

Experimentation & Innovation



4ST PLAYBOOK

A self-help guide with concrete steps, examples and ideas to explore and achieve desired 4ST outcomes

Updated 13/07/2023



OUTCOMES:

Thrust 4



The social service sector experiments to develop quality, innovative & sustainable solutions

What is the Social Service Sector Strategic Thrusts (4ST)?



The 4ST was first launched in 2017 as a five-year strategic roadmap for the sector. It presented a shared vision and directions to guide the sector in achieving the vision of “every person empowered to live with dignity in a caring and inclusive society”.

Since the launch of the 4ST roadmap in 2017, larger shifts globally and within Singapore have presented challenges and opportunities for the social service sector. This prompted NCSS to convene stakeholders in 2021 to consider how the sector could respond to emerging trends and prepare for the future through the refreshed 4ST (2022-2026) roadmap.

The refreshed 4ST (2022-2026) lays out four strategic thrusts to pursue our shared vision:



Thrust 1:
Empowered and included individuals, families, and communities



Thrust 2:
Effective and impactful social purpose entities



Thrust 3:
Caring, collaborative and impactful social service ecosystem



Thrust 4:
Future-directed social service sector



Read the **4ST (2022 – 2026) report** for more details.

As a complement to the 4ST (2022-2026) report, NCSS has also curated the 4ST Playbook, which lists the concrete steps, examples and ideas that stakeholders can explore to bring the refreshed 4ST forward.

4ST Playbook

The 4ST playbook is divided into 6 main segments.
Click the boxes below to explore the corresponding playbook segments!

Empowerment & Inclusion



Practices and solutions in the sector become more person-centred



Vulnerable groups have support to make well-informed decisions on how their needs and aspirations are met



The ecosystem leverages the assets of individuals, families, and communities to solve social challenges



More vulnerable people are included and participate in society

Enabling People, Sector Wide Processes and Systems



SPEs serve with heart and demonstrate professionalism across all levels, backed by robust governance and strong people practices



A digitally-enabled and data-driven social service sector



Sector players take a systems approach to deliver quality, innovative & sustainable solutions and advance sector goals

Strategic Partnerships & Collaboration



SPEs collaborate across the sector and beyond to optimise resources and enhance effectiveness



Strategic and sustainable partnerships are fostered between different sectors and stakeholders for greater impact

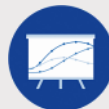


The ecosystem leverages the assets of individuals, families, and communities to solve social challenges

Sustainable Resourcing



SPEs are forward thinking and practise **sustainable resourcing**



Improved diversity and sustainability of resources in the sector

Forward Planning



SPEs are **forward thinking** and practise sustainable resourcing



The social service sector is well-positioned for the future

Experimentation & Innovation



The social service sector experiments to develop quality, innovative & sustainable solutions

How to use the playbook?

Please look out for the following icons, if applicable



Introduction

Provides an overall explanation on the playbook segment, with guiding questions



Steps you can take

Shares action steps that one can take to achieve the desired outcomes



Resources Available

Lists resources including guides and programmes



Case Examples

Outlines case examples in Singapore



Ideas for Exploration

Outlines ideas practised by others, including from other sectors, locally or overseas

EXPERIMENTATION & INNOVATION

Thrust 4 Outcome:



The social service sector experiments to develop quality, innovative & sustainable solutions



Introduction

Guiding questions

- How might we **cultivate a culture** that embraces experimentation, and accepts risk of failures to learn?
- To what extent does your organisation have **leadership commitment, capabilities, and processes** to drive innovation?
- To what extent does your organisation **share best practices** on innovation for peer and cross-sector learning?

Definition of innovations

"Innovations are things that **change the affordability, accessibility, or effectiveness** of practices or tools used for treatment, prevention, and care."

- PATH.org (a global health organisation)

"A learning culture is an environment that **demonstrates and encourages individual and organizational learning**, and where both **gaining and sharing knowledge** is prioritized, valued, and rewarded."

- Centre for Creative Leadership

Definition of learning culture

Why is there a need for experimentation & innovation?

