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A practical guide

Using social challenge prizes to support people-powered innovation

Based on lessons from
the Big Green Challenge

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NESTA would like to thank colleagues past and present for their dedication and creativity in delivering the Big Green Challenge; our partners for their commitment, patience and openness to working in new ways; and our competitors and Finalists for sticking with the programme, pushing the boundaries with their projects and being open to learning with us throughout.

In the context of the huge challenges facing public services and society today, finding radical and effective ways of meeting social needs is vital.

At NESTA, we are finding practical ways to unlock the energy, enthusiasm and vast potential for innovation among communities, local groups and the people working on the frontline of our public services. We call this ‘people-powered public services’.

This guide outlines one such approach – the social challenge prize – based on the lessons of the Big Green Challenge.

Introduction to this guide

The focus of this guide is the challenge prize, a tool for stimulating, supporting and testing innovation, particularly among new groups of people. We have found that our Big Green Challenge programme and 'Mass Localism' report, alongside recent developments in methods such as crowdsourcing and co-production, have struck a chord with funders and policymakers looking for new ways to generate ideas from community-based innovators.

Through our experience with the Big Green Challenge we have found that a social challenge prize with distinct stages for competitors can inspire communities to develop imaginative, effective solutions to big social problems.

Challenge prizes reward the achievement of measureable outcomes (usually through a financial prize fund). This is distinct from a grant process, which funds proposals, and it is complementary to a growing emphasis on outcome-based commissioning and tools such as social impact bonds, which aim to help funders and commissioners use limited financial resources for maximum impact.

A social challenge prize, as we define it, has a very open set of criteria, rewards the achievement of social or environmental outcomes and creates a support process to enable less experienced groups of innovators to respond to the challenge with their solutions.

NESTA tested the use of a social challenge prize as part of the Big Green Challenge, which aimed to stimulate, support and reward successful community-led responses to climate change. The two-year, four-stage programme attracted more than 350 community¹ groups from across the UK. The programme generated an impressive range of innovative solutions that achieved significant CO₂ emissions reductions and other community benefits such as increased social capital.

The Big Green Challenge generated a wealth of insights, evidence and practical lessons about how to run a social challenge prize, which is captured in this practical guide. We hope that the experience we share through this guide can inspire and help others to harness the potential of people-powered innovation.

We would like to thank all of the organisations, community groups and individuals who were part of the Big Green Challenge as partners, competitors, staff and supporters. This guide aims to reflect the experiences – good and bad – of everyone who was involved.

We believe there is a lot more potential for the wide use of social challenge prizes and the principles behind them. We also don't believe that we have all the answers, or that the approach we've taken is the only option. If you decide to design a new programme based on content in this guide, or if you've already started using a similar approach, we would be interested to swap notes and share experiences. If you have any feedback on the guide itself we'd like to hear that too.

¹Our definition of community was broad, including for example communities based on location, faith, shared interest.

Who is this guide for?

We believe that the approach to using a social challenge prize set out in this guide will be useful to anyone who is responsible for finding new ways to fund solutions to difficult social challenges. You might find it particularly useful if you work in a statutory or charitable funding organisation or in a local authority.

You will be interested in social challenge prizes if:

- / You have a specific goal in mind that relates to a particular social problem.
- / You think that, while traditional funding approaches play a valuable role, they can't always stimulate the most radical and effective solutions.
- / You believe there is a wide range of untapped ideas and potential solutions to this problem, and can't be sure exactly who holds the most effective ideas.
- / You want to remove barriers that prevent people from putting forward new solutions to challenging social issues.
- / You know communities have a critical role to play in tackling difficult problems, and want to find ways to harness their potential.
- / You want to learn about how new solutions to the problem work in practice, and about the conditions that could make them work better.

How to use this guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide practical advice and support to anyone interested in running a Social Challenge Prize. This advice is backed up by lessons – what worked and what didn't – drawn from our experience with the Big Green Challenge.

This guide is not supposed to be exhaustive or prescriptive – it does not provide a complete, detailed step-by-step set of instructions. The difficult social issues this method is designed to tackle can be complex and diverse, so a 'one size fits all' solution is not desirable or feasible.

The guide is divided into two parts:

Part One provides a brief overview of the social challenge prize and the Big Green Challenge – how it worked, what made it different, and the main lessons that we drew from it.

Part Two provides guidance on how to run a programme of this sort, in particular what you need to consider during design and delivery of the process.

Part One: Understanding social challenge prizes

In **Part One** we will provide a brief overview of the social challenge prize and the Big Green Challenge – how it worked, what made it different, and the main lessons that we drew from it.

What is a social challenge prize?

There are many ways to design prizes to generate social solutions to social problems, and the right design decisions for each prize will depend on the specific prize objectives and context. For example, Changemakers builds an online international community of people keen to solve social issues, and works with this community and with sponsors to devise challenges. Entries are usually new ideas or existing projects that meet the needs of the challenge. Judges select a shortlist of ideas, projects or organisations and the winners are voted for by the community and the public.

