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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Thank you to all of the many inspiring projects and service providers that I have come across in the course of writing this guide. In the end there was just too much to fit in but I hope I have given a sense of just how dynamic and innovative the UK's social enterprise sector has become, and provided some new ideas for organisations in the Lancaster District to take forward. I am grateful for the time I previously spent with Lancaster Freewheelers Workshop and Bristol Bike Project which introduced me to the challenges and rewards that come with working for the social good. Finally, thank you to the various organisations involved in commissioning this project and for the helpful feedback received from Mandy Naylor and Jez Hall.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT**

This report was commissioned as part of the Lattice Works social enterprise programme delivered in the Lancaster District between September 2011 and March 2014. The programme was managed by Jez Hall from Shared Future CIC in partnership with Mandy Naylor from Latent Promise (following on from the original partnership with Help Direct (Age UK Lancashire) where Mandy was employed until March 2013). Lattice Works was funded by the Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership (later Lancaster City Council) to help local VCFS organisations become more sustainable by adopting a social enterprise approach. The programme combined access to training and business support, a participatory approach to providing development funding, on and offline information and events, one to one support and advice for new and established not for private profit organisations. As a way to ensure the impact of the programme beyond the lifetime of direct support, this report offers local SEs an insight into newer developments in the field using examples of their practical application in other parts of the UK.

Further information can be found at <http://www.sharedfuturecic.org.uk/lattice-works/>

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## SUMMARY

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Combining positive social impact with a sustainable business model presents various challenges for a social enterprise. But with every challenge there is an opportunity to thrive. This requires innovation. The aim of this guide is to provide practical information and advice for social enterprises in the Lancaster District, UK. Helping them to look outwards and assess the potential for adopting some of these innovations within their own organisations

The questions facing social enterprises in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century range from the structure of their organisation to their methods of service delivery. They concern the partners that a social enterprise should choose to work with and its activities for generating income. They relate to which audiences should be engaged and how this should happen. In the following pages I hope to provide some insight into how these questions can be addressed. Whilst the guide is tailored to social enterprises in Lancaster, much of the content will be of relevance to the wider sector.

In terms of layout, the introduction sets out what is meant by a 'social enterprise'. It outlines the state of the social enterprise sector and describes recent trends within the Lancaster area. While there are signs of growth, there are also plenty of challenges. These require that both individual organisations, and the industry as a whole, are able to take advantage of emerging opportunities for innovation.

The main part of this guide is divided into nine innovations drawn from across the UK. There is no particular order to the innovations. This is because they vary in all sorts of ways. Some focus on specific tools while others are better understood as broad concepts or ideas. Some focus on generating income, others on engaging beneficiaries or managing your data. You are happily invited to head straight for a particular page.

For each innovation, I try to provide grounded examples of how tools and ideas are being used in practice. The case studies are by no means a representative sample of what's going on across the country. There are plenty of super innovations that will be given no coverage. At the same time, the guide is certainly not intended as some kind of blueprint for how to innovate. It is merely meant to provoke thought and discussion about how things can be done differently. The real innovation lies in how you tailor the tools and ideas that are available to the needs of your own organisation.

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# INTRODUCTION

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## Defining (a) Social Enterprise

Already, I'm ashamed to say, there is a lack of clarity about the focus of this guide. Do we refer to '*a social enterprise*' as a specific organisation? Or is it better to talk about '*social enterprise*' as a general approach to carrying out business? You'll be pleased to know that I'm not going to dwell on this matter. It makes little difference, and there are far more interesting things to think about. But, by way of an introduction, it is worth briefly setting out what I understand by the term.

There is not actually any legal definition for *a social enterprise* (there, choice made). They can exist in all manner of different forms. But what do they have in common? Broadly speaking, and as outlined by the UK Government, a social enterprise is:

**"a business with primarily social objectives** whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners."

Social enterprises use business models to achieve social or environmental good. Unlike conventional charities, which *tend* to have a greater dependence on donations and grants, social enterprises ideally generate **the majority of their income through trading products or services** in a competitive market. Any profit made is reinvested towards the social mission. By funding their activities in this way, social enterprises are supposed to become self-sustainable. So far so good.

But many questions are left unanswered. What qualifies as a social objective? Where does the money come from? What does it mean to trade? There is good reason for leaving these questions to one side. Diversity. Social enterprises differ in their setups and in their ways of working. They work on a wide range of social issues and operate in all parts of the economy. They are big and small, newly formed and well established. Deciding on what qualifies as a social enterprise could form a guide of its own. But someone else can produce that.

## The State of the Sector

There are more than 68,000 social enterprises in the UK. Between them, they contribute £24 billion to the economy and employ over one million people.<sup>1</sup> And the sector continues to grow. In a recent survey, Social Enterprise UK (SEUK) found that **one third of social enterprises are in their first three years of operation.**<sup>2</sup> In terms of their focus, social enterprises are most frequently working in business support and consultancy, education, employment and skills, and housing. Other activities include retail, culture and leisure, social care, financial support and services, workspace, healthcare, environmental issues, and creative industries.

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<sup>1</sup> BMG Research (June, 2013), 'Social Enterprise: Market Trends', published by the Cabinet Office.

<sup>2</sup> SEUK is the UK's representative body for the social enterprise sector. 'The People's Business' was a report published by SEUK in 2013 which summarises recent trends within the sector.

While there are broad trends at the national scale, there are **differences in what happens where**. 38% of the UK's social enterprises operate in the 20% most deprived communities. What these organisations do (the groups they target, the services they offer, and their methods of delivery) will differ from the activities of those working in less deprived areas. The effect of geography is hardly surprising. Different communities have different needs. And this means that the challenges faced by social enterprises, and the opportunities they have to innovate, will also vary.

So what can we say about the social enterprise sector in Lancaster? Does it stand out from its wider context in any way? In 2005, Matthew MacDonald counted 39 social enterprises operating within the Lancaster City Council District.<sup>3</sup> He estimated they had an annual turnover of more than £2.5 million and provided over 150 jobs, amounting to 1,245 hours of work every week. The most common activities undertaken related to education, training, and culture, media and arts, but MacDonald identified a number of gaps in service provision. These included design and print services, food supply, community accountancy, and childcare. In terms of their funding, he found a low dependence on loans and other investment mechanisms, and a growing reliance on public service contracts. Yet the majority of social enterprises reported that less than 50% of their income came from trading activity.<sup>4</sup> Trading *between* social enterprises was especially limited.

In the eight years since MacDonald's research, and in line with broader national trends, Lancaster's social enterprise sector has matured. Certainly, the number of social enterprises has increased and the variety of the services that they offer has grown. Many are establishing effective trading models and reducing their dependence on grants and donations. But the challenges facing social enterprises, in Lancaster and beyond, are also becoming more pronounced.

## Challenging Times

Growth in the social enterprise sector has come at **a time of greater need**. Reductions in government spending mean that there is increased demand for many of the services provided by social enterprises. A recent report focusing on Lancaster's voluntary sector suggests as much.<sup>5</sup> It argues that cuts to public spending are reflected in changes to benefit entitlements, reduced access to food, and the growing prevalence of mental health difficulties. The advice and support offered by Lancaster's social enterprises are in greater demand than ever.

At the same time, the future of many social enterprises is under threat. In the studies carried out by MacDonald (2005) and Grover and Piggott (2012), **various challenges** were reported. Many of these revolve around income: securing investment without collateral; adapting to procurement policy and acquiring the necessary skills for competitive tendering; responding to downward price pressure from commercial operators; and planning for business sustainability and development. But the challenges facing social enterprises are not purely financial. They also relate to:

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<sup>3</sup> MacDonald, M. (2005), 'Feasibility Study into Possible Models for Joint Working within the Social Enterprise Sector in the Lancaster City Council District', commissioned by Lancashire County Developments Ltd.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that many of Lancaster's biggest and more established enterprises did not respond to the research conducted by MacDonald. This is likely to have skewed his findings in some regards.

