



Innovation Platform

Create Space for Breakthrough. Test Ideas. Scale What Works.

EXPLAINER GUIDE

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1. What It Is

Innovation Platforms are structured, time-bound setups that enable institutions to step outside day-to-day operations and explore new ways of thinking, working, and delivering. Whether tackling persistent problems or jumpstarting reforms, these platforms provide the space and structure needed to test ideas, engage diverse voices, and pilot practical solutions.

In many public systems – especially in small states and resource-constrained contexts – innovation doesn't happen because there's no dedicated space for it. Routine takes over. Risk feels dangerous. And "what we've always done" becomes the default.

Innovation Platforms counter that by shifting energy from problem-solving to possibility-thinking. They enable rapid iteration, cross-sector collaboration, and institutional learning – helping governments and teams unlock creativity and uncover new delivery models, approaches, or partnerships.

When linked to real priorities and designed with intention, Innovation Platforms can become launchpads for transformative change.

2. What It Helps You Do

- Create structured space for bold thinking and experimentation
- Bring diverse actors into shared problem-solving including communities and partners
- Design and test new delivery models, service approaches, or policy pilots
- Energize teams and institutions weighed down by routine or reform fatigue
- Strengthen learning, adaptability, and cross-sector collaboration
- Uncover insights from the edges by surfacing voices and ideas not usually at the table

3. When To Use It

Deploy an Innovation Platform when:

- Facing a persistent challenge that hasn't responded to traditional solutions
- Beginning a reform and seeking to test ideas before scaling
- Hosting a strategy retreat or design lab where fresh thinking is needed
- Building momentum around a transformative idea or change agenda
- Seeking to involve external actors, partners, or communities
- Embedding innovation into a broader delivery, diagnostic, or strategy cycle

4. Example Scenarios

Innovation Platforms add value in moments when new thinking, shared ownership, or adaptive approaches are urgently needed. Common scenarios include:

- A Ministry wants to rethink how it delivers youth employment programmes and invites youth, employers, and community partners into a short-term design sprint.
- A reform unit is piloting a new service model and uses an Innovation Platform to test assumptions and refine the approach with frontline staff.
- A national strategy is under review, and leadership uses an Innovation Platform to bring in non-traditional voices and stress-test priorities before finalization.
- A donor-funded initiative hits an implementation roadblock, and a time-bound innovation cycle is launched to surface practical workarounds or new partnerships.
- A government department uses a platform model to explore cross-agency solutions to a persistent social challenge, such as school dropouts or local food security.

5. How To Use It

Innovation Platforms are best used in settings that encourage shared exploration such as:

- Co-creation labs
- Design sprints
- Strategy retreats
- Multi-stakeholder workshops
- Each Platform should be clearly scoped with:
 - A defined theme or challenge
 - A fixed time frame
 - An intended shift (e.g. policy rethink, new pilot, reimagined service)

To increase effectiveness, link the Platform to broader institutional or national priorities to ensure there's a clear pathway for integrating insights into ongoing delivery or reform work.

Use alongside other tools such as:

- Institutional Logic Map – to stay grounded in how the system actually works
- Planning & Delivery Accelerator – to transition promising ideas into structured delivery

6. Who It's For

Innovation Platforms are ideal for:

- Ministries and agencies seeking new approaches to persistent delivery challenges
- Reform teams and programme managers tasked with strategy development or pilot implementation
- Cross-sector groups working on shared policy or service challenges
- Donor partners and facilitators supporting institutional innovation or experimentation
- Leaders who want to re-energize their teams and unlock creativity in safe, structured ways

7. Optional Add-Ons

To increase impact, Innovation Platforms can be paired with:

- Facilitation Support for Co-Creation Labs or Design Sprints
- Linkages to Strategy Reviews or Delivery Diagnostics
- Structured Follow-Through via the Planning & Delivery Accelerator
- Systems Mapping with the Institutional Logic Map
- Documentation of Pilots, Prototypes, and Lessons Learned

8. Final Encouragement

When business as usual isn't working, create or adapt a platform for what's possible – then test, learn, and grow.