



What We Are Learning

DESIGN, DELIVERY, AND EVALUATION
OF THE FUTURE OF HOME LAB

1 OF 4 STRATEGIC LEARNING BRIEFS



INTRODUCTION

The *Future of Home: Inclusive Housing Solutions Lab* draws on the principles of human-centred design and social innovation to generate new and creative housing and support models that are accessible, affordable, and enable the social inclusion of people with developmental disabilities.

Through its work, Lab participants generated a number of prototypes to address different challenge areas, ultimately collaborating on a single prototype model—and a smaller spin-off prototype building on one of its features—that would lead to more inclusive apartment-style living for people with disabilities.

The *Future of Home Lab* is a collaboration between Skills Society, Inclusion Alberta, Civida (formerly Capital Region Housing) and Homeward Trust. Lab participants included people with developmental disabilities, their families and allies, service providers, funders, architects, advocates, and housing developers.

This brief discusses key learnings that have emerged from the design, delivery, and evaluation of the *Future of Home Lab*.

Visit our website to learn more about the *Future of Home* project and view prototypes, lab tools, and other background information:

<https://skillsociety.ca/projects/future-of-home-inclusive-housing-solutions-lab/>

A Skills Society Action Lab project conducted in partnership with Inclusion Alberta, Civida, and Homeward Trust.



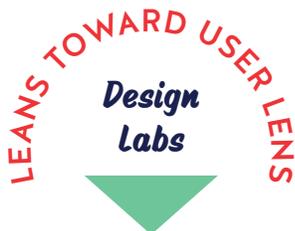
SOCIAL INNOVATION & HUMAN CENTRED DESIGN APPROACHES

WHAT IS SOCIAL INNOVATION?

In essence, social innovation is about uncovering promising solutions to complex problems. Once solutions have been thoroughly tested, they become a true social innovation when they spread and scale to a systemic level. Complex problems—also known as wicked problems—are characterized by a low level of agreement on what the problem is and what might be the best way to address it. Complex challenges are messy, conflicting, changing, not easily definable and full of uncertainty. Social innovation strives to tackle these challenges at their root by examining and building upon what might already be working and experimenting with new pathways and possibilities. As Canadian social innovator Al Etmanski explains, “[Social] innovation is a mixture of the old and the new with a dash of surprise.”

WHAT ARE SOCIAL INNOVATION LABS?

Social Innovation Labs are designed to draw on the strengths, empathy, creativity, and wisdom of a collective to make new progress on a complex challenge. Social Innovation Labs are not designed to provide immediate, simplified solutions to challenges. Instead, they tend to focus on systemic challenges and aim to generate longer-term change.



Often smaller teams

Focus on improving systems by addressing practical issues through research, co-design, prototyping.

Finding out what might work for people by really checking with people.

Bottom up approaches.

CAN BE SHORT SIGHTED IF ONLY APPLYING DESIGN THINKING.



Focus on assisting lab participants to better understand and work with the dynamics at play in complex problem domains.

Often a mix of Systems Thinking and Design Thinking.

Bias towards Action and prototyping solutions.

MIGHT LEAN A LITTLE MORE TOWARDS DESIGN APPROACHES.



Often bigger groups

Focus on the role of people in shaping systems, with intensive personal transformation as the major pathway to change.