<sup>5</sup> Grover, C. and Piggott, L. (2012), 'Economic Crisis, Need & Voluntary Organisations in the Lancaster District', produced for Lancaster District Community Voluntary Services (CVS).

- maintaining a community focus;
- effective marketing of products and services;
- building ICT infrastructure;
- training staff in necessary skills;
- developing support networks;
- employing the right governance structure; and
- adopting effective monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

A common assumption is that social enterprises are, by their very nature, innovative vehicles for the delivery of social products and services. They are seen as efficient models for getting things done cheaply. It is no coincidence that the sector has grown during a period of austerity. But the lasting capacity of an organisation to deliver public services is not guaranteed. As with any other business, social enterprises will stand or fall.

## Standing Out

With so many social enterprises in their early stages, the average size of organisations is shrinking. While the sector has grown, median turnover has decreased from £240,000 in 2011 to £187,000 in 2013. Yet it is the more established businesses that are often favoured by prospective funders. They are seen as less risky and more likely to deliver their objectives. It is a trend that is all too familiar. Against this backdrop, smaller organisations need to find effective ways of carrying out and highlighting their work. To meet demand for the services they offer, to overcome the tendency of capital to head only in certain directions, and to build a self-sustainable business, **social enterprises need to innovate.**

Innovation can refer to any number of processes and, again, we won't dwell on the pros and cons of adopting different definitions. For all intents and purposes, and in its broadest sense, **'to innovate'** refers to **'the act of introducing something new'**. In relation to a social enterprise, it means using new methods to bridge the gap between what is needed and what is possible. At its most obvious, this can mean making changes to the products or services that you offer. But there are opportunities to innovate in all aspects of your work: in the groups that you choose to target and in the methods you employ to deliver services; in constructing an image of your work and in how this is communicated; in how your social enterprise is organised and in the ways that it generates income; in the training of your staff and in building partnerships externally.

Most important, innovation **does not occur in isolation**. If a social enterprise is to prove effective in achieving social good then it must align its own capacity to act with the various challenges and opportunities that come from outside. In the following pages, I hope to provide some guidance as to how this might be achieved.

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# INNOVATION 1: CO-PRODUCTION

PURPOSE: TO WORK *WITH* THE COMMUNITY

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## What's the problem?

Those most in need of support are often at the margins of society. They tend to be framed as being in need of professional help from the outside, and have **little influence in the design and delivery of services**. And so the degree to which a group may already be disadvantaged is further entrenched. Service providers that operate on such a basis tend to achieve limited success. At their most extreme, they overlook the value that lies *within* a community, they retain all control in service delivery, and they create a culture of dependency which maintains the status quo.

## What can we do?

Co-production offers an alternative philosophy. In short, it advocates an **asset-based approach** to community development. Instead of focusing on what people might lack and what they might need, the emphasis shifts to what they might offer. For [Edgar Cahn](#), the [New Economics Foundation](#) (NEF) and undoubtedly many others, **the community is a resource**. Or at least it can be. It consists of support networks, civic engagements, relationships of love and care, mutual respect and trust, and social justice. These are aspects of what has been termed **the 'core economy'**. But they have often been overlooked and undermined in the design and delivery of public services. If the core economy is allowed to flourish, support networks will evolve from within the community.

## How does it work?

To build and maintain the core economy, the members of a community must feel they are of value and that they have something to offer. This is how networks of mutual support come into fruition. Somewhere down this line of thinking, we get to the point where it makes quite a lot of sense to devolve the design and delivery of public services to the members of a community. A **social enterprise** that wishes to apply the idea of co-production in its work must therefore think of itself less as a provider of services and more **as a facilitator** or catalyst for community development. Perhaps your role is to embed the seeds of reciprocity and mutuality, or to establish a platform for greater community participation in decision making. Time banking is one example, and is closely linked to the development of co-production as a workable concept, but there are plenty of others.

## Anything to be wary of?

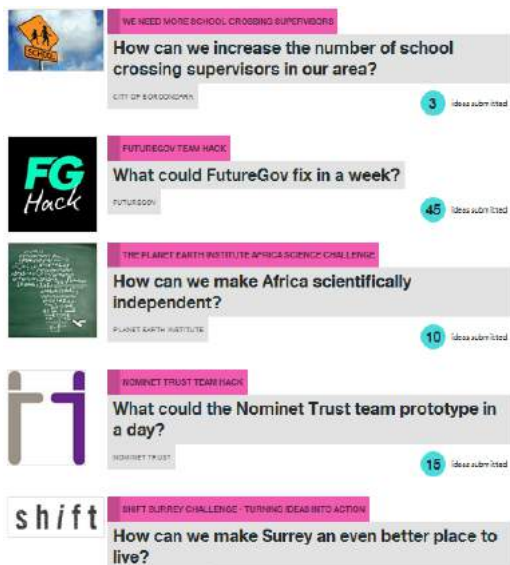
'Co-production' is tossed around far too easily. There's a danger that it becomes **just another buzzword** used to tick boxes. Too often, it is merely used to indicate that the beneficiaries of a service should be somehow involved in designing how that service is delivered; that a social enterprise should work in partnership with its community if it is to prove effective in pursuing its mission. Of course, this is true. But co-production also means unlocking the potential that can



come from *within* the community through planting the seeds of mutuality. If these features are allowed to slip away then co-production loses all its value as a way to build the core economy.

## What tools are available?

There are all sorts of tools that can be used for effective co-production. Participatory budgeting is a model which enables community members to decide how funding should be allocated. [Lattice](#)



*Simpl Challenges is an online platform for gathering feedback on community issues.*

[Works](#) can offer advice and support on this for social enterprises based in the Lancaster District. It would also be worth keeping an eye on the [Policy Beta](#) project being run by Catalyst (a research programme partly based at Lancaster University). This is developing a digital platform through which ‘to network communities, generate ideas, debate issues, and vote on the policies that formulate principles for political action.’ Finally, you might want to check out [Simpl Challenges](#). This online platform can be used by organisations that have an issue or question to gather feedback and ideas from the community. The best innovators are then invited to a ‘challenge event’ where possible solutions are developed further and teams are awarded prizes.

## Any examples?

[KeyRing](#) is a charity that operates throughout the UK, ensuring that **people with learning disabilities** are given the opportunity **to live independently**. This means they are able to live in their own homes and enjoy the many freedoms that come with that. Whether it is choosing when to get up, what to eat, or who to invite around, the pull of independence can be considerable.

This should not mean isolation, however. To make independent living workable, KeyRing networks provide a **platform for mutual support**. Each network consists of a group of ten members living within walking distance of each other. Nine of these require some sort of support but they are encouraged **to share their skills** with one another and to build support mechanisms from within. This can mean assisting with practical tasks like decorating, filling out forms or even just visiting for a chat. The other network member is a ‘community living volunteer’ who is able to provide additional support when needed. Importantly, the onus is on members rather than a service provider to decide when they might want some company or assistance.

But the networking doesn’t stop there. The members also have regular group meetings where they discuss how they can get involved in the wider community. KeyRing operates a ‘Small Sparks’ fund which can be used by network members to take forward an idea. Members in Wrexham started growing their own vegetables at a local allotment while the Oldham network joined together to take part in a community football tournament. Others have started their own

neighbourhood improvement campaigns. And every month the 'Community Connections Prize' is awarded to a network member who has stood out for their contribution to the community.