To be future-directed, **SPEs must meet the needs of today while preparing for new challenges tomorrow**. Increasingly, giving partners also demand quantifiable impact and effective solutions. Innovation would **allow the sector to adapt with new capabilities to meet different challenges**. Various good sector practices were achieved because of those who embraced new paradigms, as a result of perseverance through failure. **Having a culture of embracing challenges, coupled with a willingness to learn from our failures, will spur us to find better solutions** today and tomorrow.

Types of innovation & desired level of impact

Innovation can be applied to many areas, including

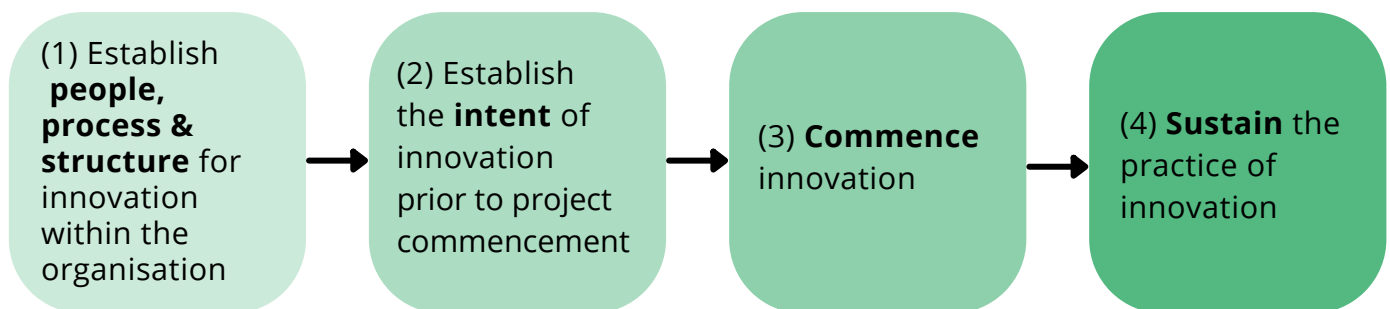
(i) service delivery approaches, (ii) organisational operating processes, and (iii) partnership models.

The intent of innovation differs according to the circumstances and needs of the organisations. Innovation can be **incremental** to keep up with latest trends, or **disruptive** as needed to meet future challenges.

! Steps you can take

For social purpose entities (SPEs)

To kickstart and sustain SPE's innovation journey



1 Establish **people, process & structure** for innovation within the organisation

Gain leadership commitment & review organisation processes to advance innovation:

Obtain **buy in from the Board and Senior Management** to embark on innovation and **dedicate resources** towards experimentation.

Leaders should drive a culture of innovation and **create an environment** where staff are:

- Encouraged to **challenge existing ways** of thinking and working, and that some efforts can start small;
- Provided with **time and platforms** to experiment with new and bold approaches (e.g., sandboxes, workgroups);
- Provided with the **necessary resources** to pursue these initiatives;
- Equipped with the **relevant training** (e.g. design thinking, creative thinking, agile methodology) to practise innovation;
- Recognised for embarking on innovative projects; and
- **Comfortable** to accept failures and translate them into lessons for others.

SPEs should also **identify which areas** they would like to embark in innovation for:

- **Identify and adjust service and funding models that could be improved, put in a place a longer runway** to ascertain efficacy (as results may not be immediate), and **put in place post-pilot commitments** to ensure smooth transition to a stable state such as scaling up.

Review **organisation practices & processes** that could benefit from innovation, and implement changes that are successful.

Establish the structure to drive innovation:

SPEs could **experiment with the structure that best fits their needs and priorities, and adjust depending on circumstances.**

SPEs can reference **2 types of organisation** structure, or adopt a **hybrid approach** as outlined below:

Decentralised Organisation Structure

Centralised Organisation Structure

How does it work?

- **Each team** in the organisation is responsible for innovation.
- **Bottom-up** approach where team-led innovation is prioritised.
- Current employees adopt innovator roles **on top of their current responsibilities.**

- A **centralised innovation unit** is responsible for innovation.
- **Top-down** approach to oversee innovation.
- Employees in centralised unit are **resourced specifically** for innovation.