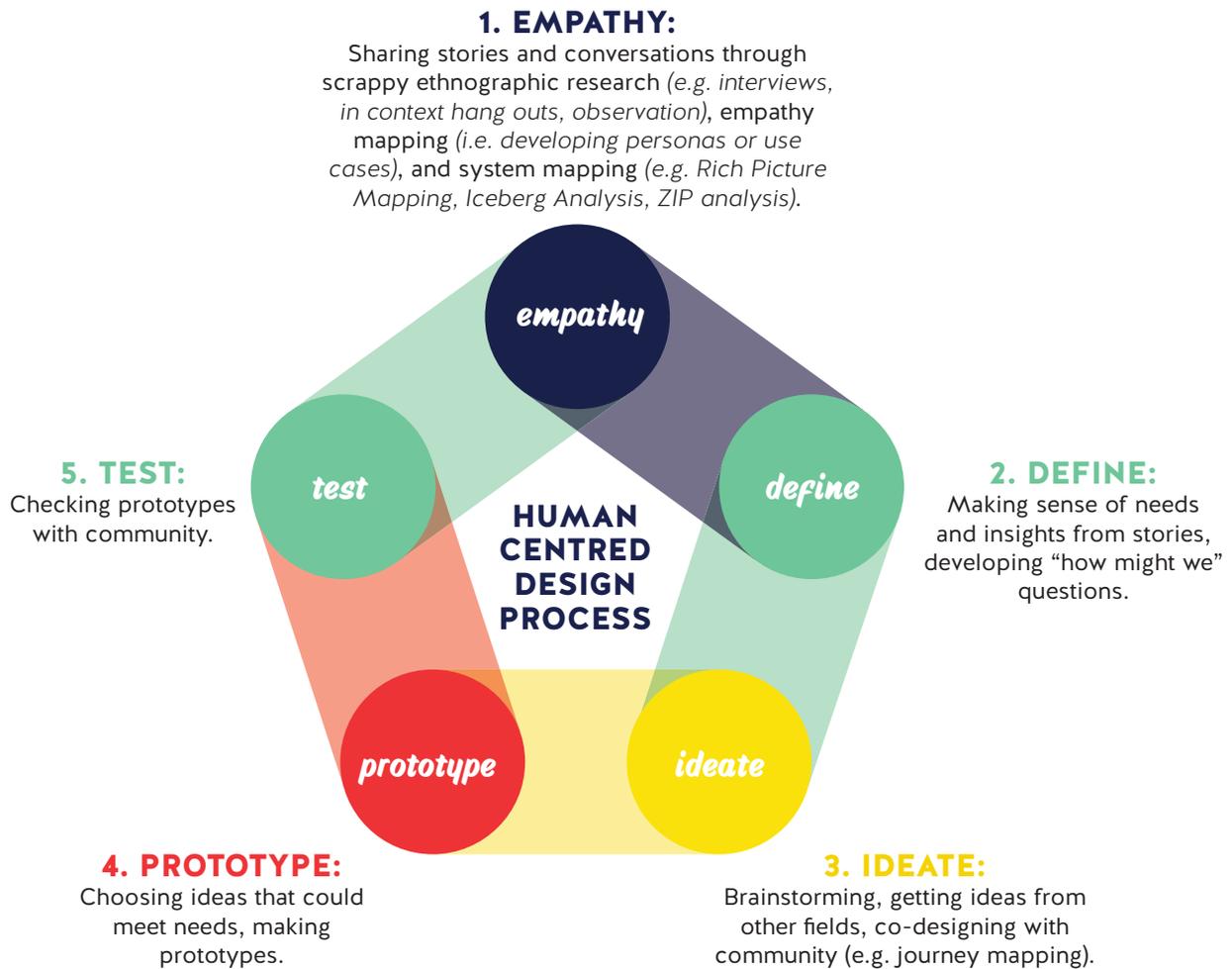
A lot of group dynamics. Questions lead to more questions.

CAN BE TRICKY TO MOVE TO ACTION IF GROUPS GET STUCK IN EXISTENTIAL SYSTEMS THINKING FUNK.

WHAT IS HUMAN CENTRED DESIGN?

Human Centred Design (HCD) is a well-established approach to collaborative problem solving. Through this approach, stakeholders with deep insights into a particular challenge come together to co-design solutions that better meet community needs, drive efficiencies and increase the value of solutions.

The strength of a human-centred design process is its ability to build empathy and understanding amongst a diverse range of stakeholders. In the *Future of Home Lab*, family members, allies, service providers, funders, architects, advocates, and housing developers each had an opportunity to learn from one another and about the experiences of people with developmental disabilities in navigating current housing and support systems.



LAB MEMBERS & STRUCTURE

STEWARDSHIP TEAM

The *Future of Home Lab* Stewardship Team is responsible for designing the key lab methodology, facilitating and coordinating lab activities, and interfacing with stakeholder groups. Throughout the process they compile and organize feedback, strive to listen and adapt plans based on what emerges, and coordinate follow-up activities and communications with external stakeholders. The Stewardship Team includes the Process Design Leads (Skills Society), the Developmental Evaluator (Mark Cabaj), and the Project Coordinator.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Project Partners represent key stakeholders within the problem or system being explored. These partners are consulted throughout the process to

advise, provide input and expertise, and leverage their networks to build capacity and strengthen the project's outcomes.

