

# Sustainable Innovation Sydney

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Social Innovation Sydney was formed in 2010 as an open forum for conversations around environmental and social issues. It was designed around building communities of individuals with diverse skill sets who can identify and address broad ranging wicked problems and to support and enable social innovations that address these and assist their innovators to succeed. Over a short period of time it has evolved into a learning ground for those new to the social innovation segment, a petrie-dish for social innovation ideas to grow and a lab where individual projects to be tested.

Social Innovation Sydney runs four 'unconferences' each year where anybody, no matter their experience or background, can express what they are passionate about. These 'passions' often unearth opportunities for social innovation. Participants were leaving the 'unconferences' feeling excited that they had a good solution to a problem but then frustrated upon finding it very difficult to do anything with their ideas.

Generating ideas that lead to innovation is often not as difficult for social innovators as bringing the ideas to fruition. Since the industrial revolution innovation has most closely been linked to industrial and commercial activities. These innovations are generally processes, technologies or products that are won at great cost. Consequently they were developed using a closed innovation model<sup>1</sup> so these costs could be recovered. The shortcomings of this model, such as IP ownership hampering further or faster innovation, were identified and now an open innovation model has become more fashionable. However this still hinges around development cost recovery and in the case of most social innovations is not ideal.

Most social innovations, though potentially extremely beneficial, do not have the support structures available for their realisation that corporate innovations do, nor do they necessarily promise adequate financial gain to attract investment. Their resolution may be complex and require specialist skill sets and access to resources that are out of the innovators reach. Many great social innovations never make it to market due to lack of resources or an inability of the their creators to get them there. A new method of innovation needed to be developed for social innovation projects.

In response to this Social Innovation Sydney set up a series of 'Start-Up' camps to give budding social entrepreneurs a chance to participate in an intense program where any idea could be developed from scratch to prototype, business plans could be formulated and pitches prepared for and given to investors or potential collaborators.

This paper documents the formation and growth of Social Innovation Sydney. It will discuss it's various initiatives and the methods it has developed to run these along with some of the social innovation outcomes resulting from them.

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