Benefits

- Requires **fewer dedicated resources.**
- **Lower risks** compared to a centralised innovation model.

- Typically leads to **more rapid results**, compared to decentralised models.

Challenges

- **Lack of central coordination and support** for innovators.
- Potentially creates the **need for new staff.**

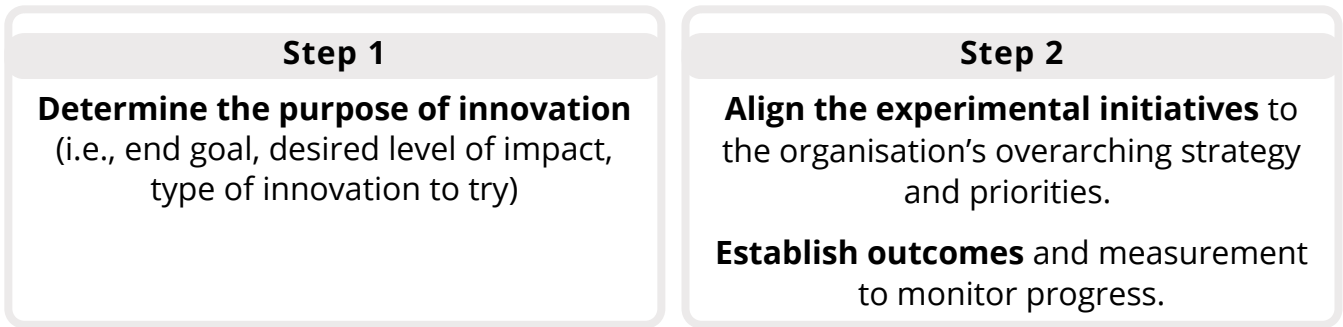
- Centralised structure **might not appreciate deeply** the considerations of various functional teams.
- Requires a **higher level of dedicated resources.**

Recommended first steps for this model

- Start with **one or two departments** before expanding to the wider organisation.
- **Train all employees** to innovate.

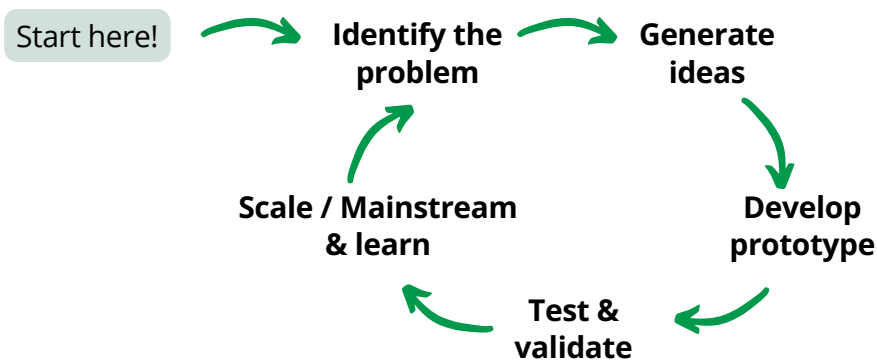
- Start small by **earmarking set resources** to achieve **specific, focused outcomes.**

2 Establish the **intent** of innovation prior to project commencement



3 Commence innovation

After establishing the intent and also having the right team set up (people & structure), to commence innovation, these are five steps which can be taken:



Identify the problem	Generate ideas	Develop prototype	Test & validate	Scale / mainstream & learn
<p>Identify the root problem to address. This ties in closely with establishing the intent of innovation outlined above.</p> <p>Engage relevant stakeholders and consider a person-centred approach to better scope and understand the problem.</p>	<p>Come up with ideas through local and overseas scanning of best practices to address the problem.</p> <p>Consider co-creating with relevant stakeholders where suitable.</p> <p>Ideas could be but need not necessarily involve technology.</p>	<p>Start building and developing the prototype.</p>	<p>Test the prototype with stakeholders, using data to determine success.</p> <p>Ideas can be validated based on factors such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desirability • Feasibility • Viability • Impact 	<p>Present the final working prototypes to key decision makers for selection.</p> <p>Convert promising ideas to fully-fledged products by securing relevant funding or allocating it a portion of your organisation's budget.</p> <p>Lessons from this process can be shared to inform the next innovation journey.</p>

Note: The whole process should be person-centred, agile, and iterative, to respond to stakeholders' feedback and changing circumstances.