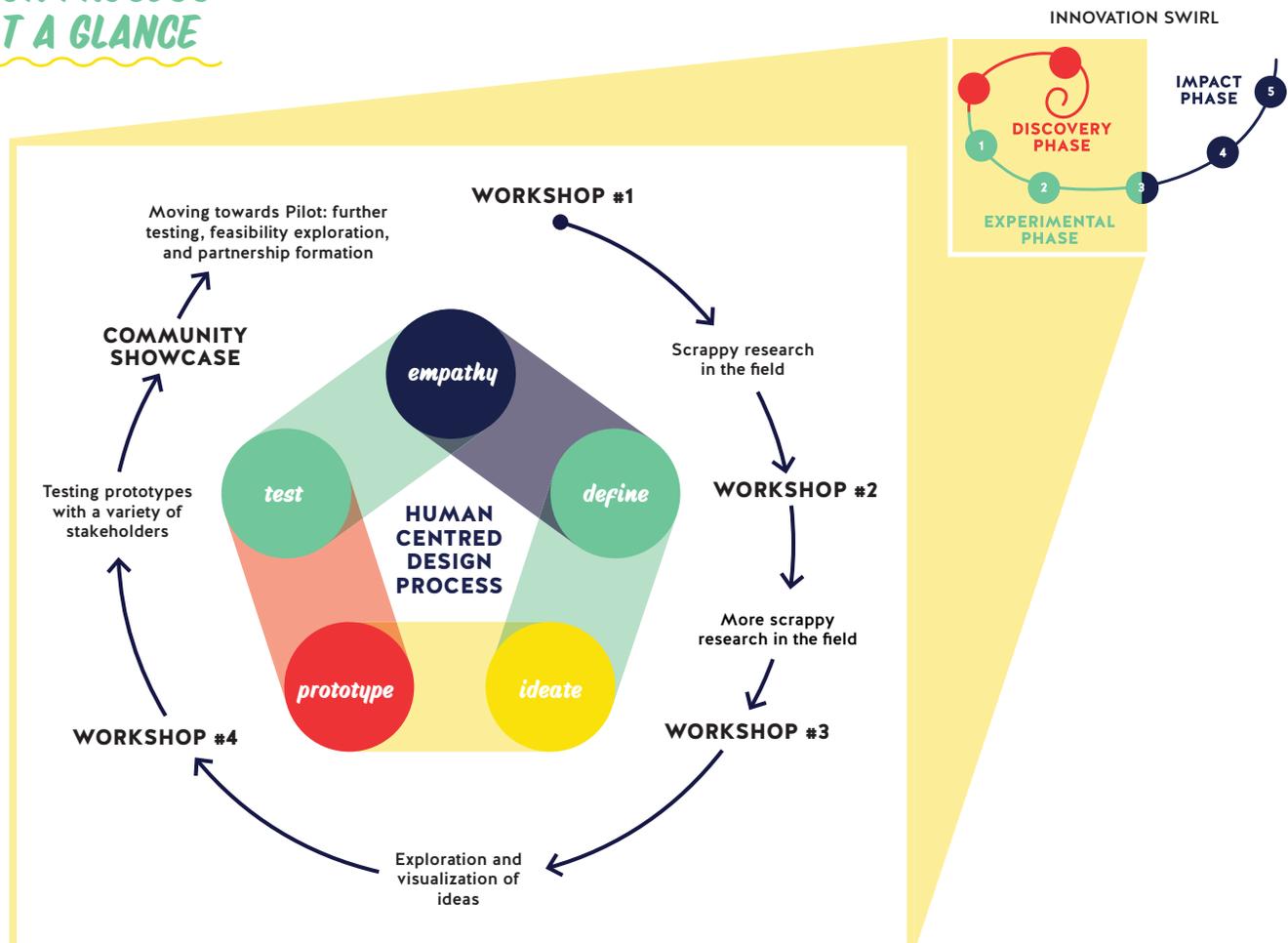
CORE TEAMS

Striving to be a diverse representation of the system being explored, Core Teams are the driving force behind the development of the prototypes that emerge. Core Teams do sense-making of the key challenge area, undertake scrappy, rapid-action research, evaluate insights, ideate possibilities, and prototype and test interventions.

