



# Try, Test and Learn Fund Policy Hack

Key Outcomes  
February 2017

## Overview

This document captures the key themes and outcomes from the Try, Test and Learn Fund Policy Hack held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday 10 February 2017. The Hack was organised by the Department of Social Services (DSS) to develop innovative proposals for the Government's \$96 million Try, Test and Learn Fund.

The Hack saw 93 participants—with roughly a 30/70 split of government to non-government attendees—work across 10 teams to create targeted responses aimed at improving workplace participation for the Fund's initial priority groups. Most participants were selected to attend via an Expression of Interest process, and represented not-for-profit organisations, academia and business. There were also interested individuals and representatives of the priority groups. The Hack was facilitated by an independent facilitator from Right Lane Consulting.

An expression of interest (EOI) process was conducted in January 2017 through DSS Engage to identify Hack participants, and the vast majority of those who put in an EOI were invited to the event. This ensured all interested stakeholders had an equal opportunity to attend. Participants brought to the Hack a balance of expertise across priority groups, expertise across field of work and diversity across individuals and organisations. Following the EOI process, a number of participants were invited directly to attend.

## Purpose and structure of the Hack

The overall objective of the Hack was to identify innovative and evidence-based proposals for the first tranche of the Fund focussing on the three groups identified by the Priority Investment Approach model: young carers, young parents, and students at risk of moving from study to a period of long-term reliance on unemployment payments. The Hack also provided an opportunity for individuals who are keen to be involved in developing policy solutions, but who would not normally have the opportunity to do so, to contribute ideas for the Fund and to workshop these with experts and other stakeholders.

The Hack supported the key principles of the Fund; including fostering collaborative policy development across stakeholders; ensuring broad accessibility of the Fund submission process; and facilitating new and innovative approaches that support the goals of the Australian Priority Investment Approach to Welfare.

Participants were allocated to a team, ten teams in total, and each team was assigned one priority group to focus on. Team composition was carefully crafted to ensure a spread of experience and diversity of individuals and organisations. Each team had a table captain and a scribe, and access to one of four mentors (two prominent non-governmental experts and two senior executive staff from the departments of social services and employment) as well as data experts.

Prior to the event, participants were informed which priority group they would focus on for the day and they were provided with a Participant Handbook, providing information and data on the priority groups.

On the day, the teams were lead through problem solving methodology leading to the development of a policy proposal. Each team pitched their idea to a mentoring panel in front of all participants. Everyone was able to vote for their favourite idea and the 'popular choice' award was given to the team with the most votes. The mentoring panel awarded certificates to teams for the:

- Most innovative idea
- Most collaborative team
- Clearest articulation of the needs of the priority group
- Most compelling hypothesis.

Ideas from each table at the Hack have been or will be submitted to DSS Engage and will go through the same eligibility criteria check as all other ideas submitted to the Fund. The criteria are:

- Provides services or supports for one or more of the three priority groups
- Seeks to improve workforce participation or capacity to work
- Provides new or useful policy evidence
- Generates measurable outcomes within a reasonable timeframe
- Is not unethical or illegal, or pose other unreasonable risks.

## Outcomes and feedback

Assuming they meet the initial eligibility criteria, ideas produced at the Hack will be published on DSS Engage and identified as coming from the Hack; these ideas will be assessed for shortlisting for co-development alongside all other ideas.

Hack participants were invited to provide feedback on the event through an emailed survey. More than half of participants completed the survey, and key feedback from those who responded is summarised below.

Three-quarters either agreed or strongly agreed that following the Hack, they have a better understanding of issues within their allocated priority group.

*The range of professionals in my group were experienced and mostly extremely informative. I really enjoyed and took a lot from their opinions.*

*Especially good to have a young parent in the room.*

*Participants mostly put their individual organisational interests to the side which provided a good environment to work through the best potential solutions.*

The vast majority (90 per cent) agreed that the Hack fostered collaboration within the teams, and allowed for individuals to make meaningful contributions.

*Working together over the course of a day in a structured and evolutionary way certainly resulted in a sense of 'team' being built. People seemed to genuinely respect and bounce off the diverse experience and skills of others in the group.*

*Having a young parent on the team enriched the process, and took it from being potentially a superficial discussion to a deep and respectful collaboration.*

*I think everyone got a say, but ... was the idea our group came up with really the best idea we could have come up with? A one day Hack or discussion among strangers is not the best forum, and ideas from it should not be considered for funding.*

**Around seven in ten agreed that the Hack provided an opportunity to think innovatively about policy development.**

*I left the Hack with a strong sense that team diversity is a key ingredient in fostering innovative ideas generation.*

*Good, though time is against a deeper dive into the complexities of course.*

*The framework of the Hack is one of the most innovative processes I have been part of.*

**A majority (77 per cent) agreed a Hack is a good way to engage stakeholders in policy development.**

*Expanding collaboration is vital for good policy development – this shows strong commitment, well done.*

*I think the environment was more conducive to conversation than the usual probity concerned tender rounds which actually stifle collaboration. Within this sector, there are many people who would happily work together or give away ideas for the benefit of the priority group, and the country ... this format allowed me to meet a range of people and to be inspired. Please do it again. Please.*

*I think it would be more meaningful if the process was purely a Hack, not alongside concurrent submissions from stakeholders.*

**General comments:**

*It was a great initiative to get people thinking creatively, and bring different perspectives to bear on entrenched disadvantage...The time constraints on developing our different ideas were tight and it was difficult to stay focused on our group but within these constraints I think all the groups did achieve something. We spent some time discussing early intervention approaches which was not within the brief, so theoretically was time wasted. However I think it shows how complex the problems are, and the need to move beyond narrow guidelines in approaching them. I wonder what would happen if we had more of the key target groups in the room doing their own design?*

*It was a great achievement and a real shift for the government and I think it should be promoted.*

*We could have spread it over two days and perhaps dived a bit deeper into our idea. It is a really good way to develop new innovations.*