Innocentive also creates an online community of ‘solvers’. ‘Seekers’ are able to pose open challenges to the community of solvers. Seekers judge the entries, which are usually ideas or scientific or technical solutions. The People’s Millions is a partnership between the Big Lottery Fund and ITV that enables the public to decide which local community projects will get grants of up to £50,000 of Lottery funding for their ideas. Prizes such as the Ashden Awards highlight significant existing achievements in a specific field (sustainable energy), and then network winners and other relevant partners to encourage further development of the winning projects. All of these examples work well for their audience and aims.

Part One: Understanding social challenge prizes

Through the Big Green Challenge we found that using a prize with the following defining characteristics was effective in galvanising UK-based community-led activity, finding new sources of innovation and identifying sustainable solutions producing measurable results. For the purpose of this guide we refer to this as a social challenge prize.

- 1 **Challenge prize:** a clearly defined challenge is set and a prize is offered to the most successful solution(s).
- 2 **Outcome-focused:** this approach rewards performance – the prize is awarded for solutions that prove themselves successful against measurable criteria.
- 3 **Staged process:** taking respondents through a series of clearly defined stages, which start with a low barrier to entry and become increasingly more demanding. Participants receive non-financial and/or small-scale financial support at each stage.
- 4 **Not prescriptive:** how the problem is tackled is left entirely to competitors to decide. It requires the organiser to be genuinely open to not knowing what the most effective types of solutions will be.
- 5 **Open:** barriers to entry are low, with eligibility criteria kept to a minimum.

The benefits of a social challenge prize

For funders:

A social challenge prize can be a valuable alternative to traditional grant funding.² It requires real clarity about desired outcomes and can require considerable time and effort, but the potential rewards are significant.

It maximises value by:

- / Helping funders manage risk – because resources (time, support, money) are allocated to competitors as it becomes clearer which are most likely to effectively achieve the outcomes being sought.
- / Stimulating and supporting new ideas and new people/groups to become active problem-solvers.
- / Providing measurable evidence to demonstrate effective solutions.
- / Focusing the process and resource on the outcomes being sought.
- / Building sustainability into the process from the beginning (if this is part of your criteria and covered in support for competitors).

²We are not advocating a wholesale move to challenge prizes from grants. Grants still provide vital support to social projects, particularly during the transition from piloting to setting up a more sustainable delivery model, and for discrete projects.

Part One: Understanding social challenge prizes

For competitors:

Some of the most important advantages for competitors are:

- / Providing the momentum to turn ideas into action.
- / Increasing courage and confidence (through legitimising and celebrating ideas and achievements).
- / Providing the freedom to innovate.
- / Helping to crystallise their ideas and accelerate their development, whether they win or not.
- / The opportunity to think more clearly about long-term scalability.
- / Providing a base from which to leverage more support, e.g. recognition, more volunteer time and further funding.

For both:

- / Providing a shared goal, and a shared sense of endeavour.
- / Providing the flexibility necessary for innovation and for ideas to develop through several iterations.
- / Effective documentation of project progress through the production of evidence focused on achievement and outcomes.

“The Big Green Challenge made us discuss what we were doing and forced us to think longer term than we would have naturally.”

Competitor

The Big Green Challenge – a people-powered challenge prize

Background

NESTA launched the Big Green Challenge in 2007. It ran over two years, and offered a £1 million prize for the best community-led responses to climate change – in this case for reducing CO₂ emissions at the community level. The only restrictions were that people couldn't apply as individuals, their idea had to be UK-based, and groups had to be not-for-profit. But they didn't have to be formally constituted to apply – competitors could form entirely new and informal groups for the initial application stage.

We had over 350 entries from across the UK and the best 100 of these went through to a second stage where they received help and support from NESTA to develop their initial ideas into detailed plans. A shortlist of 21 was then invited to pitch their projects to us and from these we selected ten Finalists.

The ten Finalists then had one year and a £20,000 grant to begin implementing their plans, supported by further guidance from NESTA and our partners, in particular UnLtd. The £1 million prize was awarded to the Finalists who were able to demonstrate that their innovative solution was effective in reducing CO₂ emissions, that it engaged the community in which it was based, that it was sustainable (i.e. would last beyond the life of the Big Green Challenge), and had the potential to scale or be replicated. In aggregate, the Finalists cut CO₂ emissions by at least 1,770 to 2,059 tonnes, and the winners reduced emissions by 10 per cent to 46 per cent in just one year.³ Set against the context of the UK target being a 34 per cent reduction by 2020, this was a significant achievement.

³CO₂ reductions in the Big Green Challenge year were monitored by CRed on behalf of NESTA. This data provides a conservative estimate of reductions achieved by Finalists across the Big Green Challenge year. The emissions reductions achieved, now and in the future, may well be higher than the reductions reported here.

What made the Big Green Challenge different?