This lab was comprised of two Core Teams, each exploring a different challenge area:

- ▶ A version of scattered-site supportive housing
- ▶ A shared community model

OUR PROCESS AT A GLANCE



ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE FUTURE OF HOME LAB

Curated a robust primer document

This document provided foundational information on the social innovation approach, the lab theory of change, foreseeable tensions in the project, the proposed challenge area, and existing models the teams might learn from.

Developed two prototypes and tested them with community

Two core Future of Home Lab teams each created a prototype and tested them with community stakeholders, ultimately collaborating on a single prototype: a new, ready-to-pilot housing and support model of inclusive living.

Refined a spin-off prototype based on one of the features

As the Lab work evolved, the Stewardship Team agreed that a singular part of the prototype should be developed and scaled on its own. This prototyping will occur in Phase 2 of this project.

Developed four Strategic Learning Briefs to share our lessons learned

These documents formally capture in-depth learnings about the process and the complex problem the Lab was trying to solve. These Briefs can be used by stakeholders working within the space, as well as by other organizations facing similar challenges.

Created a new lab innovation tool

Through this process, the Lab developed a new tool called “Imagining Possibilities Canvas” using the Three Horizons Framework¹ to help better understand the problem and kickstart new thinking (see more on this framework in the strategic learning brief titled “A Portfolio of Possibilities”).

Customized a prototype evaluation and testing approach

See more in the booklet titled “Insights from Prototype Testing with Stakeholders”

Formed stronger partnerships in a move towards a pilot

To help bring the new prototype to life, the Lab established a working partnership with a for-profit housing developer and began the process for piloting a new model within a proposed housing development.

You can explore the Future of Home Primer, prototype booklets and videos, the Strategic Learning Briefs, our Imagining Possibilities Canvas, and the Prototype Testing Booklet on our website:

<https://skillsociety.ca/projects/future-of-home-inclusive-housing-solutions-lab/>

KEY LEARNINGS ABOUT SOCIAL INNOVATION LABS

In the process of facilitating the Future of Home: Inclusive Housing Solutions Lab, the Lab Stewardship Team—in cooperation with Lab participants—uncovered a number of important insights about the design and delivery of Social Innovation Labs. While these insights are immediately relevant to the Action Lab stewards who are constantly developing, testing and improving their unique approach to social innovation, they are also relevant to other teams, organizations and collaborations employing a Social Innovation Lab approach in their work.

INSIGHT #1: **IT IS POSSIBLE—BUT NOT IDEAL—TO FACILITATE A SOCIAL INNOVATION LAB ONLINE**

Social Innovation Labs aim to create a dynamic space for diverse teams to come together and explore the systemic nature of a challenge they wish to address.

They are usually carried out in face-to-face sessions where people can freely discuss ideas, make sense of data, share their experiences and stories, and work together to create, workshop and test novel solutions that they wouldn't be able to come up with on their own.

The sudden arrival of the COVID-19 Pandemic required the Stewardship Team and participants to pivot. While two in-person workshops were held with COVID-19 safety measures in place, along with site visits to interview people with disabilities in their current home, the rest of the planned sessions were carried out online.

This pivot was largely successful in multiple ways:

- ▶ The Stewardship Team created multiple channels for participants to carry out their work and collaborate online, including workshops via videoconferencing (i.e. Zoom), a communication platform (i.e. Slack), shared Google docs, open electronic resources and lab tools, and individual video and telephone meetings.
- ▶ The feedback from Lab participants was that working online was sometimes difficult but that the work was designed and managed well. Through this feedback, we learned a variety of ways online Labs could be improved in the future (See Table A).
- ▶ Despite these challenges, the Future of Home Lab team was still able to carry out each step of the original lab design on time, and complete all of its key deliverables.

At the same time, working primarily online made it difficult to take advantage of the strengths of the Lab approach. These challenges included:

- ▶ The reduced possibilities for field research with innovation stakeholders—most notably people with disabilities—face to face or on-site. This undoubtedly limited the range and depth of information that could be gathered.
- ▶ The very limited options for employing different interactive prototyping techniques to make promising solutions more tangible (e.g., mock ups, simulations). The use of a graphic recorder to visually capture the key features of the two Prototype Teams was very helpful, but was only one way to tangibly represent the key features of their proposed housing models.
- ▶ The struggle to have deeper, more dynamic discussions amongst team members that is normally possible when working face-to-face. Although the team worked well together, most participants reported that ‘online fatigue’ and the inability to use non-verbal communication (drawing, body language, physical interaction) at times limited their ability to work together.

