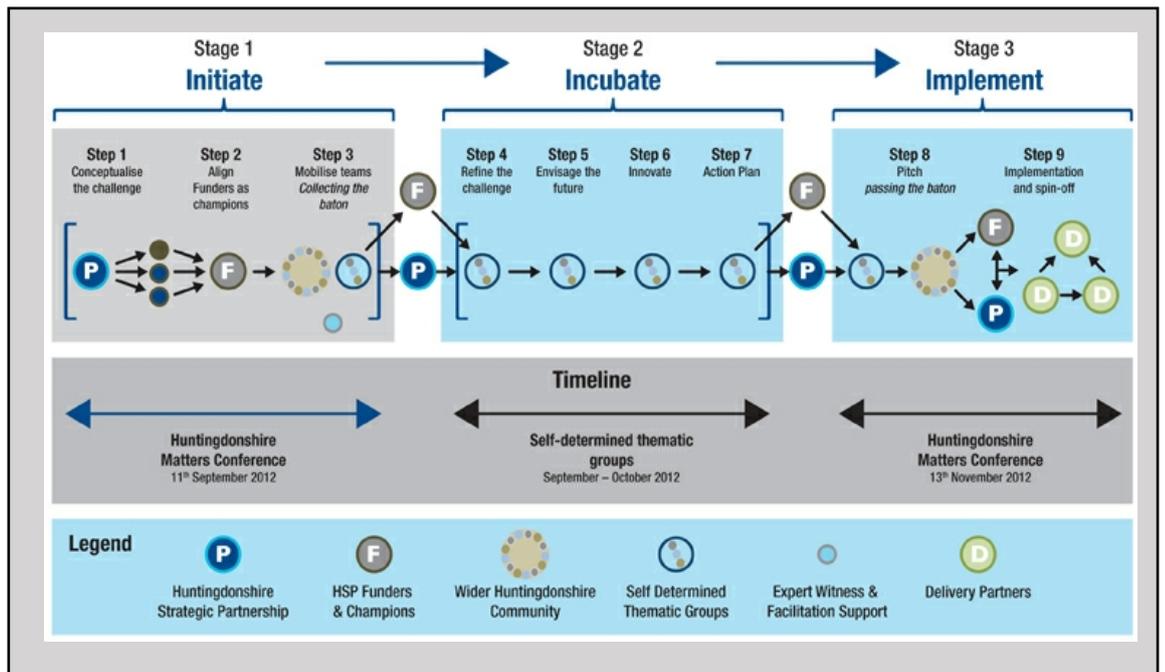


Collaboration Incubators - A new way of building powerful partnerships



Manny Gatt MD of Shared Service Architecture explains the Collaboration Incubator pilot.

The roman poet Horace was quoted as saying “Adversity reveals genius, prosperity conceals it”, or as we might more commonly say “Necessity is the mother of invention”.

However we choose to phrase it, the recent budget and reality of austerity measures lasting a decade is focusing the minds of political leaders and humble families trying to make ends meet.

George Osborne said during his Autumn Statement “we are all in this together” and with this sentiment very much in mind, councils, colleges, housing associations, blue light services, the voluntary sector, faith groups, businesses, communities and individuals are beginning to explore new and imaginative ways of working together.

Some of this has been driven through policy initiatives by government such as the ‘community budget’ pilot being tested at

neighbourhood level (check out One Haverhill), or in whole place pilots such as Greater Manchester.

Blurring the lines between partners

Others not wishing to wait on the outcomes of these pilots are taking the initiative. A good example of this is Huntingdonshire Matters, a community engagement strategy led by the Huntingdonshire Strategic partnership (HSP).

Huntingdonshire Matters is a new approach to community engagement and action.

Instead of pooling budgets, the partners seek to blur the lines between themselves and the wider community, making joined up working easier, more natural and more effective.

The approach is based on a number of key principles that govern the way the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership and its



Stage 1 – Initiate

The Initiate Stage has three steps:

Step 1: Conceptualise the challenges facing our community.

For Huntingdonshire Matters this meant the launch of a dedicated website and a kick-off event held on 20 June 2012, which began the process of conceptualising the challenges facing the community.