Through these mechanisms, network members have far more autonomy in organising their lives than they would through more conventional, professionalised support systems. Decisions about how the network should evolve, and the types of activities it should become involved in, are made by the members. The emphasis is not solely on what vulnerable adults might need by way of support, but also on the contributions that they can make to the community. And, over time, the circle of friendship and mutual support in which members are embedded is able to grow.

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## INNOVATION 2: CROWDFUNDING

PURPOSE: TO SECURE FUNDING

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### What's the problem?

Many traditional methods of funding worthy causes are based on securing **large investments from one or two providers**. They often involve some sort of financial intermediary which redirects the funds of an investor pool to organisations of its choosing. This might be a bank or the Government, or some other kind of funder. For investors, this can mean a lack of transparency regarding the work they are funding and the likelihood that some of their money will go to the intermediary. For organisations in need of funding, they will often have to meet the stringent criteria of a provider.

### What can we do?

Online platforms enable projects in need of funding to be presented to as wide an audience as possible. Rather than seeking investment from one or two providers, the rise of 'crowdfunding' allows social enterprises to draw on "relatively small contributions from a relatively large number of individuals...without standard financial intermediaries".<sup>6</sup> This is a form of '**peer-to-peer**' funding whereby the details of specific projects are made directly available to potential donors and investors who are then able to support the causes with which they most identify.

### How does it work?

Crowdfunding is best used for a **finite project** to which a specific cost can be applied. It isn't a way to secure ongoing investment although the project idea that you present, and the **funding target** that you set, can generally be as big or small as you wish. Depending on the platform that you use, funds can be raised in the form of **donations** (often in return for some kind of non-financial reward), as **repayable loans**, or in exchange for a share of **business ownership**. Platforms for crowdfunding vary in several other ways. Some focus on particular themes or issues such as renewable energy or the use of public space. There are also differences with regard your entitlement to the funds that you raise. Many allow you to keep the funds raised even if your

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<sup>6</sup> Mollick, E. (2012), 'The dynamics of crowdfunding: Determinants of success and failure'.

funding target isn't met but don't take this for granted. Other platforms offer a **milestone service** whereby a project receives the funds so far pledged once it passes certain target thresholds.

## Anything to be wary of?

There are a wide range of factors that influence whether a project meets its funding target. Of course, the **quality of your proposal** is paramount. But there is every chance that a well-developed idea, destined to change the world for the better, will fail to attract sufficient investment. Think of the **crowdfunding arena as a marketplace**. There are all sorts of stalls and stands clamouring for the attention of passers-by. How do you make them stop? How will you stand out from all the other projects proclaiming the good they will do? Effective presentation is paramount. Potential investors need to be enticed. Also think about the network that you can draw upon. Yes, your idea is online but so are lots of others. Who is retweeting your proposal? **Explore your connections**. And the connections of your connections. In an ideal world, you want to find someone who carries leverage and has a following. I accept that Stephen Fry might prove out of reach but there may be other high(ish)-profile figures and organisations willing to plug your cause. Another factor is whether your project will be confined to a particular region. If so, people from the area might have a vested interest in ensuring you succeed but you might also exclude a significant proportion of the audience that an online platform gives you access to. It makes sense then to draw out some of the broader lessons that might emerge from your work.

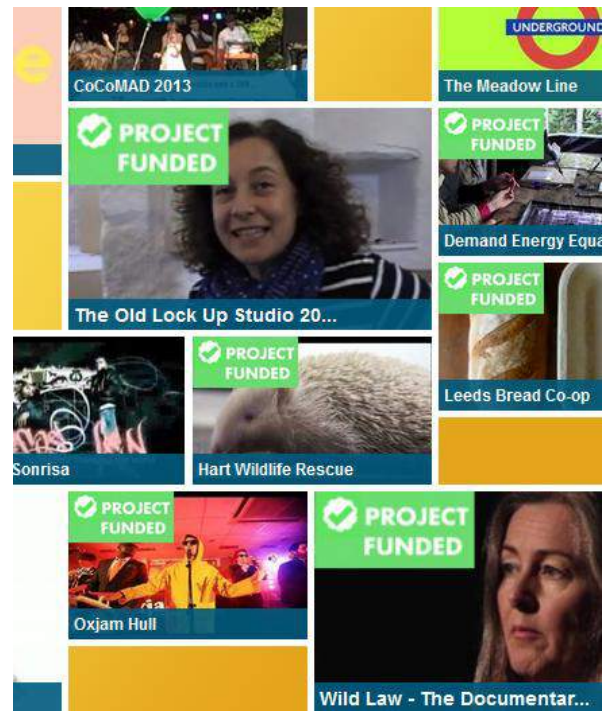
## What tools are available?

Many of the major crowdfunding platforms started in the US, such as [Kickstarter](#) and [Indiegogo](#), but apart from dollar signs being scattered across your page this tends to mean little in the online world. If you do take greater comfort from using home-grown services, however, you'll be pleased to know that the UK's crowdfunding arena is rapidly growing. [Buzzbnk](#) is one of the most flexible for social enterprises and offers a milestone service so your efforts don't go to waste should your ultimate funding target prove unachievable. [Crowdfunder UK](#) is another major player in the UK's crowdfunding market, especially since merging with [People Fund It](#). [WeFund](#) is specifically for arts projects while [Sponsor Craft](#) focuses on education. [Seedrs](#) and [Crowdcube](#) are for raising funds in exchange for equity while [Funding Circle](#) can be used to raise loan investment through peer-to-peer lending. You might also wish to visit [Crowd Fund UK](#) or the [UK Crowdfunding Association](#) which both offer advice and support for navigating the field.

## Any examples?

The [Leeds Bread Co-op](#) was set up to **increase consumption and knowledge of organic bread**, to tread lightly on the environment in the process, and to provide an ethical workplace for its employees. As well as meeting the bread demands of the Leeds community, and supporting organic suppliers in the area, the co-op also plans to run bakery classes. But none of this would have been possible without baking equipment. To get started, the bakers needed a good quality, 5-deck, 15-tray **bread oven**. I'm not entirely sure what that means but it's expensive. Somewhere in the region of £8,000. And so they turned to [People Fund It](#), now part of [Crowdfunder UK](#).

The bakers launched their crowdfunding project at the end of October 2012. By 19<sup>th</sup> December, the group had managed to raise **£8,690 from 114 donors**. If the project had not reached its funding target by this date then they would have received nothing. So it's good that it did. The short introductory video which they posted on the project profile would certainly have helped as would the clarity and obvious value of their proposal. But if that wasn't enough, the bakers also promised **various rewards for project backers**. Depending on the donation made, these ranged from an invitation to the launch party to a voucher for the co-op's bakery classes, and from a specially designed postcard to the delivery of a loaf of bread every week for one year. **Coverage in the local media** also helped to ensure the crowdfunding effort was successful. A few months down the line and the Leeds Bread Co-op is in full swing. 'Volkenbrot' sounds especially appealing if you're keen...



*Leeds Bread Co-op joined other projects that have used 'People Fund It' to finance their cause.*

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## INNOVATION 3: PRO BONO

PURPOSE: TO FIND PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE

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### What's the problem?

Charities and social enterprises often lack the necessary knowledge and skills to develop all aspects of their business. Nor are they likely to have the financial clout to pay high prices for consultancy. Operating as a business means competing for trade within a certain market and planning for the sustainability of business activities. It means using effective vehicles for communicating a message, and branding products and services in a way that attracts custom. It means identifying and setting up an appropriate legal status, and operating in line with legal requirements. To succeed as a social enterprise requires **practical knowledge across a wide range of specialist fields**. And attempting to navigate these arenas can deflect attention away from the primary social objective towards which a social enterprise is working.

