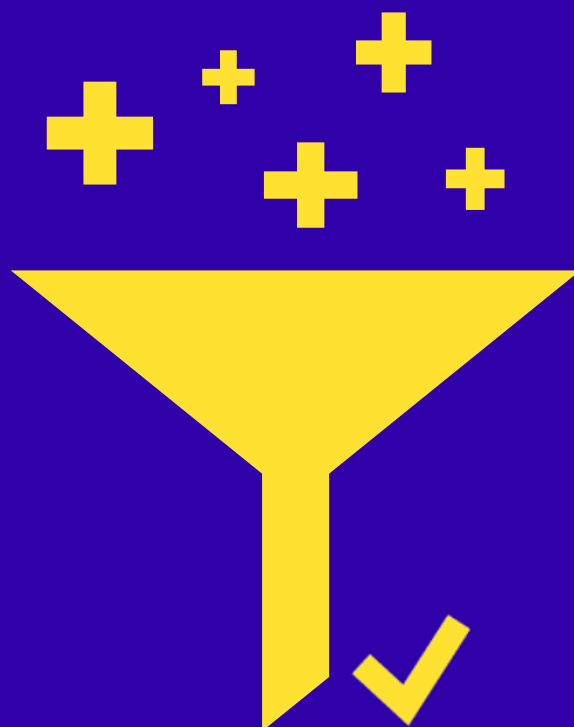




Delivering Measurable ROI from  
your Innovation Efforts: A Series  
of Practical Guides

# Step Three - Building a Stronger Ideas Funnel



# Why do we need a big ideas funnel?

The stark reality for all of us is that most ideas fail. Which means that the best way to ensure we have success with innovation is to have lots of ideas.

The more high-quality ideas your programme generates the more likely you are to be able to solve both day-to-day and strategic business challenges.

Everyone is capable of coming up with new ideas, and some of us do, regularly and with apparent ease. For others, the experience of creating new ideas is more random. Sometimes a new idea just seems to hit us in a flash when we're thinking about something else – or maybe just not thinking at all!

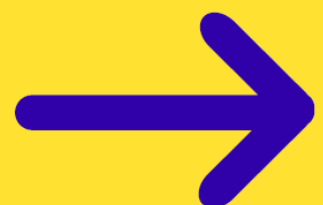
The problem is that these moments of inspiration don't always happen when we really want or need them. At times in work, we're invited to "brainstorm" or exhorted to "think outside the box" – often with quite variable results.

With the growing challenges that our fast-changing world brings, organisations can no longer rely on only the talented few who are naturally creative, nor hang around and wait for the rest of us to have our creative spark.

This guide sets out a practical framework for solving this conundrum, with tools and tips to help you fill your funnel with as many high-value ideas as you can handle!



# Three Key Areas of Focus



There are three main things you need to do to build a strong ideas funnel.



**Increase the number of unique ideas being contributed**



**Increase the number of ideas that are accepted**



**Increase the number of high-impact ideas submitted**

These all sound pretty straightforward, right? Well on paper maybe, but in the real world of creativity and innovation things are never as simple as they first appear, so the rest of this document lays out a series of practical steps you can take to ensure success in each area.



## KEY AREA OF FOCUS

# 1

## How to increase the number of unique ideas being contributed

An innovation programme that is delivering increasing numbers of unique ideas is a great indication that you have engaged a wide and diverse group of people. And that you have the systems and processes in place to help them turn their own creative juices into potentially valuable propositions.

The following practical activities are essential elements of filling your funnel right to the top.



**1**

## **Set meaningful, time-bound challenges.**

Stimulating innovation challenges that pique the interest of employees will always attract more ideas than a generic, 'always open' group.

Use the output of tools such as your Balanced Scorecard, PESTLE Analysis, Business Model Canvas & Ansoff Analysis to learn where your highest impact issues and opportunities lie. And create Innovation Challenges with short-term deadlines that clearly demonstrate what success will look like.

**2**

## **Share far and share wide!**

Other people's ideas are a great stimulus for new ideas - one person's solution to a problem can often ignite a related, but alternative, line of thought from someone with a different background and life-experience.

With or without an innovation platform, find a way to regularly share the latest ideas with everyone throughout the duration of a crowdsourcing campaign. Even the faithful old spreadsheet is better than nothing!

**3**

## **Manage your duplicates with care.**

You'll likely get many duplicate ideas in every Challenge, so make sure you've got a good process for dealing with them. Rather than ignoring duplicates, merge or link them and let the contributors know that their duplicate idea is 'in-play'.

Better still, pro-actively encourage your duplicate contributors to try again, with the help of some Challenge stimulus if possible (check out point 4 for more on this!).

4

## Fuel your employees' brains!

Most people can't produce ideas "on demand", so using some idea starters (or Brain Fuel as we like to call it!) can be a great way of stimulating the creativity of your people and supercharging your Challenge.