The Big Green Challenge was different for three main reasons:

1 An outcome-focused challenge prize to support social innovation

There are many different decisions to make on the design of any prize. A fundamental one is at what point to award the prize. In prizes that are offered as an incentive, the prize can either be awarded for the solution most likely to work, or for the demonstration of results, when the solution has been tested in practice. Establishing a prize to reward the demonstration of results was the approach we took with the Big Green Challenge. This approach (of which the X Prize is the most prominent) is less common, particularly in the context of social challenges tackled by community and voluntary sector groups.

Since the development of the Big Green Challenge, other incentive-led models to stimulate innovative solutions to social challenges have emerged. In the USA, the £700 million federal Race to the Top innovation fund aims to transform schools. In the UK, the NHS has announced public competitions to the value of £20 million for new medical breakthroughs.

2 A focus on community-led solutions

We chose to focus on community-led solutions for the Big Green Challenge because, whilst communities were recognised as important in communicating climate change messages to the public, the role of communities as a source of innovation had not been explored. Although there were some examples of pioneering community-led responses to climate change, they received limited support and recognition. The Big Green Challenge started from the assumption that there was untapped potential in communities to devise and deliver innovative solutions, and that mobilising this potential was critical to tackling the issue of climate change. We aimed to understand and showcase the potential of communities by creating a very open process to attract a wide range of different community-led ideas. We aimed to test the degree to which these could be effective by providing both support and an incentive to reward results.

3 A focus on innovative solutions

We believe that big social problems, like climate change, will only be solved by bold new solutions. Incremental improvements will not be enough. The Big Green Challenge was designed specifically to encourage and reward innovative new ideas.

We also designed the programme to generate knowledge about the opportunities for and obstacles to innovation in this context. Some of this knowledge was fed back into how we delivered the programme (for example informing the support provided to competitors). Much of it was presented to government and other organisations that might be able to help overcome the barriers (for example by providing new types of support, or by changing funding criteria or legislation).⁴

⁴Lessons on the opportunities for and barriers to innovation can be found in the following NESTA reports: 'Galvanising community-led responses to climate change' (2010); 'Working with communities to tackle climate change – practical approaches for local government (2010); 'Mass Localism' (2010).

How did the Big Green Challenge work?

The Big Green Challenge had four core objectives:

Objective 1: To galvanise people around, and inspire ambitious, innovative responses to, climate change. This led us to seek solutions from a wide range of community-led groups.

Objective 2: To achieve the measurable outcome of reduced CO₂ emissions in ways that would last and through innovations that have the potential to be taken to scale beyond the programme.

Objective 3: To leave a lasting legacy of increased capacity to innovate in response to social issues and to learn lessons about the conditions needed to support the implementation of solutions.

Objective 4: To build and share evidence on the role of prizes for social innovation.

The Big Green Challenge had the following design features aimed at maximising participation, encouraging innovation and enabling projects to grow:

Design feature 1: An 'open access' approach, with a very open first stage

To help us find, identify and mobilise new problem-solvers, we kept the barriers to entry to the Big Green Challenge very low and undertook outreach and publicity to attract competitors. Application criteria in the first stage were very broad and NESTA explicitly invited proposals from any non-profit group whether formally constituted or not.

Design feature 2: A clear outcome to aim at, but not a single outcome measure

The Big Green Challenge specified a clear, environmental outcome: a measurable CO₂ reduction. Four other crucial competition criteria were also added to define and assess successful projects: being innovative; potential to achieve long-lasting impact; potential to grow, be replicated and/or be adapted by others; and community engagement. This combination of criteria was designed to enable us to judge overall impact.

Design feature 3: A staged process

The Big Green Challenge used a four-stage process that created a 'funnel', with a large number of initial ideas being filtered to ten Finalists who were supported more intensively over a full year to implement and monitor their solutions. The staged process allowed us as organisers of the prize, and to some extent the competitors, to manage risk. The staged approach meant we could build in appropriate levels of support and graduated rewards to effectively lever up the quality of projects through the challenge prize process and help each competitor feel that they gained something from being part of the programme, whether they were winners or not. Taking competitors through a number of stages, and following the practical delivery of the Finalists' ideas, also gave us valuable insights into the opportunities and barriers that exist for these and similar solutions.

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Design feature 4: A focused timetable with support

We combined a tightly focused timetable, which generated urgency and momentum, with support to develop participants' ideas. Different levels of support were provided at different stages of the challenge. At whatever point they exited the competition, we wanted people to leave with their idea for innovation in a stronger position than when they entered.

Design feature 5: Providing space and flexibility to innovate

A desire to foster innovation and learn about the power of community responses underpinned the Big Green Challenge and was crucial to effectively engaging competitors and providing useful support. Though the challenge was clearly and specifically articulated, the challenge prize didn't prescribe the type of solution. The Big Green Challenge team's role was to offer support and impetus to the competitors who showed most promise as the challenge progressed.

What changes have been created by this approach?