### What can we do?

How about make the most of **free professional assistance**? Pro bono is short for 'pro bono publico' which literally means **'for the public good'**. And under this umbrella, all manner of institutions and trained professionals are offering their services to worthy causes. This is often

provided free of charge or at least at a heavily discounted price. There are two primary reasons. First, many organisations and individuals are keen to find ways of **giving something back** to the community. This is especially the case as calls for responsible business gather momentum. Second, students of a certain profession need ways to gain **practical experience** in the field. Pro bono support is available across a range of professions. It is perhaps most prevalent in the fields of law, marketing and business planning but can also be found in IT, architecture, medicine and various other sectors.

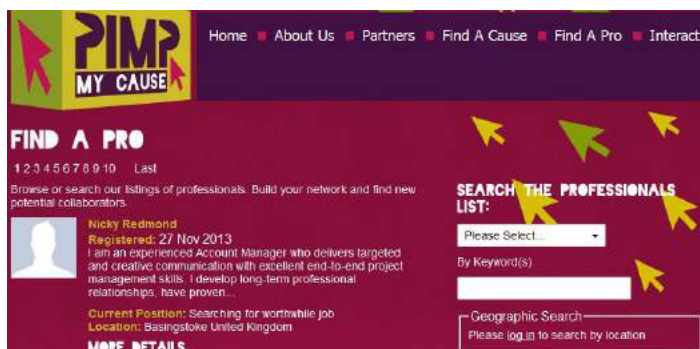
## How does it work?

All that happens, in one way or another, is a charity or social enterprise requests **assistance from an organisation or individual with expertise in a particular profession**. Of course, both the process for setting up a partnership, and the support that is made available, can vary. Sometimes you will find ways of contacting individuals directly. On other occasions you might need to apply for support at an institutional level. The type of assistance provided **will depend upon your needs**. For instance, if you wish to establish the most suitable legal status for carrying out your work, or to set up a super duper website, then assistance will only be needed for a finite period of time. Alternatively, you might set up a longer lasting relationship with a partner organisation providing support as and when you need it, perhaps in more of a coaching or mentoring role.

## Anything to be wary of?

Unlike voluntary work, pro bono specifically refers to the assistance provided by skilled professionals to organisations that would otherwise be unable to afford it. Nevertheless, you needn't think that support can only be found by searching under this label. Not all businesses or trained professionals will advertise their community services as 'pro bono'. In fact, they might not advertise the possibility of free assistance at all! There is no harm whatsoever in contacting local firms and businesses to see if they might be able to support your work. But make sure you give a **sense of how they could also benefit** from the partnership. The added value for a business that invests in the local community is not to be sniffed at. After all, didn't they have a bit of a bad run in the papers recently...?

## What tools are available?



*Pimp My Cause provides a database of professional designers and marketers offering free support.*

There are plenty of online and offline services that can be used to link with professionals. These often vary in terms of their focus. If you are in need of legal assistance then check out [I-Probono](#). This platform claims to be the first online portal for connecting charities and social enterprises with lawyers and students. Alternatively, [LawWorks](#) is a well-established network but uses an offline



application process. [Lancaster University Law Society](#) advocates pro bono as a way for students to gain practical experience in the field. Current projects primarily focus on crime and education but it would be worth getting in touch if you have specific needs. For design and marketing assistance, start with [PimpMyCause](#) which holds an online database of skilled professionals. For those organisations interested in measuring the social impact of their work, [Pro Bono Economics](#) provides assistance in data collection and analysis. As yet, there is not an online platform which works effectively across professions but expect this to change in the near future.

## Any examples?

[Upbeat Music](#) offers support to those with mental health problems. Based in Camden, and open to the wider London community, the project uses **music as a form of therapy** for service users. The charity provides 'training, workshops, recording, mentoring, performances and social events'. Most importantly, Upbeat Music instils a sense of belonging for those that join its musical community.



*Upbeat Music uses music to support those with experience of mental health problems.*

Yet, in order to spread the word, to find people willing to support the project, and to attract possible service users, Upbeat Music needed a website. And so it turned to [Pimp My Cause](#). This online platform is intended to connect **professional marketers** that have some spare time on their hands, to **good causes** that are in need of support. All you have to do is register your profile, put out an ad for the support you need and browse through the various professionals that are on the database. Oh, and send a message to possible collaborators. Pretty much like an online dating agency if you want to think of it in those terms...

So in August 2011, Upbeat Music registered on the database in the hope they might find some professionals to help redesign their outdated website. Soon enough a meeting was set up with a couple of web experts (yes, in real, physical space!) and the Upbeat representatives were able to outline their requirements. They wanted something **easy to use and easy to manage**; something that would stand out to potential donors and would showcase some of the work that Upbeat was doing.

A few months later and the design of the website was complete. Further pro bono assistance was found to develop the website and by July 2013 the site was at the forefront of Upbeat's online profile. There are images, song recordings, and a news page. It's highly professional stuff. As you would expect. But pro bono does not stop with website development. It can be used in all aspects of your work. And finding support need not be limited to the use of online platforms. Upbeat is always on the lookout for musicians able to help out with its work....

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## INNOVATION 4: GAMING TECHNOLOGY

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PURPOSE: TO SPREAD AWARENESS AND ENGAGE BENEFICIARIES

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### What's the problem?

Social enterprises are seeking **new ways to spread awareness** of the cause for which they are working. And they are exploring **new methods for engaging disadvantaged groups**. How can you move with the times? People are living in a world increasingly dominated by the use of digital media. This means two things. Firstly, it is largely through the use of such media that knowledge of a current issue is raised and support for a worthy cause gathers momentum. But with so much information and content readily available, many of the world's problems are competing for attention. Second, in order to get by in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century there is a growing requirement for people to have at least a basic understanding of how the digital world works. But levels of access and knowledge are not universal.

### What can we do?

Gaming technology presents an opportunity for social enterprises to both engage a wider audience, and to develop their work with disadvantaged groups. **Digital games** are played on all manner of different devices; from the rapidly ageing desktop computer to the newest, smallest smart phone. There are apparently 20 million mobile gamers in the UK alone. How can the time and attention committed to digital gaming be tapped into by social enterprises? The rise of open source programming platforms has made the design of gaming technology **a feasible project** for a whole range of different organisations, groups and individuals. This is no longer just the monopoly of big business. And there is no reason why social enterprises shouldn't take advantage. Games can be used **to educate** people about a particular issue and **to increase the support** for your work. You might go one step further. The demand for skilled programmers will only increase but accessing and understanding the digital world is not an option for many. The dominance of digital media has generated **new forms of exclusion and disadvantage**. Perhaps your social objectives, and your methods of working, can help to address this challenge.

### How does it work?

Your initial response to the idea of developing some kind of mobile gaming app could well be a resounding "no". If this has anything to do with not having the money or the expertise then read on! **Simple apps can be designed and made available for free**. Ok, they may require a little time, and maybe some assistance, but the impact could make it all worthwhile. Even if you choose to employ professional support the costs need not amount to that much. In any case, this could well be a chance to explore the value of pro bono networks as described in the previous section. In terms of design, a recent discussion on the [Guardian's Social Enterprise Network](#) offered plenty of advice about how to make the most of mobile gaming: **market your product** before its launch – ideally, it is integrated into the marketing of your work more broadly; don't make your game too

negative – there needs to be an **element of enjoyment** to attract users; **test your ideas** on a sample audience as you go along – and make sure you listen to their feedback.

## Anything to be wary of?

One of the main dangers of entering this arena is spending a lot of time and money on launching something that doesn't take off. No surprise there. But don't let that completely put you off. The market for gaming technology is a competitive one but if you have a clear idea of your audience and a realistic sense of what is possible then it can prove a valuable field to become involved in. Before fully committing yourself to gaming technology, think creatively about how you can make it work for you. And then **start small**.