Partner others on the innovation journey

SPEs should also consider partnering with others to leverage their assets:

- Partner others to address **complex issues that cannot be done alone, or to scale**. Consider synergistic partnerships to **increase social impact**, such as with other SPEs, technology companies or corporates that share similar goals. **Clarify** objectives and each partner's role before commencing such partnerships.
- Seek out stakeholders who will invest in **high-risk** initiatives that may not necessarily succeed, or stakeholders who may be willing to invest in scaling efforts.

4 Sustain the practice of innovation

To keep the momentum going, SPEs can:

Introduce incentives and rewards

- **Reward and celebrate** innovative organisational practices and initiatives.
- **Recognise good work** in staff communications, such as newsletters, and organisational-wide meetings.

Share lessons with others

- **Share experience for learning** with others in the organisation and beyond.
- **Create platforms and structures** to share information and network.
- **Profile good examples** to raise awareness.

Note: Please also refer to the Playbook segments on “Empowerment and Inclusion” and “Enabling People, Sector-Wide Processes and Systems” to understand innovative ways to empower and include individuals, families and communities; and to develop impactful SPEs, ecosystems and the social service sector.

! Steps you can take

For giving partners (e.g., donors and funders)

Mindset shifts

- Recognise that **innovation takes time** and may not have immediate short-term results. Some projects **may not succeed or be viable to scale**. However, recognise and support the willingness to try and accept failures.
- Understand that **scaling may take longer than anticipated**.

Funding support

- Provide support for **higher risk** initiatives.
- **Support post-pilot commitments** to scale viable projects.
- Provide incentives that reward the **culture of innovation**.



Resources available

For social purpose entities (SPEs):



Guides/Tools

Social Innovation Starter Kit

NCSS developed a Social Innovation Starter Kit which includes guiding principles and mindsets of human-centred design process as well as specific methods and tools to help the sector in tackling complex social challenges and embark on their own innovation journeys.

<https://www.ncss.gov.sg/press-room/publications/SocialInnovationStarterKit>

NCSS' Innovation & Productivity page

NCSS has collated examples and resources on innovation on its website.

<https://www.ncss.gov.sg/Our-Work/Innovation-and-Productivity>



Training to explore

Digital Skills Training

NCSS' Tech-and-Go! has compiled a list of necessary digital skills for SPEs to stay in pace with organisation transformation and to further digitalisation efforts. Relevant courses for the sector are also highlighted on the website below.

<https://www.ncss.gov.sg/our-initiatives/tech-and-go/resources/digital-skills-training>

Consultancy in Workplace Learning Framework & Certification

Visit Singapore Institute of Technology for more information at

<https://www.singaporetech.edu.sg/nace/consultancy-in-workplace-learning-framework>

Design Thinking: ADEPT @ Delivering the Future

Visit Capelle Consulting for more information at

<https://www.capelleconsulting.com/>

Critical Thinking

Visit Capelle Consulting for more information at

<https://www.capelleconsulting.com/>



Funding available

Community Capability Trust Open Grant

Provides funding to support innovative, collaborative and grounds-up projects that scale impact at the sector level, as well as projects that develop the SSAs' competencies to enhance productivity & ability in service delivery.

[https://www.ncss.gov.sg/our-initiatives/community-capability-trust-\(cct\)/cct-pillars](https://www.ncss.gov.sg/our-initiatives/community-capability-trust-(cct)/cct-pillars)

Enabling Lives Initiative Grant

Administered by SG Enable, the Enabling Lives Initiative (ELI) Grant aims to facilitate cross-sector partnership to leverage strengths to develop innovative, scalable and sustainable solutions for persons with disabilities.

<https://eli-grant.sg/apply-for-grant>

Open Innovation Programme

The InfoComm Media Development Authority (IMDA) hosts the Open Innovation Platform. IMDA launches Innovation Calls every few months and each call comprises of a set of challenges from different problem owners in various sectors. Once the call closes, the proposals will go through a structured evaluation process based on the criteria set by the problem owners. Shortlisted finalists will then commence prototype development. The selected solution will be awarded prize monies.