Research by McKinsey & Company⁵ has set out the range of potential changes a prize approach can offer. The table on the following page outlines the intended and actual impacts created by the Big Green Challenge under each of the McKinsey headings.

“The BGC mobilised untapped resources – acted as a beacon and focus for people not previously active on climate change; and revealed social capital that wasn’t previously evident or joined up.”⁶

“The BGC process provided space for locally tailored and owned initiatives while also raising ambition, accelerating change and securing tangible outcomes. It got the best out of community-led approaches while ensuring focus, drive and accountability.”⁷

⁵McKinsey & Company (2009) ‘And the winner is: Capturing the promise of philanthropic prizes’.

⁶Brook Lyndhurst (2010) ‘The Big Green Challenge: Final evaluation report’. London: Brook Lyndhurst.

⁷Ibid.

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Changes created by social prizes	Intended and actual changes created by the Big Green Challenge	Intention vs. Impact
<p>/1 Focusing communities on specific problems: can be effective at shaping or guiding the agendas or behaviours or groups, e.g. harnessing energy around solving a specific challenge or problem.</p>	<p>The Big Green Challenge acted as a catalyst for projects that would have otherwise faltered. It has provided space for communities to understand and cohere around the issues and to get engaged with projects.</p>	<p>Intention – High Impact – High</p>
<p>/2 Influencing public perception: the ability to shine a light on a particular issue or problem, shape public debate and change the perceptions of sponsors.</p>	<p>The Big Green Challenge highlighted and provided concrete examples of the value of community-led approaches to climate change. Being part of the Big Green Challenge gave projects credibility and helped raise their profile.</p>	<p>Intention – High Impact – High</p>
<p>/3 Identify and mobilising new talent: openness of prizes, and ability to attract diverse talent and generate unexpected approaches.</p>	<p>The prize fund encouraged more creativity and broader thinking than conventional grant funding and has attracted smaller and more recently established groups beyond the ‘usual suspects’ (including notably one of the winners). The programme also revealed and strengthened increased social capital.</p>	<p>Intention – High Impact – High</p>
<p>/4 Educate and improve skills: can educate the public and improve the skills of competitors.</p>	<p>Most of the Big Green Challenge Finalist projects are concerned with changing attitudes and behaviours of their communities. The support provided to competitors through the process increased skills in, for example, project management, CO₂ monitoring and community engagement.</p>	<p>Intention – Medium Impact – High</p>
<p>/5 Identifying excellence: highlighting and elevating the best ideas, behaviours and achievements as a way of inspiring others and motivating competitors, e.g. Nobel Prize.</p>	<p>The Big Green Challenge revealed replicable and scalable models for community action on climate change and offered up good practice approaches.</p>	<p>Intention – Medium Impact – Medium</p>
<p>/7 Strengthening problem-solving communities: bringing together powerful networks of people who share ideas and best practices.</p>	<p>The Big Green Challenge enabled competitors to strengthen existing links within communities and to forge new partnerships with like-minded individuals.</p>	<p>Intention – Medium Impact – Medium</p>
<p>/8 Mobilising capital: lever investment of time and resources from competitors, and have the ability to attract additional investment in the field.</p>	<p>The Big Green Challenge revealed new financial models that represent alternatives to ‘grant dependency’ tendencies in some parts of the community sector. Several groups indicated that association with the Big Green Challenge helped attract additional financial and non-financial resources. The programme also attracted additional investment from the Department of Energy and Climate Change.</p>	<p>Intention – Low Impact – Medium/ High</p>

Part Two: Running a social challenge prize – practical considerations

In this section we look at how to run a social challenge prize. We first look at what you need to consider during the preparation and design phase. We then take you through the four stages used in the Big Green Challenge and list key considerations when designing similar stages. You may decide to use a different number of stages.

Before you start: a checklist of questions

Asking yourself the following questions will help to establish whether a social challenge prize could work for you. You need to be clear about the sort of change you're looking for before embarking on the details of design and delivery. If you can answer 'yes' to the following questions, then a social challenge prize could work well for you.

- / Can the change you're looking for be expressed as a specific, achievable, measurable outcome and be achieved in a defined timeframe?
- / Do you want to attract new ideas from a wide range of different people, rather than a small defined group?
- / Will the competitors be willing to contribute their own time, resources and money and do you think you can design a process that means they see this investment as reasonable compared to the value of the prize and support on offer?

Tips for success – some underlying ‘principles’ to guide the design and delivery of your challenge prize

- / Have a clear vision for the prize – it helps if you agree and articulate a clear vision for the prize early on. Then make sure someone acts as custodian of the vision, providing clear leadership and firm decisions, as well as helping to keep the programme focused on the outcome goals.
- / Communicate openly and honestly – make time for face-to-face meetings with competitors, and keep jargon out of your written materials.
- / Take a partnership approach – both with competitors and people who are helping you deliver the prize, by being open to co-design and feedback whilst still providing clear leadership where needed.
- / Be flexible – be clear about the overall design and timeframe, and allow for flexibility and adaption if they help improve the process.
- / Be supportive and fair – see your job as delivering a supportive process to ensure that competitors are more likely to achieve the desired outcome, while balancing this with fairness and impartiality.
- / Show empathy and respect for your competitors and their ideas, their understanding of the issues, and the effort it takes to engage in the process.
- / Be confident in your competitors – acknowledge that you don’t know what the best solutions will be, and genuinely believe in the capacity and ingenuity of your potential and actual competitors to design effective solutions.