Work with your core Challenge Team to create and share a bank of Brain Fuel that everyone can use. For best results aim for around 40 to 50 pieces of Brain Fuel – that's only around 3 from each member of a 15-person Challenge Team.

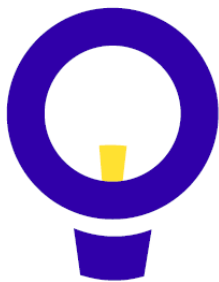
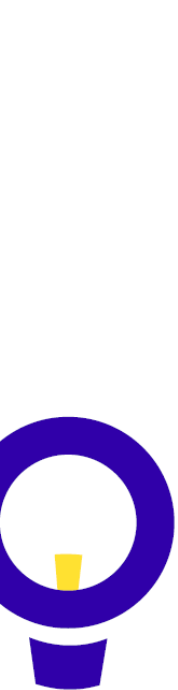
Want to find out more about how to source effective Brain Fuel? Download our handy Brain Fuel Sources guide [here](#).

5

## Keep your rewards nice and simple

Whilst the carrot of rewards might seem an obvious way of increasing idea volumes, the surprising truth is that rewards for the 'best idea' can be controversial and turn people off from future innovation - how do you objectively measure the best idea?

If you really want to use rewards as a means of encouraging more ideas, keep it simple – put the names of every contributor of an aligned idea (more on this later!) into a hat with a chance to win a small prize or voucher.



KEY AREA OF  
FOCUS

2

How to  
increase the  
number of  
ideas that are  
accepted

If you've managed to clearly communicate to people the parameters for their ideas, and have checks and balances in place to help them keep to those parameters then you will see increasing numbers of ideas being accepted as part of your innovation programme.

The following practical steps will help ensure that your funnel is full of ideas that could potentially help meet your Challenge.





**1**

## Set out your assumptions and constraints

When you set out your Idea Challenges, your people are going to need to understand the ‘tramlines’ that they should work within – for example, if you’re not looking for ideas that might result in job losses, they really should know this!

Along with your Challenge background and mission, think hard about the assumptions and constraints that employees need to consider for their ideas, and set them out in easy-to-understand bullet point form.

**2**

## Communicate your Challenge measures

Your Challenge should be capable of being expressed through strategic measures which demonstrate clear alignment to its stated goals – cost saving, environmental benefit, etc. Employees who clearly understand these are more likely to submit ideas that are aligned from the outset.

Categorise the key goals of the Challenge into easily understood measures and share them with your workforce (using accompanying visuals if possible) to aid their understanding of what a closely aligned idea might look like.



# 3

## Provide and explain your idea structure

A structured idea form will always make it easier for employees to complete an idea – it helps avoid the “rabbit-in-headlights” moment when presented with a blank canvas. We always recommend the following:

- A short **Title** – no more than 50 characters.
- A short **Description** – no more than 100 words. Describing an idea in under 100 words helps keep people focused on the real ‘nub’ of the idea. If they want to supplement it with more information, allow them to upload an attachment.
- Who is the **Customer?** - help your staff out with some starter text, such as:

*“The person, company or group of people who will benefit from this idea is ....”*

- What **Problem** does it solve? - provide a little help, this time:

*“The problem that this idea solves for the customer is.... because...”*

- What **Benefit** does it deliver? - for some help text, try:

*“The benefit that my idea brings is ... because ...”*

- What is **New** about your idea? - the following should help:

*“The thing that is new or different about my idea is ... because ...”*

Try not to go overboard with too many other fields on your form. The more you add, the less ideas you’ll receive.

## 4

### Consider the use of idea moderation

Moderation is often thought of as way of filtering out expletives, confidential, sensitive, or potentially inflammatory comments (not that any of your staff are going to do that, right?). But it can also act as a great way to encourage ideas that meet the standards that you need - meaning more ideas end up being 'in play'.

So, try adding a moderation workflow into your process. When moderating ideas 'in', look for the level of alignment that they have with the stated Challenge mission. And check that a reasonable attempt has been made to submit an idea that answers the questions in your structured form - "TBC" and "Not sure" are not really good enough here! If an idea falls short, politely return it, pointing out the issue(s), and encourage resubmission.

## 5

### Share easily accessible training

Few people excel at idea generation and innovation from the get-go. Some simple training resources can dramatically increase the capability of employees to think creatively, but in a structured manner.

Attach some supporting videos, presentations, or documents to your Challenge. Keep them short and focused on a single topic: "What does a good idea look like?", "How to use Brain Fuel" and "Some idea starters" are just a few examples that can really help increase the volume of aligned ideas that are received.



KEY AREA OF  
FOCUS

3

## How to increase the number of 'high impact' ideas submitted

Generating ideas that can create a step change for your organisation requires the right training, support and stimulus to be in place. A growing number of these types of ideas is a strong indication that your innovation programme is going well.

The following practical steps will help you move beyond the 'same-old, same-old' and find more breakthrough ideas more of the time.



**1**

## **Push the Brain Fuel boundaries.**

As we mentioned earlier, providing some idea starters can really help people come up with new ideas. But being brave with Brain Fuel can really supercharge out-of-the-box thinking!