The Lab team demonstrated that it’s possible to deliver a Lab online, complete deliverables and surface innovative ideas. They also identified online Lab activities that the team can draw on to complement more traditional Labs when public health restrictions allow.

The experience also revealed that the power of Social Innovation Labs still depends—in large part—on the ability for diverse people to come together face-to-face to build relationships, freely discuss challenges from diverse perspectives, and work dynamically to explore novel solutions.

Activities that Make the Online Experience Possible	Activities That Can Improve the Online Experience	Activities That Cannot Be Done Online
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive availability of online meeting platforms (e.g., Zoom) • A graphic recorder to visually map out the key features of each Prototype Team’s prototype • Experienced facilitators to manage meetings • Electronic versions of all presentations, resources and tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recorded meetings for those who would like to double-back on key conversations • Kinesthetic activities for people to engage online (e.g., interactive board like Miro) • Smaller break out groups • An online directory of resources, organized for easier access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive research with experts and stakeholders, including on-site visits and conversations with people with disabilities • Interactive prototyping techniques to make promising solutions more tangible (e.g., mock ups, simulations) • Deeper types of discussions amongst team members that is normally possible when working face to face

INSIGHT #2:
THERE ARE UNAVOIDABLE TENSIONS IN THE DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF LABS.

Tensions are an unavoidable part of any effort to tackle a complex challenge.

There are tensions in developing an effective solution or model to address the challenge itself (e.g., the tension between having both affordable AND quality housing). There are also tensions in designing and facilitating the innovation process to come up with a promising solution (e.g., the tension between finding an effective solution in a short period of time).

Tensions can be framed as challenges that invite participants to be creative in how they are addressed.

The *Future of Home Lab* participants experienced three major tensions in the design and delivery of their innovation lab:

- ▶ **The Tight-Loose Challenge Brief:** creating a challenge brief that was framed tightly enough to provide clear direction to the Innovation Teams but not so tight that it could not be adapted to be more helpful and/or reflect new learnings that emerged in the Lab.
- ▶ **The Linear-Non-Linear Design:** designing the phases and actions of the Lab process in a way that laid out a systematic approach to innovation while still being responsive to emerging opportunities, learnings and shifts in context.
- ▶ **The Diverse-Manageable Innovation Team:** putting together Prototype Teams that had sufficient diversity to ensure rich perspectives and creative thinking, yet small enough to allow for building trustful relationships and high performing teams.

Table B: Tensions in Lab Design & Delivery

Tension	On one hand...	On the other hand...	The Challenge	Future of Home Participant Feedback
TIGHT-LOOSE CHALLENGE BRIEF	... innovation teams are more creative when the challenge they are trying to address and the constraints within which they must work are clearly laid out in a design brief.	... it is difficult to know in advance all the features of a successful model. Some room must be left for new and emergent learning.	How might we frame our innovation challenge tightly enough to provide direction to innovation teams while still leaving room for creativity, chance and new learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Challenge Briefs provided clear direction for each Prototype Team • The Challenge Brief should include a stronger use of 'personas' to represent the diverse range of persons with disabilities • The Lab Brief be revisited periodically throughout the Lab and updated if appropriate

Tension	On one hand...	On the other hand...	The Challenge	Future of Home Participant Feedback
LINEAR-NON-LINEAR PROCESS	... all participants in a Lab would like a well laid-out process and set of tasks that reflect a solid understanding of the different phases of innovation.	... the process of innovation is organic and results in new learnings and opportunities that require participants to adjust their original plans and work iteratively.	How might we create a clear framework and plan for our innovation process that allows for ongoing development and adaptation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation for the structure and facilitation of the entire Lab • The level of effort required to participate was greater-than-planned, with mixed opinions about if it was “too much” or “more opportunity to contribute” • Periodic check-ins at transition points in the process to discuss the need, options and level of support for the next phase
DIVERSE-MANAGEABLE TEAM	...the greater the diversity of team members, the richer the insights into the challenge and more creative the solutions.	... there are logistical and financial constraints on how many people can be engaged in Teams and practical limits on the size of working groups before they become ineffective.	How might we engage the greater diversity of people in Prototype Team work in a way that is efficient and effective?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The diversity in the Teams was one of the best features of the lab • A desire for greater participation from people with more expertise, including housing developers and persons with disabilities • Create a process that allows for multiple levels of participation

The Action Lab Stewardship Team is committed to introducing participants of future Innovation Labs to the idea of ‘tensions’ in Lab projects and how they can embrace them as opportunities for creative thinking.