<https://www.openinnovation.sg/challenges>

<https://www.openinnovation.sg/imda>

Tech-and-GO!

Tech-and-GO! is NCSS' one-stop tech hub helping SSAs and charities in their digitalisation journey. It shares:

- Guides and other resources
- Grants for both SSAs and charities
- Consultancy services
- Networks, such as a Telegram group

<https://www.ncss.gov.sg/our-initiatives/tech-and-go/>

Lam Soon New Horizon Grant

The Majority Trust has launched an incubation grant in 2022 to support newer non-profits or volunteer-run groups from start-up to maturity. This includes unrestricted funding that will enable grantees to focus on organisational development, and to create space for innovation and creativity. Grantees will also receive support in community building and capacity building (e.g., networks and contacts, expertise, and guidance).

<https://www.majority.sg/funds-and-grants/newhorizon/>



Networks of support

Design4Impact

A collaboration between NCSS and MOH Office for Healthcare Transformation (MOHT), Design4Impact (D4I) is an open innovation platform that brings together like-minded, public-spirited stakeholders to address some of the biggest Singapore health and social challenges. The platform started in 2020 and organises design challenges periodically.

To continue facilitating partnerships, capability building and growing a community of activated citizens, the **D4I Innovators' Ecosystem and Community of Practice** launched in May 2023 enables D4I alumni and social innovators to network, offer peer support and gain access to industry players from healthcare, social services, technology, and design sectors.

<https://go.gov.sg/design4impact>

Click to join the Design4Impact Ecosystem:

<https://go.gov.sg/ncss-social-innovation>



Case examples

Project Keep It Real

Improving mental health of male youths using design thinking

Design4Impact (D4I) is an open innovation platform that **enables social minded innovators to come together** to use user-centred research and design thinking capabilities. Such innovators are **connected** to mentorship, resources, and networks to **co-create sustainable solutions**.

During D4I, a team of male youths serving National Service and mental health therapists discovered the **lack of effective male-targeted mental health** solutions available. The presence of mental health stigma and toxic masculinity also made it **challenging for male youths to seek help**.

Through D4I's ideation phase, the team created a 5-week programme, "Guys, Keep It Real", to promote mental and emotional well-being of male youths through **game quests and workshops** on active listening, conscious communication and meaningful conversations.

The team, Project Keep It Real, aims to promote emotional regulation among male youths and reduce stigma against such youths pursuing mental health through emotional vulnerability. At present, it is being piloted with the aim of testing the innovation for potential scaling.

Tech Able

Improving the premises' accessibility to service users

Tech Able is an integrated assistive technology space initiated by SG Enable and SPD in the Enabling Village. Tech Able **promotes the adoption of assistive technology for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) to live independently**, including **loaning technology for testing** in PwDs' home, office or school environment, and providing specialist consultations on the adoption of the assistive tools.

In 2019, Tech Able **renovated the premises and enhanced the experience** for PwDs, after incorporating visitors' feedback that they would like to self-explore at their own pace. Some features include:

- An **open layout with widened walkways** and **tactile markers** to feature assistive technology equipping one for play, home, work and education, and mobility.
- **Large digital screens and directional audio** with localised sound for information to be accessible to different users.
- Braille map of the space, **co-created with persons with visual impairment**.
- **Interactive web application** to shop without having to physically visit Enabling Village.



Ideas for exploration

Committing to innovate as an organisation

Singapore: Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS)

What is it?

The social service agency, MINDS aims to advance the well-being of Persons with Intellectual Disability (PWIDs). To achieve its goals better, it practises **continual evolution** of its services, strategises to **meet needs in new and diverse ways**, and **devotes institutional resources** to evidence-based research.

Potential benefits

- **Stay relevant** in light of changing circumstances.
- **Customise interventions** to the diverse needs of clients.
- Grow influence to **positively influence sector practices**.

How does it work?

MINDS aims to **shape new paradigms to meet needs**, acknowledging the evolving landscape it operates in. To do this, it **commits to using, developing and sharing applied research and evidence-based practices** in collaboration with universities and learning centres.