For every piece of modest Brain Fuel, task the more adventurous members of the Challenge Team with adding a further piece of Brain Fuel that is a bit 'out there'. Taking yourself out of your own business sector and observing what 'best' looks like in NASA can really help people get the mind racing!

**2**

## **Combine the serious with some fun!**

Lots of your workforce actually enjoy having fun with ideas. When they are encouraged to have some fun, submission numbers will rapidly grow - and the seed of a great idea can come out of anywhere.

So, keep it simple - ask your staff for 2 (or more!) ideas, of which at least 1 should be a bit wacky. Whilst it might not be workable in its initial guise, everything can change when the Challenge Team gets its hands on it during the Create Session - see point 3 below!



# 3

## Run a Create Session

With the best will in the world, your idea crowdsourcing activity will generate lots of ideas of varying quality. Many will be what we consider 'draft', but don't despair – one person's draft idea is another person's golden nugget of Brain Fuel!

A Create Session brings a small, identified group together, in a workgroup setting, to multiply the existing crowd-sourced ideas into even more brand-new ideas that have a fighting chance of being deliverable. Here are our top tips for a Create Session:

### **TOP TIP #1: Organise your Brain Fuel.**

We've talked about Brain Fuel lots, but that's because we really like it!

- For your Create Session think about topping up your Brain Fuel with some fresh entries. Some new Brain Fuel might emerge from some of the wacky crowdsourced ideas.
- Make it easily accessible and easily searchable – a simple spreadsheet attachment is often all it takes. The Create Session moves along at pace, and Brain Fuel that is difficult to find and use will serve no useful purpose.
- Categorise it if you can. That way you can get one group to focus on one category, and the next group to focus on another.

### **TOP TIP #2: Mix-up the group.**

You're going to want to get the best group possible together for your Create Session:

- Keep your group size to no more than 15 people - more than this exacerbates the problems of communication especially in remote Create Sessions.
- Include people from different functions, years-of-service, age groups and personalities (extravert, introvert, etc) - more diversity increases the chances of more and better ideas.
- If possible, involve people from outside the organisation - consider inviting suppliers, customers, academics: people with no preconceived ideas that might inhibit creativity.

### **TOP TIP #3: Make your life easier with some tech!**

In today's remote / hybrid world of work, an obvious enabler for remote ideas sessions is communication technology.

- Make good use of platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom which provide one part of the jigsaw for successful remote Create Sessions. With new breakout rooms functionality, they are ideally suited to enabling effective Create Sessions.
- It goes without saying that we think innovation management tools like smartcrowds, used in conjunction with Zoom or Teams, are nothing short of essential for a successful remote event!

### **TOP TIP #4: Get cycling, fast and hard!**

For remote ideation, a half-day workshop will allow for a few creative “cycles” where the group will make use of the Brain Fuel and other creative thinking tools that the facilitator can introduce.

- Try to squeeze in 5 cycles of 30 minutes each. You should be able to get over 100 additional well-formed, ideas from this approach – many of them high impact.
- Ensure that the cycles involve both individual and small group elements. Microsoft Teams' breakout rooms make this straightforward.
- Setup breakout rooms with a member of the facilitation team included in each group. This will ensure that everyone understands the task and uses the Brain Fuel and tools appropriately.
- Make sure one of the cycles uses existing crowdsourced ideas as additional Brain Fuel. The group will find lots of opportunities to build on these and form their own new ideas, and the original contributors will get some kudos as well!

# What's Next?

Now that you've got Steps One, Two and Three in place, check out the next guide in this series - Step Four: Making Better Informed Decisions.

## REQUEST AN ROI CALCULATION

Our Innovation Consultants will carry out a short review and prepare an **ROI Calculation** for you that highlights the areas where the most significant return is likely to be achieved.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

## REQUEST SMARTCROWDS IMPACT DEMO

Our **smartcrowds IMPACT demo** is delivered around the key innovation performance indicators described in this guide. In the demo you'll find out how smartcrowds helps you engage better with your workforce, empower your employees to make change happen, and turn more ideas into more outcomes, more of the time.

[CONTACT US TO REQUEST A DEMO](#)



## BOOK A 'PRACTICAL STEPS TO PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT' SESSION

The leading indicators of Innovation Performance outlined in this guide are the foundation for improving the return from your innovation efforts.

The **Practical Steps to Performance Improvement** session, led by our Innovation Consultants, will assess the current innovation activities that are being employed in your organisation, and recommend a step by step process that improve the performance of a set of leading indicators that we agree with you.

FIND OUT MORE

### ABOUT SMARTCROWDS

At smartcrowds, we work with organisations looking to empower their employees, at all levels, to make sustainable, positive contributions to business change and innovation. Our smartcrowds IMPACT programme has been designed to deliver repeatable return on innovation investment, through a 5-step programme that is built around the key leading indicators of innovation performance measurement.



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