In the Huntingdonshire example, over 50 advocates volunteered to engage the wider community to identify their challenges and issues. In doing so eight key community challenges were identified.

Step 2: Align the strategic funders behind these challenges.

The members of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership (and therefore funders or providers of resource) are Huntingdonshire District Council, Interfaith Groups, the Hunts Forum, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue, Cambridgeshire County Council, Huntingdonshire Regional College, the NHS and Cambridgeshire Constabulary. As a group they committed to working together with the community to address these challenges.

Step 3 – Mobilising the teams.

The Huntingdonshire Matters Conference was held on 11 September 2012. The conference was designed as if it were an exhibition, with each of the eight community challenges having their own stands.

Over 150 people, from across the community and partners, attended the event, shared their concerns and prioritised the three most crucial issues confronting their community. For example young people issues, older peoples concerns, and skills deficit.

49 volunteers from the event agreed to participate in teams to work on these three issues and the baton was passed to them to explore and incubate new ideas across the three priority themes.

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community work together. They have encapsulated these principles into a series of commitments to the wider community.

A driver of the Huntingdonshire Matters journey has been the adoption of a new approach to community engagement, action and capacity building.

Underpinning this new approach is a structured methodology introduced by Shared Service Architecture called 'Collaborative Incubators'.

Incubating community ideas

Collaborative Incubators is a highly inclusive, flexible and networked approach that places greater emphasis on commitments and energy making a difference, rather than the traditional target driven public sector culture.

At its core is the concept that the community 'incubates the ideas' and the partnership seeks to find a permanent home for them. This is either by mainstreaming the ideas within existing provision, or building the community's capacity to deliver them.

Collaborative Incubators is a systematic yet intuitive approach to community engagement and action. It has three distinct phases:

The self-determined thematic groups supported by subject area experts and external facilitation (from SSA) explored and developed the solutions that best fit their communities.

Stage 2 - Incubate

The incubate stage is all about innovation, creativity and problem solving.

The self-determined thematic groups supported by subject area experts and external facilitation (from Shared Service Architecture) explored and developed the solutions that best fit their communities.

To achieve this, a structured approach to innovation and problem solving was adopted consistently across all the thematic groups. The innovation cycle adopted has four steps:

Step 4 - Refine the challenge.

Recognising that the definition of the problem will be the focal point of all their problem-solving efforts, the group's first task was to fully understand and as a consequence re-define the 'actual' problem they seek to address.

Step 5 - Envisaging the future.

The next step for the group was to create a goal statement that provided a vision of what a successful solution might look like.

Step 6 - Innovate.

With the problem clearly defined and a sense of direction and ambition agreed, the group began the innovation journey, identifying new ideas and innovative ways of working that had the potential to meet their challenge.

Step 7 - Action Plan.

Then they prepared an action plan. This would act as an elevator pitch for their ideas which they presented at the 13 November 2012 Huntingdonshire Matters Conference.

Stage 3 - Implement

The implementation stage has two steps:

Step 8 - Pitch

Over 120 people attended the 13 November conference, to hear the three work groups present their ideas to the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership and the wider community.

Here the *baton was passed back* to the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership partners who committed to explore the best way to mainstream these ideas and turn them into actions.

Step 9 - Implementation and spin-off

The final step in the journey took place on 28 February 2013 when the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership reported back to the wider community on mainstreaming the chosen ideas and exploring new areas for collaborative working.

Tangible outcomes...

Feedback on the Collaborative Incubator process, from the wider community, the volunteers who participated in the incubator groups and the wider partnership, has been very positive.

As a result the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership has agreed a new memorandum of understanding. They have agreed to embed Huntingdonshire Matters, and the application of Collaborative Incubators, as their common approach to community engagement, and committed to phase 2 of its development.

In that phase it will seek to build community capacity and civic leadership, widen participation on the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership board and roll out the community engagement process to include welfare reform.

To explore setting up a Collaboration Incubator for your community led activity contact Manny.Gatt@sharedservicearchitects.co.uk