INSIGHT #3:
PROMISING SOLUTIONS DO NOT NEED TO BE CREATED FROM SCRATCH.

The focus of most Social Innovation Labs is to come up with entirely new and novel solutions to a complex challenge.

The participants in the *Future of Home Lab* discovered that there are (at least) three different pathways to innovation:

- ▶ Create something entirely new from scratch
- ▶ Build on, improve or scale a model that exists close by
- ▶ Adopt and adapt a model from elsewhere

The Stewardship Team was eager to provide information and examples to the Prototype Teams so that they could think beyond the conventional ‘create something new’ approach. To assist in this, they included examples of two types of housing models developed in other sectors and communities.

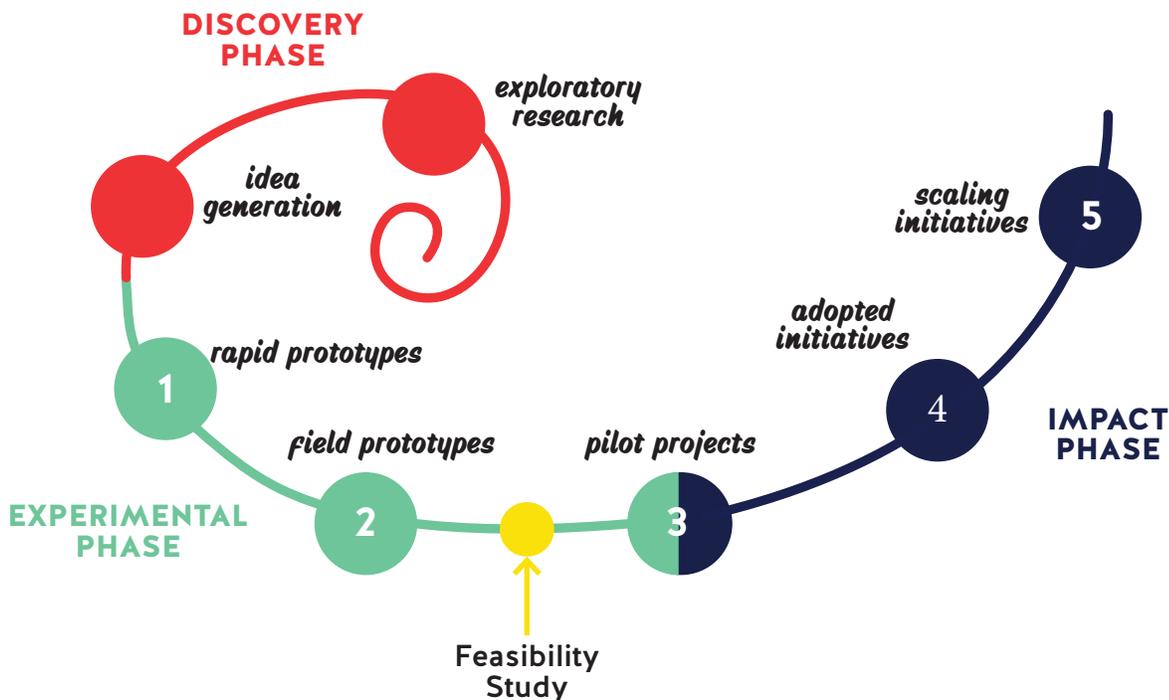
In their feedback, participants suggested the teams could have gone further in sharing other examples:

- ▶ Participants found housing models in British Columbia, Arizona and the United Kingdom that were highly educational and inspirational for the Lab
- ▶ The team assigned to carry out a feasibility exploration found that some of their financial projections could be strengthened by building on financial models already employed by several local housing providers

The Stewardship Team is already committed to more fully integrating a ‘multiple pathway’ orientation to innovation in its next labs by: (1) encouraging Lab participants to consider all three pathways in their innovation work; and (2) completing pre-Lab research on other ‘similar’ models that can be shared with Lab teams as baseline information.

INSIGHT #4:
THERE IS A STEP BETWEEN A PROTOTYPE & A PILOT PROJECT

The conventional understanding in the field of social innovation is that prototypes that test well against their core criteria (e.g., effective, feasible, viable) should have a business case created and a pilot/demonstration project developed to allow for a more systematic test of the new model.