## What tools are available?

If you are interested in seeing if game design is for you, there are various open source platforms that can be used to experiment. [Game Editor](#) allows you to develop games for a range of digital technologies. [Gamestar Mechanic](#) is a game programming platform specifically designed for children but open to everyone. Alternatively, once launched, [Mouple](#) will enable users to design their own digital interfaces which can then be made available for others to download. It might also be possible to find another social enterprise which provides support in designing social impact applications. [Decode Global](#) offers this service but its focus is limited to North America and Asia at the moment. Keep an eye out for new enterprises which fill this gap in the UK. Or fill it yourself...

## Any examples?

For a local example, take a look at [Less is More](#). This project brings together [LESS](#), a Lancaster social enterprise focused on sustainable living, and the [Catalyst research programme](#) at Lancaster University. They are trialling a **mobile game designed to encourage more sustainable lifestyles**. Players set themselves a number of **everyday challenges** to try and meet, such as walking to work or turning down the thermostat. Once a challenge has been achieved the gamers log their activity through GPS mapping or by uploading evidence. They are then rewarded with **online points** which can be exchanged for more tangible prizes such as free bus tickets or vouchers for a local bakery. In the process of playing, whether the player is successful or not, they are at least made more aware of the impact that their lifestyles might have. As a secondary objective, the Less is More project is inviting volunteers to help those without IT skills or internet access to play the game.

Another project working with gaming technology is [Excite-ed](#). Bringing together



*Planet Excite-ed is used to sell educational games designed by children.*



experience in education, i-touch technology, gaming design and marketing, this social enterprise works with **teachers and children** to provide them with the skills to design and develop mobile applications. Recognising that young people are growing up in a digital world, the project enables children to translate the **social issues** that might affect them **into a gaming format**. This provides them with the knowledge and expertise to thrive in tomorrow's labour market.

For instance, students at a school in Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, have developed an app which addresses cyber-bullying. 'CyberSafe' is designed to appeal to 7-14 year olds and can be used on phones, iPads, tablets or PCs. 'Simple Salah' is another digital game created with the help of Excite-ed. This was developed at Al Amanah School in Watford and provides an alternative way for children to learn Islamic prayers and positions. Planet Excite-ed is an online platform where the various games and apps designed by children can be bought. This provides an important source of income for Excite-ed which enables future work to be carried out.

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## INNOVATION 5: DATA MANAGEMENT

PURPOSE: TO INFORM DECISION MAKING

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### What's the problem?

Many social enterprises suffer from an **'information deficit'**. A lack of relevant data can mean that decisions about the design and delivery of services are made with only a partial understanding of the issues at hand. It can also mean that organisations are unable to effectively demonstrate the impact of their work which can lead to future funding problems. Information can be generated about all aspects of a social enterprise's work, but it is rarely used to its full potential.

### What can we do?

The management of data can be broken down into four categories. First, there is the collection or **'mining' of data** that is relevant to your work. This will probably relate to the communities with which you are working, or the impact of the services you provide. Second, **data needs to be analysed**. What does it show and how can it be used to inform future decisions? Third, how should data be visualised? Spreading awareness of an issue or highlighting the impact of your work means **representing data** in ways that engage the intended audience. Finally, effective data management means **storing your material securely**, or finding ways to share it only with certain collaborators.

### How does it work?

Data can be of the quantitative or qualitative kind. The first gives you breadth, the second gives you depth. Both are valuable. And ideally they should be used together. More conventional data comes in the form of surveys, interviews, photographic and video imagery. But as people turn to the digital world for living out their lives, data on their **opinions, preferences, behaviours and experiences** are being generated all the time. Much of the time, this is openly available. It can be

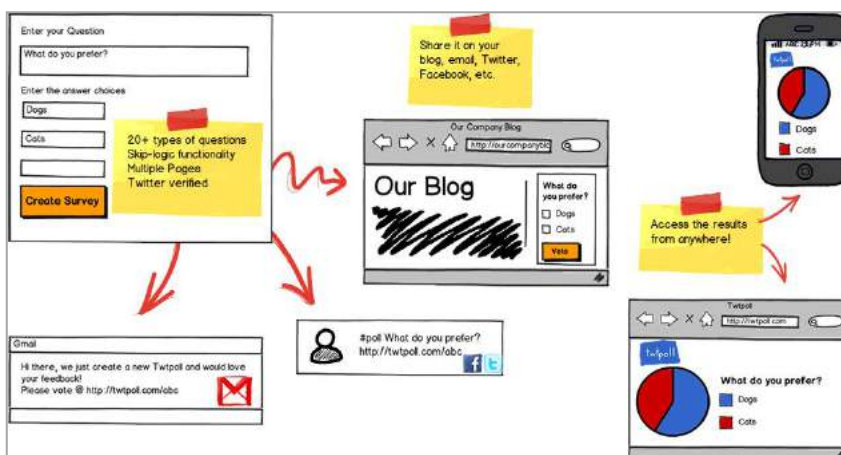
used to assess **popular trends and social media content**, to identify emerging issues, and to tailor products and services to particular target communities. To take things a step further, a social enterprise might actively use **online media to generate feedback and data** relating directly to their cause, to spread awareness of a particular issue, or to highlight the impact of their work.

## Anything to be wary of?

The words ‘**big data**’ have probably found their way onto your radar in the past couple of years. Essentially, this is data that is high in volume and variety, and requires considerable computing power to process. It has become particularly important as businesses and organisations attempt to make the most of the digital traces left by people as they navigate the web. It is likely, however, that using big data for a social cause will not be possible for most social enterprises. Unless you find a business partner that wishes to collaborate in this area, it is probably better to innovate with information that you have more readily at hand.

## What tools are available?

There are so many freely available tools relating to data management that I can provide only a flavour of the possibilities. If you wish to start by gathering and analysing data about your own organisation’s strengths and weaknesses, the [Organisational Capacity Assessment Tool](#) (OCAT) from McKinsey is worth checking out. For calculating the value of your work, [Tools and Resources for Assessing Social Impact](#) (TRASI) provides an extensive database of impact measurement tools. Open data relating to issues and trends at a global scale can be found and compared at [Gapminder](#) and [Worldometers](#). For keeping on top of issues that are attracting attention, [Google Trends](#) provides information on the most common internet searches while [Alexa](#) shows the most visited websites and [What the Trend](#) gives a summary of the topics receiving most coverage on Twitter. [Tweet Chart](#) allows you to search for what people are saying about any keyword (e.g. your organisation or area of interest). To generate your own data, consider starting an online survey ([TwtPoll](#)) or petition ([Change](#)). [Infogram](#) and [Easel.ly](#) are tools for visualising and representing data.



*TwtPoll is an application that can be used to carry out surveys across social media platforms.*

In terms of circulating relevant content, think of creating magazines ([Flipboard](#) or [SimpleBooklet](#)), make videos of your work and its impact ([UStream](#) or [Vine](#)), or record and share the content of your computer screen ([Screenr](#)). [MixBit](#) can be used to make videos collaboratively. Private and public ‘cloud’ infrastructure, such as [Dropbox](#), allow users to store and share

data as they see fit. At the very least, check out the information and resources on [TechSoup](#) which offers the latest data advice and resources for social enterprises and non-profit organisations.

### Any examples?

The [Medway Youth Trust](#) has recently attracted media coverage for its **use of data to inform decision making**. The charity works in Medway, southeast of London, to provide guidance and **support for young people** that are at risk of disadvantage. Their mission has been made more manageable through the use of **Tableau software**. This is used to analyse and visualise the data that the Trust collects from schools, interviews and various other sources. The technology can handle both structured and unstructured data which allows all manner of relevant content, including randomly organised textual information, to be analysed and represented together. Use of the technology has enabled Medway Youth Trust **to simulate the likely paths** of young people within the community, and to target its effort accordingly. The visual representations generated by the software have also helped to engage potential funders.

