Tech For Good Learning & Evaluation

Produced by Tech For Good Global & Snook

#techforgood

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The purpose of this work was to understand

How can Comic Relief and Paul Hamlyn Foundation (and other funders) support the best use of digital technologies to enact social change?

How can Comic Relief and Paul Hamlyn Foundation grow the tech for good ecosystem for funding and digital product development?

Now in its second year, the **Tech For Good** programme continues to improve - in the experience for those taking part in the programme, the capacity being built in the organisations involved, and in the quality of digital products and services being developed.

This piece of work, whilst limited in being able to provide clear measures for impact, has identified opportunities for future programme design, a better understanding of the skills and knowledge that projects and funders need, and recommendations for how to strengthen and grow the ecosystem around “tech for good.”

Summary of insights

Clarity is needed to define what the most important aspects of the programme are. Is it to develop an MVP (minimum viable product) or for not-for-profit organisations to learn how to develop effective digital products/ services? These don't need to be in opposition. It might be both, but this question should be a primary focus of a Theory of Change exercise.

The breadth of the programme (variety of focus, variety of stages of development, variety of projects) and the different stages of development influences the programmes effectiveness. It means that some things are hard to do. It's harder to create a community because it is so diverse. It can limit the effectiveness of support because the support is spread too thin and a wide variety of support is needed. A Theory of Change exercise will help prioritise which of these things matters most.

Summary of insights

There are three strands of value being created by the programme. Value in what the teams are producing, value in what they are learning, and value in how the programme as a whole is helping stimulate the “tech for good” field. Going forward it would be useful to try and measure the organisations’ changes internally, their ability to react to change and see learning and capability building as a successful outcome too.

A lot of value from the programme won’t become clear until further into a project’s lifecycle. It would be useful to develop a way of tracking the progress of projects over time.

There isn’t measurable evidence that developing projects using an agile methodology makes the digital products and services have greater social impact. This is still an assumption of the programme and it would be useful to try and measure this in the next phase of work.

Recommendations for the programme

The most important touch points that can be designed to help build the ecosystem are:

Regular breakfasts and other events like the show & tell event at the end of the programme (see events menu in final section of report)

Link projects into the tech for good community at every opportunity

Comic Relief and Paul Hamlyn to continue to lead by example

Build up a more visible and diverse range of suppliers

When designing the programme next time it would be good to:

Plan more support upfront (prepare people and their wider organisations, set expectations and be clear about commitments)

Make the support network (and supplier network) more visible

Understand what the “minimum viable” amount of information and engagement is for participants

Recommendations for the programme

The most important aspects of support for projects to develop well are:

Diagnostic support to understand what they don’t know they need

User research support

Support to define team roles, break down objectives and prioritise

Accountability to keep on track

Timely access to expertise

Being able to share what they are doing with colleagues

The skills and expertise required to support high quality design and development of tech for good projects is challenging, not just because of their cost and scarcity, but also because the experience needed to identify and manage this resource is currently limited.

The following slides summarise the experience organisations had on the programme and the influence of the programme on developing their “tech for good” products and services.

Benefits to the organisations taking part in the programme

The programme developed participants digital literacy.

It helped change the mindset and understanding of people and organisations.

The programme was the catalyst for new professional relationships forming inside participating organisations.

Organisations were able to develop a framework for experiments and testing that can be used in other work.

The programme helped remove people's fear of research and testing.

The programme gave participating organisations a sense of what can be done in a short time.

The programme helped develop the confidence in organisations to use digital.

Organisations learnt how to work in an agile way and will continue to use the approach.

Organisations were able to see that it can be easier and cheaper to test assumptions.

“We have realised that testing assumptions is vital to create the “right” product, and more importantly, testing can be easy, quick and not costly.”

“The programme has transformed our understanding of this area, helping us understand how we might use digital products to solve some of our wider organisational challenges in the future.”

Benefits to the participants of the programme

The new confidence and skills that participants gained can be applied to other organisational challenges or future digital work.

Participants found it for validating other work they wanted to do internally.

Through developing greater understanding of the costs of digital, participants can now plan for other digital work going forward.

