



# Try, Test and Learn Fund stakeholder consultation workshops October 2016

## Key Outcomes

### 1. Overview

This document captures the key themes and outcomes from the Try, Test and Learn Fund consultation workshops held on Friday 21 October 2016. The workshops were organised by the Department of Social Services (DSS) to seek stakeholders' input on the design of the Try, Test and Learn Fund.

Thirty-two stakeholders were in attendance including large, medium and small service providers, academia, social enterprise, corporate sector representatives, local councils, and social impact organisations. The workshops were facilitated by an independent facilitator from EY.

Workshop participants were invited to take part in half hour teleconferences with DSS staff prior to the workshop to answer any initial questions and gauge stakeholder priorities regarding the Fund.

The workshops were the first step in an ongoing consultation and collaboration process between the Department and external stakeholders. The design of the Fund will not be static but will continue to be refined over its lifetime. As such, priorities and themes raised by stakeholders will strongly influence the initial design of the Fund at its December opening, but will also continue to be used to inform the evolution of the Fund over time.

### 2. Purpose and structure of workshop

The purpose of the workshop was to seek stakeholder views on the processes and operations underpinning the Try, Test and Learn Fund. The Department sought opinions from stakeholders about how the Fund could be innovative, inclusive and build new evidence on effective ways to support people at risk of welfare dependence.

The Fund aims to be innovative but must also adhere to Commonwealth funding frameworks and probity requirements, and follow a relatively streamlined approach to accommodate a large anticipated volume of idea proposals. Like any new process, designing the Fund comes with challenges and opportunities. Including stakeholders in the design is critical to understanding and addressing them.

While the Department entered the workshop with an open mind about processes, stakeholders were provided with some key parameters and starting points:

- It is expected that the initial tranche of the Try, Test and Learn Fund will open in December 2016.
- A broad proposed framework for the Try, Test and Learn Fund was provided as the starting point for discussion. The framework included:
  - An ideas generation phase seeking ideas for policy proposals through different channels
  - An intensive policy co-development phase for a selected shortlist of ideas
  - A funding process to seek a provider to deliver ideas.
- The first tranche will focus on three groups identified by the Priority Investment Approach model: young carers, young parents, and students at risk of long-term reliance on unemployment payments. Future tranches could focus on other groups and the Department was keen to speak with stakeholders about how future groups could be identified.

### 3. Stakeholder priorities and feedback

Stakeholders' views are summarised into themes below.

### General design issues

- Open, flexible and outcomes-focused definitions of **priority groups** will better support impactful policy responses, including early intervention, than narrow, prescriptive definitions
- **Existing or previously trialled ideas** should be eligible for funding as well as new ideas, where they could be usefully scaled up, reintroduced or applied in new contexts and where evaluation will add new information about what works for whom
- **Meaningful co-design**, and especially **end user involvement**, is very important across all stages of policy development, from issue definition and ideation through to implementation

### Multi-stage approach to ideas generation and funding

- The multi-stage approach has implications for **pathways to funding** but participants were open to new processes balancing collaboration and transparency with competition
- The ideas generation stage will afford an opportunity for stakeholders to break down silos and **collaborate and share ideas**, perhaps eventually through brokering of partnerships
- Information on the **end-to-end Fund process** should be available to stakeholders before they enter the ideas generation stage, particularly as the multi-stage approach is novel
- Some participants proposed that the multi-stage approach was **not innovative enough**, such as the language and practice of funding 'rounds' compared to the private sector
- It may be more effective to make **systemic changes** to support priority groups than to fund multiple small ideas, leading to the prospect of trials of such systemic changes

### Ideas generation processes

- There is a tension between **defining the goal** of initiatives sufficiently well to provide structure and guide thinking, but not so narrowly that it constrains creativity and innovation
- Similarly, DSS should provide an initial '**problem**' definition to stimulate ideas, but stakeholders should refine the problem and trial outcomes based on their expertise
- Channels for submission should be **actively and broadly promoted**, while written proposals initially should be **simple** such as a one-page template with guided responses
- **External stakeholders** should be engaged in the assessment and selection of ideas

### Implementation and evaluation

- As with the 'problem' definition, taking too prescriptive an approach to **outcomes definition** constrains thinking and fails to capture the full value that providers can deliver
- While designing policy responses to '**fail fast**' is a virtue, performance indicators and measures of success need to **acknowledge the time needed** for change to occur
- **Evaluation** is integral to the Fund's intent and so it should be integral to the ideation and design processes for policy responses, including methods like randomised controlled trials.