In the case of the *Future of Home Lab*, participants discovered the value of an intermediate step between a prototype and more formal pilot project: a feasibility study to systematically assess the financial viability of a new model.

- ▶ A feasibility study builds on stakeholder feedback regarding the prototype – particularly around their preferred features and ways to improve the overall model – but adds a more thorough set of financial analysis and projections that developers and would-be residents need to know in order to decide whether or not to proceed with the idea further.
- ▶ If the findings of the study show that the model is viable, much of the analysis can be used to inform the creation of a more formal business plan or pilot project.

The Stewardship Team concluded that the complex nature of their proposed model, coupled with the high stakes nature of developing a full fledged business plan and pilot project, meant that carrying out a feasibility study was the best ‘bridging’ step between their prototype testing and putting the idea in practice.

While feasibility studies are quite common in the business world, the team’s experience shows that social innovators should consider this as useful step in the developing, testing and refining of promising solutions.

INSIGHT #5: **TREATING ‘STRATEGIC LEARNING’ AS A CRITICAL LAB OUTCOME**

The central focus of any Social Innovation Lab is to provide diverse teams with an opportunity to experiment with different ways to tackle stubborn, complex challenges, such as ensuring affordable, accessible and inclusive housing for people with disabilities.

Defining the success of a Lab solely on its ability to create a successful innovation, however, is too narrow for two significant reasons:

1. Most prototypes do not result in successful innovations. For example, the Dyson company required 15 years and 5,127 prototypes to produce its now famous, best-selling vacuum cleaner². Social innovators often need multiple cycles of innovation to land on a solution that is not only effective, but feasible and viable. It is highly unlikely that they will find the perfect solution based on a single prototype.
2. Each Lab generates learning that can be used to inform and improve future rounds of innovation. Social innovators always uncover deeper insights into the nature of the challenge, what does and does not work, and the systems that hold these complex problems in place.

The Stewardship Team concluded that a better definition of ‘results’ in a Lab should be widened to include the ‘strategic learning’ that emerges from the process.

Just as those leading research and development (R & D) efforts to address more mainstream challenges (e.g., Type 2 diabetes) are expected (and required) to codify and share their learnings with the field so that others can build on them to inform future R & D efforts, lab participants should do the same with their insights in order to drive future innovation.

² <https://nymag.com/vindicated/2016/11/james-dyson-on-5-126-vacuums-that-didnt-work-and-1-that-did.html>

To demonstrate their commitment to this idea, the Stewardship Team has developed several Strategic Learning Briefs (in addition to this one). These include:

- ▶ What Makes A House a Home?
- ▶ Addressing Tensions in Building an Inclusive Home for Persons with Disabilities
- ▶ A Portfolio of Possibilities: Innovating Across Three Horizons of Change

These resources will be useful for future work by the Action Lab partners—and others—to create better housing solutions for people with disabilities. They can also be used to inform the work of other organizations, collaborations and communities interested in a similar mission.

NEXT STEPS

These five insights that emerged from the *Future of Home: Inclusive Housing Solutions Lab* process are significant learnings for the Action Lab team.

These insights go beyond the ‘steps and activities’ of Social Innovation Labs provided in most guides and templates; instead, they reveal deeper strategic issues that can be addressed when bringing a diverse group of people together to experiment with new ways of tackling tough systemic challenges.

In the spirit of ongoing improvement and innovation, Action Lab facilitators have already responded to these insights and have integrated them into their next phase of the *Future of Home: Inclusive Housing Solutions Lab*. They have:

- ▶ Identified the best online Lab activities (e.g., videos, Zoom team meetings) to use as ‘complementary supports’ to future Labs that will be primarily face-to-face;
- ▶ Included ‘Lab tensions’ (e.g., process vs. product) in the orientation session for new Lab participants;
- ▶ Expanded the pathways to innovation beyond ‘build from scratch’ to include expanding upon successful models that already exist;
- ▶ Upgraded the innovation continuum to include feasibility studies as a step between prototypes and pilot projects; and
- ▶ Added ‘strategic learning’ to the definition of Lab Outcomes and Strategic Learning Briefs as key lab ‘deliverables.’

The Action Lab Team will also make these insights available to lab facilitators, social innovators, funders and policy makers through its website, conference presentations and professional networking sessions.

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