Data for Children Collaborative
WITH UNICEF

Impact Collaborations

The Process:

Our Impact Collaborations are a unique way of developing and enabling collaboration. Our mission is to provide the platform that brings together the appropriate data and expertise to answer our challenge questions targeted at improving the lives of children.

We work with the challenge owner to develop a Challenge Question that looks to address an existing problem for children using innovative data science techniques or novel data sets and data linkages. Once the question is finalised, we segment and identify the necessary skills, capabilities and competencies required for each of these.

We then post an Expression of Interest form for each challenge that allows candidates to detail their expertise and interest in the project. Once we have identified the project team, we bring them together with our partners to shape the details of the project. Most importantly, this will involve designing and building the project proposal that clearly answers the challenge question we set at the start of the process. We then present the collaborative team's project proposal to the board for approval.

The Projects:

To date, we have a number of teams working on Impact Collaboration projects, including:

- What is the best approach to using data to tackle the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on children?

- How do we use novel data sets and techniques to effectively understand the impact of child poverty on education within urban and rural contexts?

- Prevention of adolescent mental health conditions: Is technology a possible source for good?

- Where are children most vulnerable to the impact of climate change, both now and in the future?

Impacts:

Diverse Teams Working Together:

This process has allowed us to bring together interesting collaborations of people from around the world who wouldn't normally have the opportunity to work together.

Demand Driven Projects:

Having a challenge owner develop the Challenge Question and be engaged throughout the project has allowed for project design to be user orientated from the start, helping to ensure that any outputs will have maximum impact.

Workshopping Project Design:

One of the benefits of this process is that the team codesigns the project around their skills and expertise. Across our current projects we have been able to refine the workshopping process to ensure that all stakeholders - challenge owners, end user and project team - can input to shape the project from the ground up. We've made good use of virtual tools to help us achieve this successfully during the pandemic!

Expanding Our Network:

Through this process we have been able to connect with new individuals and organisations across the world! Our partners work across a variety of sectors and topics.

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Lessons Learned:

Clear challenge questions are critical:

A detailed and precise Challenge Question with a clear objective will allow applicants to best understand how they could apply their skills and knowledge to the problem. By working with the challenge owner early in the process to help them articulate their needs we have been able to move from abstract ideas to specific requirements.

Managing stakeholder engagement:

Throughout this process we have learned that although it is great to have lots of people involved in a project and to be enthusiastic about its outcomes, how we engage needs to be carried out in a strategic way to ensure that we can leverage their skills and expertise to its full potential. We've since created a stakeholder mapping tool that we will use for future projects, to categorise the type and level of engagement appropriate for different members of a project team. We'll also be creating a 'onboarding pack' of key documents that we will provide to all stakeholders for clarity and visibility.

Project structure should be expertise driven:

Our process is quite unique in that we want to codesign a project with the team, rather than ask them to apply to a certain work package or phase of a project. From our first Impact Collaboration project we learned that rather than proposing a structure that people could align their skills to, we should focus on sourcing the skills and expertise that could contribute to the design of the project. We have since applied this knowledge to our current projects with good success.

Rethinking the legals process for collaborative teams:

Combining individuals from many organisations and locations has caused some delays in the legal process and therefore the agility of our projects. We are rethinking how we go about forming legal contracts for these projects, considering what types of questions we need to ask upfront to allow us to be flexible in our approach.

We might not get everyone we need the first time around:

Sometimes as we begin to design a project it is clear that there may be gaps or areas where the current team are unable to support fully. Equally, we have realised that sometimes when we delve into the details of a project, not everyone who originally applied may have a role to play across the whole project. We make sure to communicate this clearly to ensure that people are aware that an Expression of Interest may not always lead to a committed role on a project, and we explore this as part of the design process.