

How to facilitate a session

A guide to running a social innovation hackathon that produces tested prototypes with — not just for — the community.

Social Innovation Hackathon

labs4change.org · Methodology Toolkit

1 Prepare

- Invite mixed teams of students plus partners or users who live the challenge (about 5–15).
- Allow 3–4 hours, or a full day. Bring prototyping materials: paper, card, sticky notes, pens.
- Brief the partners on their role as experts-by-experience, not observers.
- Agree facilitators, timings, and how prototypes will be presented.

2 Run the session

20 MIN Understand — an empathy session with the partners about the real context.

25 MIN Define — teams frame the specific problem worth solving.

30 MIN Ideate — generate many ideas fast; defer judgement.

40 MIN Prototype — build rough, testable versions of the best ideas.

25 MIN Share & test — present to partners and users; gather honest feedback.

10 MIN Close — agree what happens next for each prototype.

3 Follow up

- Document each prototype and the feedback it received.
- Share the results with participants and partners.
- Decide which ideas to develop, and hand them to an action plan.
- Thank the partners and invite feedback on the process.

4 Running it online

- Use a shared whiteboard for empathy notes, ideas and prototype sketches.
- Work in breakout rooms per team, with partners joining rooms for feedback.
- Keep energy up with tight timeboxes and quick check-ins.
- Prefer privacy-respecting tools, especially when discussing sensitive contexts.