want to address and the goals of your Social Lab. If you're planning a full Social Lab, make sure you leave time after the first and third workshop to engage with more stakeholders.

- In step two, after you defined the research question. It can take weeks to months to schedule and execute the interviews.
- In step 4, after you defined which extra participants you need to achieve your goals. You will need time to brief them and to plan for the next workshops.

## Venue

Choose a venue that inspires collaborative work and creativity, such as an open workspace or a co-working space. The venue should be big enough for participants to sit comfortably in their groups, stick their posters up on the walls, and allow for the facilitator(s) to move between groups comfortably. Ideally, it should have a projector and a microphone.

Think about choosing a venue that relates to your Social Lab. For example, if you're addressing a climate change challenge, choose a venue in a sustainable building or even the local botanical gardens.

Where possible, make sure the venue is accessible: both by public transport and for any participants who have mobility challenges.

## Materials and stationery

A Social Lab is an interactive methodology. We suggest providing the following materials so that participants can engage fully with the tools:

- Sticky notes of different shapes (round and square) and sizes (small and standard)
- Markers or markers at least one per participant
- Pens, at least one per participant
- Adhesive gum or tape to hang the posters on the wall

## Food and drinks

Making sure there is enough good food and drinks available during the Social Lab is key to providing space for creativity and collaboration. We recommend having a tea and coffee station set that up that allows participants to grab a drink whenever they feel the need.

Again, think about linking food and drinks to your Social Lab. For example, if you're hosting a Social Lab to address climate change, consider serving food from sustainable and responsible suppliers. Or if you're addressing the housing crisis, consider donating any leftover food and drinks to a local homeless shelter.

A note to ensure that you plan enough time for everyone to take a break and get some food. Participants getting to know each other is as important as getting results from the Social Lab.

## Compensation

Participating in a Social Lab takes time and commitment. Consider compensating for participants, specifically for social entrepreneurs or if you invite people affected by the social challenge you are addressing. You can provide compensation in different ways such as covering travel costs or making a payment or donation to the social enterprise.

## Using a facilitator

As a host, you can choose to facilitate the Social Lab yourself, have a team member facilitate, or bring in external facilitators. When making the decision, it is important to consider what makes a great facilitator.

Firstly, keep in mind that their main role is to make conversations, decisions, or workshops easier for the group. To do this effectively, they need to be confident and at ease in themselves.

- Comfortable speaking in front of a (large) group.
- Able to communicate and guide the process in a simple, concise way.
- Have good listening skills coupled with the ability to paraphrase individual ideas to make them clearer and/or confirm the speaker's intention.
- Able to summarise and communicate back key themes and trends identified or decisions made during the workshops.
- Flexible the process. For example, if the discussion takes a completely different direction, let it happen and reflect on how this can contribute to the overall goal.
- Have keen observation skills to notice small gestures, glances and facial expressions that may indicate, for example, boredom, resistance, concerns, or frustration.
- Optimistic and positive to get the most engagement from each participant.
- Top tip! One way we do this is by using 'appreciative inquiry' – helping participants to look at issues from a "what's working" perspective rather than "what's not working".
- Able to stay neutral about the topic and to treat all participants as equals, regardless of personality type, personal opinion, or bias.

It's best to avoid choosing a facilitator who has the tendency to be dominant in conversation and steer towards the outcome towards their own solution.

## Briefing the facilitator

Whether you choose to have a team member facilitate the Social Lab or bring in someone external, it's important to brief them well.

- Brief them about the challenge you're addressing and desired outcome of the Social Lab. Give them some background material about the challenge, for example information about the people most affected by the issue or videos of the social entrepreneurs explaining the issue and the design challenge at hand.
- Make sure the facilitator knows who will be in the room. Give them a list of the participants that includes their name, organisation and role.
- Organise at least one meeting to do a walkthrough of the agenda and review the steps and tools of the methodology.
- Share the full facilitators guide with them.

## In Summary

Hosting a Social Lab can be a transformative experience for both the host and the participants.

A Social Lab is a process that brings together diverse stakeholders to work collaboratively on complex social challenges, using a structured methodology. The timing of a Social Lab can range from a few days to several months, depending on the complexity of the challenge and the goals of the Social Lab.

Choosing the right venue is important to ensure that participants feel comfortable and inspired to engage in the collaborative work. The venue should be big enough to accommodate the participants and facilitate movement between groups. Providing the right materials and stationery is essential for participants to engage fully with the tools used during the Social Lab. Additionally, serving good food and drinks is crucial to providing (mind)space for creativity and collaboration.

It is important to consider compensation for participants, especially for social entrepreneurs or people affected by the social challenge being addressed. Choosing the right facilitator is also critical to hosting a meaningful Social Lab, and key qualities to look for include communication skills, listening skills, flexibility, and observation skills.

Briefing the facilitator is crucial to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the challenge, desired outcomes, and who will be in the room. A Social Lab can be an excellent way to address complex social challenges and bring about transformative change. By following these guidelines, you can successfully host a Social Lab that delivers meaningful results.