Alternatively you might see value in using online media to harness **the power of collective opinion**. The UK Government's [e-petition service](#) means that if you collect 100,000 signatures for a particular cause, the issue will be considered for debate in Parliament. In India, [I Paid a Bribe](#) was introduced to focus attention on the extent of corruption. The platform invites citizens to provide details of any bribes they have paid or been offered. The data is subjected to analysis and represented in various chart formats. The model has since been introduced to other countries battling corruption.

Finally, for a local example of how data is being used in innovative ways, keep an eye on the [Community Data Explorer](#). This is an initiative run by the Catalyst research programme at Lancaster in partnership with [CyberMoor](#) which focuses on rural digital inclusion in Alston Moor, Cumbria. The project is exploring how public data can be represented in ways that enable community members to reflect on the delivery of services. It is hoped that a mobile app for **accessing and visualising open data** will provide local citizens with the information they need for new community-led initiatives.

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## INNOVATION 6: ALTERNATIVE CURRENCY

PURPOSE: TO BUY SOCIAL

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### What's the problem?

Social enterprises can only do so much on their own. The dominant system of exchange is one that serves to maximise profit and it is a significant challenge to ensure that every transaction you make lives up to your social ideals. Your profits may well be used for public good and you may well have invested significant time and effort in finding similarly minded suppliers. Perhaps you know who you are dealing with. But who are they dealing with? **Supply chains can stretch a long way.**

This means that much of the capital that could be used to generate positive social impact is ultimately allowed to drain into the more overtly commercial world. In fact, it seems that social enterprises aren't doing all that much business with one another. The 'Buy Social' campaign has been launched by SEUK in response to the finding that 1 in 4 social enterprises do not have another such organisation in their supply chain. Only 13% count other social enterprises as their majority suppliers. It is only through **collaboration from within** that the social enterprise movement can gain momentum.

## What can we do?

Establishing an alternative currency can ensure that **investment in social good is ring-fenced**. For instance, a community currency for use within certain geographical boundaries can help to sustain **local supply chains**, and prevent the draining of value into other areas. An alternative currency might also ensure that transactions only ever involve businesses and organisations that ascribe to a **socially oriented mantra**. Moving further away from the conventions of monetary exchange, there are also systems for earning and using credits in return for **time and labour**. Forms of exchange have been around for millennia and certainly precede the existing capitalist model within which we are working. But now we have mobile payment systems, internet banking, and various online platforms for conducting business. And there is a growing desire to use them for social good.

## How does it work?

Alternative currencies can take any number of forms. These inevitably vary in terms of their reach and the products and services for which they can be used. **Local equivalents to the national currency** have been introduced with varying success in communities across the UK. These often use some sort of incentive for converting pound sterling into the local tender (and a disincentive for making the reverse move). Locally, [Lancaster ESTA](#) is working with researchers from Lancaster University to develop a [BARTER card](#) which tracks movement of money within the local economy and aims to encourage responsible spending behaviour. [Local Exchange Trading Systems](#) (LETS) and [time banking](#) initiatives have been used to reward work that is typically undervalued by the dominant market system. These enable people to lend their time and skills in exchange for some form of **community-recognised credit** which can then be handed over in return for future assistance. Credits of this kind cannot usually be exchanged for the national tender.

## Anything to be wary of?

If you are seeking to buy from similarly minded groups and organisations, or believe that an alternative currency could help to ensure this, then some sort of **robust certification system** would probably help. In terms of auditing and recognising the validity of social enterprises within the UK, the [Social Enterprise Mark](#) has been particularly active in this regard.



*Seeking out the Social Enterprise Mark is one way of ensuring you 'buy social'.*

## What tools are available?

If for the moment you are just keen to buy your goods and supplies from other social enterprises then there are various directories available. [BuySe](#) is probably one of the best. The [Social Enterprise Mark](#) has a directory of certified organisations while [Shop For Change](#) also provides a



*There are various platforms that enable you to earn credits in return for your time and labour.*

list of social enterprises to buy from. If you wish to consider a system of exchange based upon the sharing of labour and skills then take a look at [Teaching Giving Learning](#) or [SkillsBox](#). For those that harbour dreams of establishing their own local currency, the [New Economics Foundation](#) can provide support.

## Any examples?

The [Bristol Pound](#) stems from a not-for-profit partnership between Bristol Pound Community Interest Company and Bristol Credit Union. The currency was introduced in September 2012 as a way **to support local, independent traders**, and to keep wealth within Bristol. Over 600 businesses and organisations within the city are now registered to accept the money (£B), over 1,200 people hold Bristol Pound accounts and there is more than £B200, 000 in circulation.

Rather than seeking to replace the national currency, the Bristol Pound was introduced as a **complementary and voluntary system of exchange**. Individuals and businesses start by opening an account with Bristol Credit Union, which is regulated by the Financial Services Authority. For every £B printed, an equivalent pound sterling is taken out of the economy and placed within a trust. The exchange rate is fixed at 1:1 which means that if the local currency should collapse, account holders would be covered. The fixed exchange rate also means that, for tax purposes, all transactions made in Bristol Pounds are treated as if they were made in pound sterling. If individuals or businesses wish to convert their £B back into pound sterling, they are charged a 3% fee.

For many, the principle of keeping money within the local economy is enough to gain their support. But **incentives for using the local currency** are more than a philosophy. Central to the success of the Bristol Pound is the flexibility that it offers in terms of payment. It can be transferred as paper, through a mobile payment system, or online. Furthermore, many local businesses registered to the scheme offer discounts to customers that use £B. The benefits for businesses that register to accept the currency include free advertising and a low cost means of accepting electronic payments (relative to debit and credit card transactions).

The jury is out on how successful the currency will prove. But just over a year since its launch, the progress has been steady. Residents can use Bristol Pounds to pay for food, rent, bus journeys, and accountancy services. Importantly, the Bristol Pound also has the support of the city council which means that residents can pay many of their local taxes using the currency. And George Ferguson, the first elected Mayor of Bristol, even takes his salary in £B.

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## INNOVATION 7: SOCIAL IMPACT BONDS

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PURPOSE: TO SECURE FUNDING

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### What's the problem?

When it comes to funding the delivery of public services, it is often the taxpayer that carries the **risk of failure**. Through a system of grants and contracts, UK governments have progressively shifted responsibility for the delivery of public services to external service providers. Indeed, despite retracting funding in certain areas, the public sector remains the single biggest buyer of products and services within the UK. There is every chance, however, that public funds are spent on **projects that prove ineffective**. This becomes all the more important if the problem that a project was supposed to address escalates into something more costly further down the line.

### What can we do?

Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) are used by the government as a way to direct **private sector funds** towards the **delivery of public services**. This model of funding links the returns that an investor might receive on their investment to the successful achievement of specific outcomes. Gobbledegook. Yes. Ok. So an investor wishes to invest in a project that will address a social problem but also carries the possibility of financial reward. The government wishes to fund the delivery of public services but does not want to foot the bill if service delivery proves ineffective. The social enterprise wishes to finance its activities. These three interests come together in the SIB. Private investment is used to provide service providers with **upfront funding** to address a social problem. The investor only receives a return on that investment if certain predefined targets are met by the service provider. If this is the case, the government pays the investor a return from the savings it made by using the private sector to fund service delivery.