Preparation and design of your social challenge prize

This section looks at the preparing for and designing of your social challenge prize. It specifically covers the following:

- / Prize focus
- / Prize value
- / Eligibility
- / Criteria and assessment
- / Judges
- / Timeframe
- / Early design of the prize stages
- / Support packages
- / People and partners
- / Marketing and engagement

Prize focus

The first thing you need to do is clarify your focus for your challenge prize. There will be at least two aspects to this:

- / The specific measurable social or environmental **outcome** you want to achieve as a result of the challenge process – the ‘what’.
- / The **groups** you want to target to help generate potential solutions – the ‘who’.

It is very useful to **involve some of your stakeholders** in framing the focus of your competition. This includes individuals or organisations with a particular expertise in the field, people who you might want to work with to deliver the prize and people who you might want to influence with the results. This will create further confidence in and commitment to the prize process, and make its focus more relevant and accurate.

The Big Green Challenge focused on:

- / The what – the reduction of CO₂ emissions.
- / The who – generating new ideas from community groups.

Part Two: Running a social challenge prize – practical considerations

Once you've decided on your focus, find a way of describing it that is accessible to a wide range of audiences. If possible, test your language on some of these audiences and gauge their response.

Prize value

The monetary value of the prize needs to be appropriate for the particular problem you want to tackle and the people you hope will enter the competition. For example, a national prize with a large number of competitors is likely to require a bigger prize than a local or regional one. A large prize will attract more attention and generate more publicity, as well as sending a message about the urgency of the problem you wish to address.

You may need to bear in mind the **impact that a large prize could have** on smaller groups. The size of the prize may encourage competitors to think on a bigger scale but they may also find it daunting. You may have to work hard upfront to make potential competitors believe the programme is for them and you should consider whether your final delivery stage needs to include support to help winners manage any large sums of money being awarded.

Remember that you will also need a **separate budget for running the competition and supporting** competitors, in addition to the prize. A rule of thumb here is to budget for as much money to support the competitors and deliver the process as you offer as the prize. Though it's also possible to opt for a different model and have – for example – a smaller prize and a more intensive level of support. The actual amount depends on the type of challenge you set, the scale of your prize (geographical spread and size of the prize), and the support your competitors are likely to need to fulfil their ambitions.

You can also leverage your contacts to provide support in-kind or negotiate with a sponsor to provide prize money.

“The strength of the prize is rarely derived from the size of its purse. More important is the underlying strategy to produce change and the way that strategy is implemented.”

McKinsey & Company (2009) ‘And the winner is: Capturing the promise of philanthropic prizes’.

Eligibility

It’s important to keep your **eligibility criteria to a minimum**. Be clear about who can and can’t enter, keeping barriers to entry as low as possible.

Eligibility criteria can stifle innovation if they are used to try to eliminate all risk. An example is demanding a proven track record in the field, which would effectively exclude a large number of potential entrants. If you want new groups of people to participate you need to open up the first stage to unconstituted groups with no formal status who would then be expected to formalise their arrangements if they progress to the next stage.

Criteria and assessment

Clear, transparent judging criteria at each stage are critical to a fair and robust prize process that achieves the desired outcome. Your principal criteria will relate to that measurable outcome. This could be presented as open ended (achieve as much as you can) or as a specific target (achieve a specific number or percentage). An ambitious target can help to encourage innovation (the target could never be reached through existing means). At the same time you should be careful not to set a target that your potential competitors will feel is impossible for them to achieve.

For the Big Green Challenge, applications were limited to social enterprises, NGOs, and community groups. We excluded public and private sector groups in this case because we decided that the community aspect was especially important for this particular challenge. Only four of the 359 initial applications we initially received were ineligible.

Here is the wording we used:

Who can enter?

The Big Green Challenge from NESTA is for not-for-profit groups or organisations, e.g. voluntary or charitable (third-sector) organisations, and you will need to prove that you fulfil this requirement before you are accepted as a Finalist. You do not need to be formally constituted as a not-for-profit group for the initial application stage, so you may consider forming a new group to compete for the prize, if no suitable group exists at present.

Who can’t enter?

*/ Public bodies, except for Parish, Town and Community Councils
/ Individuals
/ Groups based primarily outside the UK*

Part Two: Running a social challenge prize – practical considerations

We would recommend you have other criteria sitting alongside the one focused on your measurable outcome. We would also recommend that you include criteria that relate to the sustainability and/or potential for scale or replication of the solutions.