It uses various methods to reach out to PWIDs.

This includes models that encourage independent living among PWIDs, support caregivers, and use Virtual Reality technology to enhance PWIDs' skills.

In order to communicate better with non-verbal PWIDs, MINDS staff **brainstormed and engaged in rigorous experiments** to more effectively communicate with PWID clients.

For example, MINDS staff experienced challenges in communication with PWIDs, whom they hoped would notify them before using the restroom. MINDS staff used various methods, such as encouraging signing, which worked for some clients. To further encourage communication, MINDS further developed visual aids that showed the limited restroom slots available and which PWIDs clients could use to communicate with MINDS staff.

Food for thought

- How might organisations **incorporate innovative methods into their strategies** to serve clients and stay relevant?
- How might organisations **devote resources to using, developing and sharing innovative evidence-based practices**?

Creating the time and space for innovation to take place

Singapore: Government Technology Agency of Singapore (GovTech)'s Hack for Public Good

What is it?

Every January, GovTech's Open Government Products Division officers **pause non-core projects to work on public problems** of interest.

Potential benefits

- Allow staff **dedicated time** to innovate.
- **Facilitate exchange of ideas** to work on areas of interest.
- Provide opportunities for staff to **learn and develop skills**.

How does it work?

Each January, officers **iteratively generate ideas, conduct user research, and prototype**, with the end goal of showcasing working prototypes by the end of the month. Prototypes with potential to create value for the public will then be converted to full-fledged products.

Products like Go.gov.sg (link shortener for public officers), Postman.gov.sg (enabling public officers to easily send mass messages to citizens), and RedeemSG (for public officers to easily create, issue and track voucher redemption) were generated and developed through the Hack for Public Good.

As part of the process, the officers **go on community learning journeys, and learn from public officers** about the nuances and challenges of their work.

Food for thought

How might we **carve out time and space** for teams to focus on innovation?

Creating platforms for diverse stakeholders to come together to innovate

United States: Hacks for Humanity

What is it?

Hacks for Humanity conducts **hackathons for participants to create innovative solutions** to local and global issues.

Potential benefits

- Quickly **create innovative ideas** to be tested by the organisation.
- Create “disruptive innovation” through a **quick burst of creativity**.
- **Leverage diverse perspectives** from different stakeholders, which can result in impactful solutions tapping on technology.
- Build a **community of individuals** for social good.

How does it work?

During the **36-hour hackathon**, individuals are randomly assigned to groups to find solutions to social problems. At the end of the hackathon, **teams pitch their products and judges reward the top 3 teams with prizes**. Unlike a ‘normal’ hackathon which may require ‘hacking’ or computer skills, Hacks for Humanity invites anyone interested in creating solutions for social good to come together. **Mentors also guide the participants** during the hackathon process, and **volunteers assist with logistics**.

‘ARKHumanity’ is one impactful solution created at Hacks for Humanity. ARKHumanity’s system identifies specific tweets with key phrases that are often used by people at risk of self-harm. They won the 2014 Hacks for Humanity hackathon and have since launched their business, HumanityX.

Food for thought

How might we **create platforms to leverage diverse perspectives** from different stakeholders to create innovative solutions to social problems?

Supporting and scaling innovative models

United Nations: World Food Programme Innovation Accelerator

What is it?

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) Innovation Accelerator **sources, supports and scales high-impact innovations** to achieve Zero Hunger.

Potential benefits

- Provide **capital and necessary support** for experimentation.
- **Support acceleration and scaling** of models.

How does it work?

The UNWFP provides employees, entrepreneurs and start-ups with **funding, hands-on support, and access to WFP's global operations**.

Through the Accelerator, WFP leverages digital innovation including mobile technology, artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain and new business models to transform the way vulnerable communities are served globally.

UNWFP's Innovation Hub focuses on **two main programmes** to facilitate innovation:

Sprint Programme

An **intensive six-month acceleration programme** that provides resources and funding to help innovators validate concepts and develop prototypes for implementation.

Scale-Up Enablement Programme

Supports advanced stage innovations which have already proven their concepts and are working to **optimise their reach at regional or global levels**.