### How does it work?

The process is likely to be initiated by a **commissioning body** (perhaps a Government Department or Local Authority) that wishes to tackle a particular **social issue** through **preventative measures**. This means that a service provider seeking SIB funding will have to wait until an opportunity to tender arises. It should also be noted that in bidding for funding of this kind, you will be signing up to a **set of criteria** by which your success will be measured. For SIBs, these tend to consist of target **'outcomes'** rather than 'outputs'. This means a focus on broad targets rather than specific methods of service delivery, and is therefore seen as a way to free the service provider from having to use prescribed tools in pursuit of its social goal.

### What should I be wary of?

The SIB model is a form of **payment by results** (pbr). In the case of SIBs, 'payment' refers to the return that an *investor* will receive if the service provider performs as hoped. The funding for a social enterprise to carry out its work is provided upfront and there is no requirement for this to be paid back, even if the targets are not met. However, in other instances, payment by results can

also refer to the service provider. This means that payments to the service provider are withheld if their work is not delivering the target outcomes.

## What tools are available?

The SIB model is constantly evolving and the detail of each opportunity that arises will differ. The best place to start is probably at the [Centre for Social Impact Bonds](#) which is working to improve and embed the use of SIBs across government. [Social Finance](#), which issued the first SIB back in 2010, also offers plenty of information and advice. Other bodies which support the use of SIBs are the [Social Outcomes Fund](#), the [Social Incubator Fund](#), [Commissioning Better Outcomes](#), and [Bridges Social Impact Bond Fund](#).

## Any examples?

The UK's first SIB was introduced by **Social Finance** in September 2010 as a way to tackle the **problem of reconviction** when offenders are released from prison. High rates of reconviction present a considerable cost to government departments and service providers, but previous efforts to address the issue through preventative rehabilitation have met with limited success. In order to avoid using the public purse for work that does little to improve the situation, Social Finance used the SIB model to fund a new project called [One Service](#) in Peterborough.

One Service specifically aims to **reduce re-offending** amongst male offenders that have been released from HM Prison Peterborough after a sentence of less than 12 months. Throughout much of the country there is lack of support for prisoners newly released from short term sentences. This means that many previous offenders quickly revert to a life of crime. One Service combines the **skills and expertise from a range of charitable organisations** to provide a highly effective rehabilitation programme. Support ranges from housing issues to job training and is provided immediately upon prisoner release. The project expects to help some 3,000 ex-offenders resettle into the community.

To fund this service, **£5 million** was raised by Social Finance from private investors. If One Service manages to **reduce re-offending by 7.5% or more** over the course of six years then it will be deemed a success. The Ministry of Justice and the Big Lottery Fund will then pay investors a share of the savings that the government makes through the reduction in reconvictions. And if One Service performs beyond this 7.5% threshold then investors will receive an increasing rate of return. If the project fails to achieve the target reduction then investors receive nothing.

And so far, the results seem pretty good. Certainly good enough to attract plenty of media coverage. In June 2013, the Ministry of Justice announced a 6% drop in reconvictions for prisoners released from HMP Peterborough compared with a 14% increase nationally. It seems that with more upfront money available, a reasonable amount of time over which to meet targets, and close monitoring of what works and what doesn't, service providers are able to continually refine their methods for engaging with offenders. Although Social Finance and One Service have treated the data with caution, the success of the innovation should become clearer next year when investors in the SIB may be entitled to their first payment.



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## INNOVATION 8: CROSS SUBSIDISATION

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PURPOSE: TO BECOME SELF SUSTAINING

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### What's the problem?

The funding of a traditional charity depends to a large degree upon grants and donations. But unless that charity is well established, with extensive coverage, generating income in this way is unlikely to prove sustainable. The **availability of public funding** comes and goes. The **goodwill of philanthropists** cannot be relied upon. Social enterprises are therefore encouraged to adopt a **trading business model** whereby products and services are sold for a fee within a competitive marketplace. The idea is for their activities to become self-funding. Yet, it is often the case that the groups and individuals that an organisation wishes to help are **unable to afford the services** available. Any contribution that they might be able to make is unlikely to cover the full cost of providing support.

### What can we do?

'Cross-subsidisation' means that the revenue needed to finance a particular service or product is generated through activities that are distinct from that service or product. For a social enterprise, it is a method of ensuring that the primary beneficiaries of your work do not need to pay the full cost, if anything at all, for the support that they receive. To make this possible, a social enterprise develops different products or services which can be sold at a profitable price in other markets. Most of the profit (usually more than 50%) is then reinvested in the primary social purpose towards which the enterprise is working. In some cases, the **delivery of a public service** may be **100% subsidised by trading other goods** meaning that beneficiaries are not charged for your support. A simpler model of cross-subsidisation means that the cost of the services you provide varies with the financial standing of the customer. The same services are provided to everyone but the price paid by some is used to subsidise the price paid by others (e.g. the unemployed). This is called an equitable fee structure.

### How does it work?



*Elvis and Kresse sell bags and belts made from old fire hoses, and give up to 50% of profits to the Fire Fighters Charity.*

Ok, so this is another of those ideas that isn't really that new. Charity shops are an obvious example of cross-subsidisation and they have been around for years. The **innovative part is down to you**. How you choose to make your project self-sustainable will depend upon the issues on which you are working, the groups that you target, and the skills that you have at hand. [Elvis and Kresse](#) sell bags, belts and other accessories that they make out of old fire hose and jute sack. Up to 50% of their profits go towards projects and charities linked to the materials they reclaim. [Cinque Ports Community](#)



[Kitchen](#) uses the profits made from its parent restaurant business to finance a range of cookery courses for disadvantaged people in East Kent. The ways in which cross-subsidisation is used across the social enterprise sector are endless. As a first step in this direction, it is worth undertaking a **skills audit** to uncover all those hidden talents that you and your partners might draw upon.

### Anything to be wary of?

The **Community Interest Company (CIC)** was introduced in 2005 as a legal structure specifically for social enterprises that expect to generate the majority of their income through trade. It is designed to provide an organisation with the **flexibility and entrepreneurial freedom** of a commercial business whilst ensuring that the profits generated are reinvested towards a social mission. However, a charity wishing to register as a CIC must give up its **charitable status**, including any **tax advantages** that it might previously have benefitted from. This means, for instance, that if you do find people wanting to donate to your work then you cannot reclaim the tax on their contribution. There are ways around this. For example, it might be possible to link with a local charity that is willing to take donations on your behalf, to take advantage of their own tax relief entitlements (e.g. Gift Aid), and to send the revised figure in your direction in the form of a block grant. For social enterprises in Lancaster, the [Community Foundation for Lancashire](#) may be able to fulfil this role.

### What tools are available?

If you are keen to sell your wares within a competitive marketplace, then you should seek the added value that comes from advertising your products within the right arenas. Of course, [ebay](#) is the global leader in terms of providing an online forum for reaching an audience of potential buyers. [Etsy](#) specialises in handmade and vintage items, and is supportive of social impact businesses. There are also platforms specifically designed for advertising the services offered by social enterprises. Join the [BuySe](#) directory and you're away.

### Any examples?

[Bristol Bike Project](#) is an excellent example of how the trading of goods and services can be used to finance a social mission. The project was set up in 2008 as a response to the difficulties that **asylum seekers** face in **becoming mobile**. The two founders began collecting and repairing **broken bicycles**, and redistributing them to those in need through a local refugee charity. Soon enough, both the supply of broken bikes and the demand for working bikes had increased to unmanageable levels. The



*Bristol Bike Project subsidises its work with disadvantaged groups with the income made through its trading arm.*

entrepreneurs had clearly found a promising venture but it was proving too much for the time they had available and for the humble backyard in which they worked. They needed more hands, more tools, a bigger workspace and, most importantly, a better system for engaging service users.