In designing your criteria you should consider the following questions:

- / Is it helpful to **set a specific target** for your measurable outcome?
- / What other features or characteristics do you want to encourage in your entries, for example, do you want to put a focus on sustainability?
- / What combination of criteria will most likely achieve the outcome(s) you are looking for?
- / Do you need to weight some criteria as more important than others? If the answer is yes, then to ensure clarity and fairness for competitors this can only be established up-front and shouldn't be decided during the judging process.
- / Which partners and stakeholders should you involve in developing or providing feedback on the criteria?
- / Think about how you can involve representatives of your potential competitor audience in this process to make sure the criteria are communicated in a way that will be easily understood.

Designing your criteria well, articulating them clearly and applying them effectively is crucial throughout the process. The best criteria help the competitors focus on the outcome and develop their ideas throughout the challenge.

In the Big Green Challenge we were looking for the solutions that could:

- 1 Reduce CO₂ emissions:** having a focus on one big environmental outcome was important to provide focus on progress. A short-term, ambitious, measurable goal, combined with long-term indicators, provided a credibility to the projects.
- 2 Be innovative:** the purpose of the competition was to try and stimulate new types of activity to tackle this challenge and to bring something additional to the landscape of existing interventions.
- 3 Have the potential to achieve long lasting impact:** we were seeking models for bringing about CO₂ reductions that would support impact over the long term.
- 4 Have the potential to grow, be replicated, and/or adapted by others:** we wanted to develop a practical set of options for CO₂ reduction by communities, with a focus on high quality implementation.
- 5 Be able to engage a community successfully:** our hypothesis was that to achieve CO₂ reductions you need to effect behaviour change.

In the Big Green Challenge the five criteria in *combination* worked to identify the solutions that would achieve most impact overall, during and beyond the life of the challenge prize. So a solution that focused on drastic CO₂ reductions during the life of the challenge,

As well as your published criteria you will need to develop **assessment guidance and a scoring framework** for your Reviewers and/or Judges (see below). Remember that in the early stages you are looking for potential, regardless of track record, and in the final stage you will be expecting evidence of impact. The measureable criteria should be judged as consistently as possible across all competitors. For some of your other criteria there may not be ‘one size fits all’ indicators of potential success. For example, for sustainability or scalability there will be a number of plausible options and you should be looking at whether the competitors’ plans are appropriate for the effective delivery of their solution.

Judges

You should aim to bring together a panel that has complementary skills, knowledge, and experience, and specific expertise in the content area of your challenge (e.g. CO₂ reduction). It’s also preferable to have the same Judges throughout the challenge.

Consider the following questions when selecting your Judges:

- / How important is it to have **high profile figures** on the judging panel? It can be useful to include people who can exert a positive influence, for example on wider government policy in the relevant area. They must also be able to commit the necessary time to the role. The best Judges are those who genuinely want to engage with the projects and learn from them. This makes them more likely to give the energy and time the process demands.
- / Do you need to **pay the Judges** for their time in order to ensure responsibilities are carried out? For example, if they’re freelance consultants you may have to pay for at least some of their time.

but had not engaged the community and had weak plans for sustaining the CO₂ reductions, was not judged to be as successful as one that could deliver more moderate CO₂ reductions during the year with strong plans for sustaining and increasing these into the near future.

Overall, the Big Green Challenge delivery team and the Finalists found the criteria helpful. Some people did feel, however, that at times the criteria could have been more clearly specified and explained.

In Stage 1 and at the beginning of Stage 2 of the Big Green Challenge we used a panel of Reviewers drawn from NESTA and our delivery partners (UnLtd and CRed) to assess the potential of the ideas and to whittle down the detailed plans to a shortlist that would be manageable for Judges to consider.

The commitment of time the Big Green Challenge Judges needed to make was as follows:

- / End of Stage 2 – hearing pitches from shortlisted projects to inform the selection of the Finalists.
- / Stage 3 – briefing meeting and first visit to Finalists (half way through their delivery year).
- / Stage 4 – second visit to Finalists (at the end of their delivery year), receipt of judging papers, briefing meeting, and judging meeting to decide winners.

Part Two: Running a social challenge prize – practical considerations

If you anticipate that you may receive a large number of initial entries to the challenge prize and if you decide that you need a high-profile judging panel who will have limited time to commit, you should consider establishing a separate group of Reviewers to assess ideas in the early stages.

At every stage it is important to brief your Reviewers and/or Judges clearly on their responsibilities and the criteria. Using group face-to-face briefings, alongside written instructions, to surface any inconsistencies in peoples' understanding of the criteria, is very valuable.

Timeframe

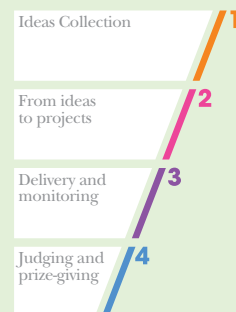
You need to ask yourself what would be a **reasonable timeframe** in which to **develop the ideas and achieve the measurable impact** you are hoping for. Bear in mind that with some long-term issues it may be necessary to accept robust indications of progress rather than demand concrete results.