The programme gave participants the confidence to imagine how to take other products and services online.

Projects were motivated by one another and “propelled on” by the cohort.

“From a personal development point of view it’s really helped me. It’s helped me find ways to align my internal team with the ambitions of the projects I want to do.”

“In some ways the learning has been as useful as the actual creation of the thing as a charity which hasn’t explored digital as much. It has been a steep learning curve for me.”

Benefits for the users/ stakeholders/members of the participating organisations

Through the programme some organisations saw their users develop better digital skills too.

Through the programme some organisations changed their reach and relationship with their member base.

The programme has meant some organisations could extend and re-focus the support they offer to their members.

“The programme gave us the space to reflect on what we do as a community and what others kinds of relationships we could be building with our members.”

“It has given our users and members the opportunity to develop their communication skills and it has meant that we’ve also opened up new ways to interact with people digitally.”

Benefits to the product or service being developed on the programme

The services and products being developed on the programme became more user focused.

How products and services were developed was improved through the teams learning how to simplify and how to start small.

Some of the projects discovered ways to retain or gain longer term value.

All the projects talked about the programme being useful for re-prioritising objectives, understanding the best way to sequence what they needed to do, and how this saved them time and resource.

“We’ve realised there are so many free tools that we can use to test assumptions before we build anything ourselves.”

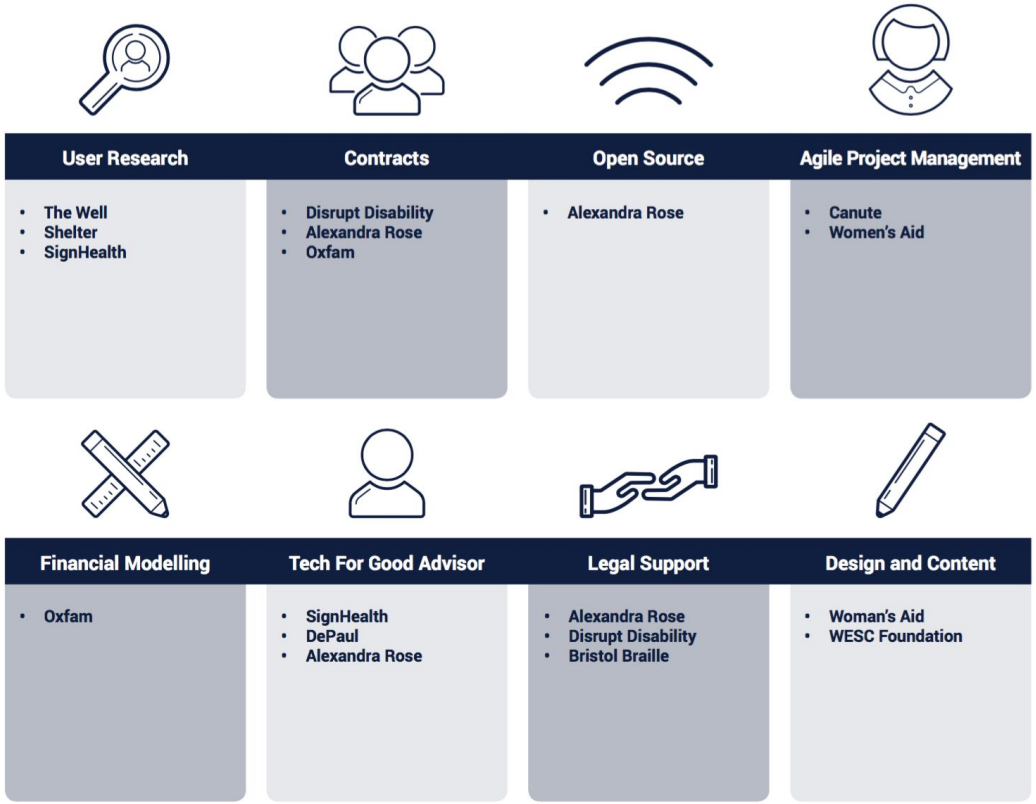
“We feel that we can understand our members and their needs so much more. We have diversified as an organisation and moved away from the belief that “face to face” is always best, as this isn’t the case with many people.”