Sprint Programme provides capital and mentorship to new innovative ideas on a smaller scale; and if successful, the project can be scaled up under the Scale-Up Enablement Programme.

Food for thought

- How might we **create an enabling environment** to support innovators to come up with new ideas?
- How might we **support successful pilots to scale?**

Innovative funding idea: Provision of an interest-free recyclable grant Singapore: Maybank Momentum Grant (The Majority Trust)

What is it?

Maybank Momentum Grant helps small charities tide through the medium-term by providing an **interest-free recyclable grant** equivalent to 4 months of operating expenditure, and capped at \$150k.

Beside capital support, it also **supports capability building** for charities to kickstart transformation.

Potential benefits

The recyclable nature of the grant enables the donor/funder to channel support to more charities to **multiply its impact**.

How does it work?

Maybank Momentum Grant provides capital and training support for charities to **become sustainable in the long run**. When they are able to repay the grant, Maybank then uses the returned sum to **support other small charities** facing cash flow issues.

Through the grant, the organisation Limitless was able to expand its services and provide professional mental health support to more young people.

Food for thought

- How might we support SPEs **beyond financial support**?
- What innovative ways can funders use to support SPEs and **multiply social impact**?

Innovative funding idea: Empowering service users through a different financing model

Bangladesh: Grameen Bank

What is it?

The recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2016, Grameen Bank is a micro-credit institution that makes **small long-term loans on easy terms to empower economic participation.**

It assumes that anyone can manage their own financial affairs and development given suitable conditions. 98% of Grameen Bank's borrowers are women, of which more than two-thirds have achieved poverty alleviation.

Potential benefits

Allow more people to access financial resources to raise them from poverty.

How does it work?

Conventional banks usually do not lend to individuals without assets or property. However, micro-lending organisations offer these **individuals small loans with relatively low interest rates**, while requiring **little or no collateral.**

In developing countries, **micro-lenders have a larger impact than conventional banks** in poverty alleviation. The removal of collateral provides individuals **financial resources to better their lives.** The **repayment percentage** for such banks has been very high, emphasising the success of the models.

Food for thought

- How might we **find solutions for those who do not benefit** from current programmes?
- How might we **shift our mindsets** to explore ideas that have not been tried before and go against existing norms/assumptions?

Annex - References:

Generic

- <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2016/innovation-strategy-why-nonprofits-must-innovate-seven-steps-to-get-results>
- <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/cultivate-and-sustain-a-learning-culture-within-your-organization/>
- <https://acuvate.com/blog/5-benefits-decentralized-innovation-management/>
- <https://innovationcloud.com/blog/fostering-innovation-culture-through-decentralization.html>
- <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-five-stages-of-successful-innovation/>
- <https://medium.com/open-government-products/ogps-hack-for-public-good-changing-how-the-singapore-government-builds-tech-44eecfa080de>
- https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Social_Innovation_Guide.pdf
- <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/collaborating-for-impact/>

Tech Able

- <https://www.enablingguide.sg/articles-details/making-assistive-technology-accessible-for-all>
- <https://enablingvillage.sg/assistive-technologies-at-the-enabling-village/>

Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS)

- <https://www.minds.org.sg/about-us/vision-and-mission/>
- <https://www.minds.org.sg/about-us/applied-research/>
- <https://www.minds.org.sg/our-stories-learning-to-innovate-innovating-to-learn/>

GovTech's Hack for Public Good

- www.open.gov.sg/hackathon/about

Hacks or Humanity

- <https://www.hacksforhumanity.io/>

World Food Programme Innovation Accelerator

- <https://innovation.wfp.org/projects>

Maybank Momentum Grant (The Majority Trust)

- https://www.maybank2u.com.sg/en/personal/about_us/maybank-singapore/newsroom/2020/21-dec-2020.page
- <https://www.majority.sg/funds-and-grants/momentum/>
- <https://www.maybank2u.com.sg/en/imsawvy/Business-pages/limitless.html>

Grameen Bank

- <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2006/grameen/facts/>
- <https://grameenbank.org/about/introduction>
- <https://hbr.org/2006/12/disruptive-innovation-for-social-change>