Another important consideration is the maintenance of interest and momentum – make the challenge period too long, and you may lose both.

Finally there are some practical considerations for both you and your competitors. You may have to factor in your organisations' internal decision-making processes and allow time to find additional capacity or partners to help run the challenge prize, as well as allowing lead-in time for publicity and promotion. You should also bear in mind that your competitors may be combining their voluntary work on the entry with a full-time job (this is particularly the case if you target community action through your prize).

In the case of the Big Green Challenge, we felt 12 months was the minimum length of time for the entrants to implement their approach and produce sufficient evidence of actual CO₂ reductions. This timeframe also allowed enough time for some of the competitors to adapt their approach after beginning to put it into practice. Feedback from our competitors suggests that ambitious timescales can help bring focus and clarity to their ideas. However, some competitors felt pressurised by the timescales, and some Finalists wished they had more than a year to achieve everything they hoped. As organisers we also would have liked to allow more time to develop the specific CO₂ monitoring tools we needed for our particular challenge (and wanted to develop for others to use beyond the challenge).

The Big Green Challenge used a four-stage process:



Early design of the prize stages

The number of stages you decide to use may depend on your audiences and desired outcomes. We found that our stages worked well to enable a very open and light touch first stage, an opportunity to support competitors to develop robust detailed plans, and a clear dedicated period during which Finalists tested and measured the impact of their ideas. During the marketing and delivery of our challenge prize we publicly referred to three phases, as these were the phases involving competitors. For the purposes of this guide we have described the judging process as a fourth stage, because it is such an important stage in the delivery of a challenge prize.

Tips for success – early design of the prize stages

- / Create clear and transparent stages to your prize process and communicate them accordingly.
- / Think carefully about what people need to know at each stage and don't overload competitors with detail.
- / Make sure you pace the amount of information and effort required from your competitors – don't ask too much of them too early.
- / Allow enough time to deliver each stage well – rushing the process will only undermine your efforts and risk a lack of full participation by your competitors.
- / Plan the timeline well in advance and endeavour to adhere to it once it's set. The timeline can help give projects drive and momentum.
- / Build in time for flexibility – you need to be prepared to make changes and improvements as you go along.
- / Design in support for competitors at each stage and adapt this as you better understand their needs.
- / Celebrate success at the end of each stage and use this as an opportunity to discuss progress with your delivery partners, and motivate competitors to continue.

Support packages

One of the key features of an effective social challenge prize is the support given by the organiser to **develop and improve competitors’ ideas** throughout the different stages. This is about providing support that enables groups to effectively take part and to develop through the stages.

There are several different types of support that can be provided and different groups will have very different needs. Support can be financial or non-financial, particularly in the form of advisory support.

Advisory support

The two main ways of providing advisory support are:

/ Workshops for all competitors

These work best when you need to share common information with all your competitors. There can also be a lot of value in bringing them all together in a collaborative atmosphere and giving them the chance to network. Likewise, you can use these events to reinforce key messages, clarify expectations and gain a better understanding of the competitors’ needs and perspectives. There’s only so much you can get across in written guidance.

/ Tailored one-to-one support

Bespoke advice and guidance can really help the competitors and will contribute to the success of the prize process as a whole. It doesn’t need to be given face-to-face – in fact, providing telephone or email support will be easier for some competitors. Whichever option you choose, make sure you allow enough time to do it properly and remember that different groups may need very different types of support. A one-size-fits-all package of a given number of days’ support won’t necessarily work for everyone.

In the Big Green Challenge, Stage 2 competitors needed guidance on how to draft bids, meet the competition criteria, budgeting and long-term planning. Some also needed help with community engagement, legal and marketing/PR aspects. Stage 3 competitors needed help with organisational structures and legal, governance, and human resource management issues, managing stakeholders and long-term planning.

The aspects of the support framework they valued the most were the mentoring from dedicated advisors, and the help with setting up or adapting their business models.

“Most of the groups were happy to have an advisor that they could bounce off ideas and to generate additional feedback. They appreciated the fact that I was there to assist them in fine-tuning their ideas and approach.”

Big Green Challenge Advisor

“Big Green Challenge Finalists have benefited from the advisory support they were provided with during the development of their ideas and in the early stages of implementation. It has helped managers build their own skills and capacity and encouraged projects to think about long-term planning.”

Big Green Challenge Evaluation, May 2009

Part Two: Running a social challenge prize – practical considerations

Financial support

You should consider providing or brokering some small-scale funding to get Finalists up and running with putting their ideas into practice. This is particularly important if you are asking community and voluntary sector groups to demonstrate measureable results in order to compete for the prize.

The size of the grants you provide should be significant enough to help Finalists achieve the initial delivery of their solutions, without pulling too much of your budget away from what you offer as the main prize incentive.