“The programme has been integral to the delivery of our project and without it, we would have likely been significantly delayed in delivering or the product scope would have been reduced.”

“It was good to get feedback from teams, a little bit of reassurance to hear other teams and keep the momentum going.”

Overview of support needed Across all the projects.

During the programme projects needed different kinds of support. This is documented in the image on the right.



A support audit can be downloaded here.

What got in the way?

Projects wanted more preparation time in advance.

There was a set of activities that projects felt could have been set up in advance of the programme starting. The pace and pressure from doing something new was all-consuming and projects wanted to be more prepared.

Aligning project needs with organisational needs.

Clarity about what was expected from organisations at the start of the programme, as well as understanding of the different roles and responsibilities each team needed to set out, would have helped alleviate some of the inherent tensions between the “tech for good” project and wider organisational priorities.

What got in the way?

There were weak links in the chain of support.

Knowing what support was available and how to access it was an issue for some of the projects. The initial diagnostic call with James helped with this, but when a support need was identified, access to someone was not always timely or was not an area of expertise that was easily available within the network.

Prioritising different activities and engagement with the programme

This links to the set-up and preparation for the programme in advance. Communication about what time commitment is expected, what is essential to participate in and what isn't, and the value of the different activities, would help organisations prioritise their time.

“I spent too much of my time trying to get buy-in and cover from my colleagues internally and more help with this upfront would’ve been useful.”

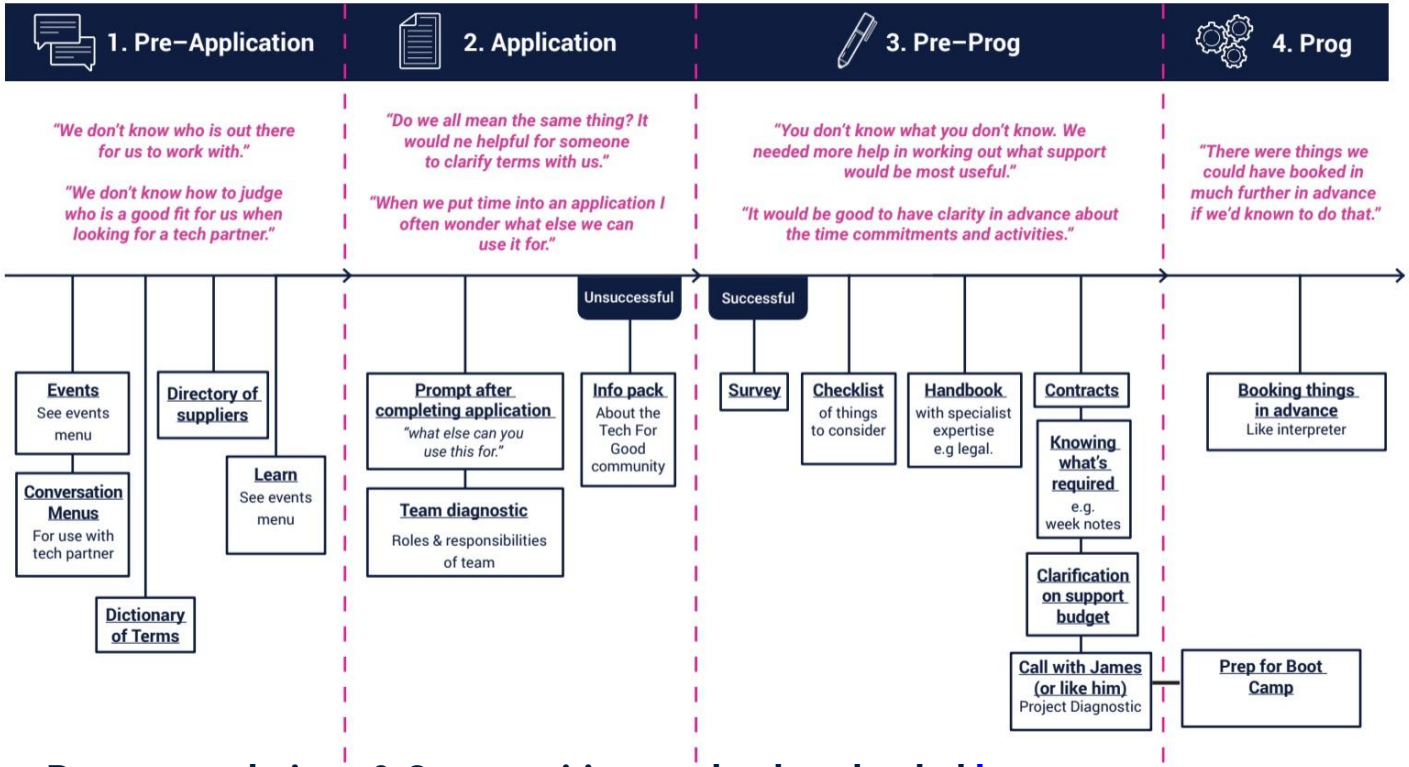
“The intense focus on this work meant that other projects in the organisation got pushed to one side, which created tensions. It would have been helpful to set expectations around this up in advance.”