A few years down the line, with the aid of new premises and a dedicated group of volunteers, Bristol Bike Project doesn't just hand out bikes. Through its innovative 'Earn-A-Bike' scheme, users of the project spend a few hours in the workshop learning basic skills in bike maintenance. And the beneficiaries are no longer just asylum seekers. **Recovering drug addicts, people with learning difficulties and ex-offenders** can also learn to repair a bicycle before taking it away. Through instilling a sense of **bike ownership** and providing a supportive space for learning new skills, the system excels as a way to engage marginalised groups.

Yet in all likelihood, Bristol Bike Project would not be viable if it was just handing out free training and newly repaired bicycles. For this reason, it has also established a **trading arm**. In another part of the workshop, there are a number of bikes which can be bought or hired by the general public. The project also offers a professional repair service and runs maintenance courses for the wider community. Providing these services to paying customers enables the project to support its social mission.

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## INNOVATION 9: 3D PRINTING

PURPOSE: TO DEVELOP PRODUCTS AND ENGAGE BENEFICIARIES

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### What's the problem?

There are many. Amputees cannot afford prosthetic limbs. Creative designers have no way of bringing their ideas into production. Social enterprises need new products to sell. The power to decide what is made, and **how 'making' occurs**, rests in the hands of a few. Everything is looking the same. Objects that might help to make the world a better place are being crowded out by goods and products that serve little social or environmental purpose. Sorry. Rant over. My point is simply that **people with a social conscience should be able to make things**. And that a shift from mass manufacturing to individualised production might prove a positive development.

### What can we do?

3D printing, or '**desktop fabrication**', is apparently set to take the world by storm. Ok you might not buy into such hyperbole but this technology certainly offers new ways to tackle the issues listed above. 3D printing combines computer aided design and an additive manufacturing process **to sculpt almost any object**, any shape, that you wish. The technology has been used to make phone covers, guitars, greenhouses, bicycles, jewellery, aeroplane components. You name it, it can be printed. (Ok, so not "happiness" or "mist", or "a living badger", or anything like that. But still.) The best thing is that basic printers can be bought for as little as a few hundred pounds. And someone has even had the clever idea of manufacturing a **self-replicating machine** which means

that prices will probably keep on falling. Oh and the other best thing is that many object designs are **openly accessible online**. Anyway, all this means that the design and manufacture of products is open to more people, requires less time, and comes at reduced cost.

## How does it work?

You really want the technical details? I have no idea. You use some kind of computer aided design package (freely available) to digitally create an object. Computer hopefully says “yes” and sends it to your new shiny printer. You **load it up** with the plastic or nylon or glass or silver filament that you wish to use as ‘ink’ (the range of material that can be used is increasing all the time). Some kind of printer gun then layers the material exactly as you want it. **Voila!** Something like that. How you might use this technology for a social purpose is up to you. Perhaps there is a product that would help to improve the lives of your beneficiaries. Maybe you could design and sell a new accessory to help fund your work. Income can also be made through selling your designs online. Alternatively, you might provide a space for people to develop their own skills in 3D printing.

## Anything to be wary of?

I imagine upon getting this far through the idea that you’ve already had reason to jump from your seat and protest that the world is already too cluttered with manufactured goods. That we already extract too much, make too much, and waste too much. I agree with you. The environmental imperative surely points to producing *less*. But again, this is where 3D printing could excel. Not only can it be used to manufacture useful products, but the **choice of input material** might also bring positive change. Extensive effort is being put into producing 3D printer filament from waste material. It turns out there are even **home recycling systems** that could be used to produce printer filament. Even better, the [Ethical Filament Foundation](#) is looking into using the rubbish collected by waste pickers to produce material usable in 3D printing.

## What tools are available?

Take a look at one of the many companies that offer 3D products to get an idea of what this technology can be used for. [Materialise](#) is a good one. When you feel ready to try your hand at 3D design, [Sketchup](#) offers a free package that can be downloaded to your computer. Software from [123D](#) allows you to convert photos into digital objects. [Thingiverse](#) provides a forum for sharing 3D designs under a creative commons license.

Before investing in any printing technology you will probably want to experiment with what is possible. Perhaps there is a local business that offers space and tools to practice. [Makerversity](#) operates in London. [Black Country Atelier](#) runs a workshop in Birmingham and offers classes in digital making. If and when you decide to invest in your own printing machine, check out the products



*Makerbot is one of many companies that sell 3D printing machines.*

offered by [Makerbot](#). Or make your own using the open source [RepRap](#) design.

## Any examples?

Ok, I admit this is all a little 'off piste' for me. But let me indulge in just one more super thing to get excited about. [Manor House Development Trust](#) is a charitable social enterprise which helps to deliver **public services in Hackney** and to enable full participation of the local community in the regeneration of the area. In 2012, it sought to install a **community-based sculpture** at the Redmond Community Centre in Woodberry Down, North East Hackney. As with any piece of artwork like this, the most pressing question was how best to involve and represent the community. They sought the input of [Something & Son](#), a creative agency committed to a more sustainable world, which then partnered with 3D printing specialist, [Inition](#). The recipe for craziness. "Err... I know! I know! How about a crowd-sourced data sculpture featuring a forest of over 400 3D-printed trees, each corresponding to an individual's answers to an online questionnaire?!". Confused faces, shuffling feet, nervous laughter... "It can hang from the ceiling!" Nods all round.



*Manor House Development Trust used 3D printing technology to create a 'community forest'. It now hangs from the ceiling of the Redmond Community Centre.*

The so-called **People Wood infosculpture** is considered both a **work of art and a source of information**. It is art because it's a colourful 3D-printed forest that hangs from the ceiling. It's a source of information because each tree is based upon a member of the community. Yep, seriously. The roundness of a tree trunk represents the diversity of an individual's ancestral roots. The length of the branches derives from the years they have lived in the area. A resident's level of interaction with their neighbours is reflected in the spread of a tree's branches. There is also

variation in the colour and brightness of the tree tips. Areas with more pronounced, brightly coloured fruit represent more active parts of the community. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is the first time that online data of this kind has been transformed into a 3D sculpture.

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## SOME FINAL WORDS

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So that's it! Nine innovations, twelve pretty pictures, and a fair few stories along the way. Hopefully you're still with me. Not that there's much left to say. I guess it's worth reiterating that these ideas will never work for everyone. I can certainly imagine that the reader who gets excited about 3D Printing is less enthralled by Social Impact Bonds. But then, you never know. What really matters is how the many concepts and tools that are out there are brought to bear on your own priorities. And, in turn, how you choose to give back. As I mentioned in the introduction so long ago, innovation is never the act of a solitary hero or heroine. It is the result of a collective effort that stretches over space and back through time. It depends on being open to collaboration and passing on the lessons learned.

In the course of writing and putting together this guide, I have come across so many inspiring ideas and projects that it was never to going to be feasible to include everything. If I have found out anything, it is that social enterprises face an uphill struggle in making the most of what is out there. Fortunately, entry points for accessing advice and support can be found across the UK. For those working in and around the Lancaster District, I greatly encourage you to get in contact with Lattice Works. This organisation caters for a range of social enterprise needs:

- Seedlings (information and advice)
- Social Enterprise Encouragement and Development (tailored support)
- Participatory Investment Programme (democratic form of funding)
- Thrive (group-based training workshops)
- Action-Learning (peer to peer leadership)
- Network (collaboration and sharing skills)

For inspiring ideas, take a look at the great stuff being done as part of the Catalyst research programme at Lancaster University. The University's Institute for Entrepreneurship and Development (IEED) also offers various forms of support. Finally, get chatting to your peers through the North Lancashire Social Enterprise forum (NLSE).

...and that's all I have to say about that...

### **Using this report:**

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Practical Insights for Lancaster District

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