“I just don’t have the time to engage in all activities. The reason why I haven’t prioritised them is because I questioned what I’ll get from them. I’ll learn a lot about tech processes but I also need to run the charity - I need to do financial modelling and charity strategy. On the whole, I’ve engaged with the tech team to make sure they have all the support needed, but not tech for good.”

Data from participant interviews, the programme retrospective and the participants' week notes was used to identify opportunities for programme improvements.

The following page maps the opportunities across the experience of the programme from a participant's perspective.

Recommendations and Opportunites



Recommendations & Opportunities can be downloaded here.

Responses to some of the recommendations and opportunities have been designed, and listed below.

An **events menu** with a series of recommended events based on the needs we heard participants describe .

A **directory of suppliers** that can be added to and shared around the “tech for good” community.

An **example checklist** that projects could use when they get accepted on the Tech For Good programme.

A **dictionary of terms** so that people can become more familiar with the language of building digital products and services.

A **“What Things Cost” site** so that people have more visibility and understanding of project costs.

The following slides summarise what we learnt from the funders who are part of the growing “tech for good” ecosystem. These insights were gathered from 5 roundtables hosted each month with an open invitation to funders wanting to understand more about “tech for good.”

What attracted funders to the breakfasts and enabled them to get this far.

This doesn't feel like a choice. It's something they have to engage with.

Awareness of a lack of skills and understanding about how to fund digital projects and how to model new behaviours.

Curiosity about what is already happening, about the landscape and what is possible.

“It still feels unclear whether we really need a separate tech funding stream of whether it should just be across everything we do. That is what we want to understand.”

“There is a lot of peer pressure. The whole sector is behind. We have money, so we should be trying to lead the way. Investing in our own organisations as well as who we give money too.”

What funders need, to be able to make further commitment to investing in digital.

Feel part of a community that is at a similar stage and asking similar questions.

Invest in digital skills across their organisation.

Continue to be exposed to practical "how to's" and examples of outcomes.

Build more shared understanding across the sector of what digital can help to achieve.

Access to a network of expertise that can be drawn on for digital work.

“Is the point to upskill the sector or is it to improve the lives of beneficiaries? Or both? We need to set some sector objectives..”

“We don’t have the skills or time to hand hold organisations that are doing digital as part of their grant, so it has been essential for building our confidence, and the organisations we are funding, to have specialist support brought in.”

What funders say is necessary to sustain their involvement.

Find ways to ensure the leadership (CEO and Board members) of their organisation is fully on board.

Joining up with others funders to practically fund and learn together about how to do it.

More examples and information that can be used to set standards and benchmarks.

More evidence that there is a social impact from the work.

More community - seeing other funders coming on board and the sense that a system of activity is developing.

“What does success look like? Are we okay with a grant that means the charity thinks very differently about digital but that the product/ service hasn’t worked?”

“We need more examples. Lists of project examples. Costs. Case studies. Failures. Learning. We need to know who to work with. We need access to more people and suppliers. We need benchmarks and standards.”