There are a number of questions you can usefully ask when you're designing the support elements of the prize process:

- / How will you keep in touch with the evolving needs of competitors?
- / What skills and capacities do they need to develop?
- / How much are you able to invest in the support overall and how do you want to divide this across the different stages?
- / Is there any mismatch between the skills and expertise needed to engage in each stage of the process, and the skills your competitors already have? What kinds of support will be most effective in plugging these gaps?
- / Which partners do you need to help you deliver the support? Are there established networks you could tap into?
- / How will you identify and train expert advisors?

At Stage 3 our Finalists were each awarded a grant of £20,000 towards the implementation of their idea.

Tips for success – the support framework

- / Stay focused on the outcome, rather than the process of the prize.
- / Work out where the key points in the process are, and target the support at these times.
- / Take time to understand what your entrants really need.
- / Offer both general and tailored support and the chance for entrants to learn from each other. This could be particularly effective with local prizes.
- / Make it easy to access the support and allow enough time for entrants to do so.
- / Offer expert advisors.
- / Make sure the competitors all feel they've gained something, whether they win or not.

Part Two: Running a social challenge prize – practical considerations

People and partners

You may not have all the skills or capacity you need to design and run a social challenge prize in-house, so you need to think early on about the extra skills and capacity you need. Keep an open mind about who could work with you and how they might contribute.

You should consider your capacity and needs in relation to the following:

- / A **central delivery team** including someone who is custodian of the vision of the challenge prize, and someone who leads the delivery (this might be the same person), as well as some administrative support.
- / Expertise relating to the **specific challenge** you want to address. This will help you develop effective criteria, appropriate reporting and monitoring systems, as well as inform judging.
- / A panel of suitable people to **review and judge the applications**. Using a small group of individuals whom you train and engage properly will save time and ensure you have a consistent and fair process.
- / **Expert advisors** to help deliver the support package referred to in the previous section, either by working directly with you or through a partner organisation who can manage their work for you.
- / Organisations and individuals who can act as **advocates and supporters** of your social challenge prize with your target audience.
- / An **Advisory Panel** made up of key partners and individuals who can help with the design of the prize process and act as a sounding board as the work develops.
- / If possible, you should also develop a formal or informal **network of in-house or external experts** who can help you with issues in specific delivery areas, in particular legal and communications.

In the Big Green Challenge, we needed a dedicated full-time project director/manager to drive the project within NESTA. They led the design process, managed the delivery process, co-ordinated relationships with our partners, and made the key decisions. We also needed administrative support and at peak times some additional project management capacity.

We worked closely with our internal communications and legal teams. The more you engage them in what you are doing, the easier it will be for them to support you to make your challenge prize successful.

We worked with two main delivery partners:

- / UnLtd helped us promote the challenge and manage and review applications, as well as sourcing, co-ordinating and providing the support to competitors.
- / CRed provided advice to competitors on how to include opportunities for monitoring CO₂ emissions in their ideas, worked with experts AMEE to design a system for Finalists to use to monitor CO₂ emissions, and helped us review and judge potential and actual CO₂ reductions.

We also worked from the early stages with an evaluation partner. This will be useful to you if you are trialling a social challenge prize for the first time with a view to running more in future and/or if one of your objectives is to use the challenge prize to understand more about how the solutions you find work and how they might be supported (by you or others) to work better in the future.

We also worked with an agency to develop a website and online application form.

Having the right partners on board early on can make a big difference to your marketing and early engagement activity.

Having **high-level leadership support** within your organisation will also be important. This kind of approach is likely to be new in your context, so it probably will not neatly fit into existing structures or processes. You need someone on board who can create the safe space needed to innovate, make bold or difficult decisions and who can influence others in the organisation to support you when necessary.

Marketing and engagement

This is all about ensuring that you get maximum publicity for your prize so that as many people as possible think about entering. There are many ways to do this and those you choose will depend on the outcome you're looking for and the nature of the audience you want to engage.

The information you will need to cover in **key messages** for all your audiences will include the social challenge prize stages and the fact that it is outcome-focused, your openness to a wide range of applicants and the benefits of taking part (for winners and non-winners).

Clarity about the process and the support package are key, so that people are clear about what's involved and what they'll gain from taking part in each stage of the process.

Particularly if you are trying to reach new audiences, you may find yourself using **communications channels and techniques** that you haven't used before. This is why it's so useful to include communications experts in the team from the start, whether in-house, or through your partners.

We worked with several partners, experts and internal teams because of the scale and experimental nature of our prize challenge. You won't necessarily need the same level of resources.

In the case of the Big Green Challenge, we knew we had to get out and about and engage with local groups in their own neighbourhoods. This also allowed us to do additional research about existing community-based CO2 reduction activities.

We made the deliberate decision to create a separate **brand identity for the Big Green Challenge**, which was clearly linked to the issue and our focus on community. The key was to find something that promoted engagement and understanding, and wasn't too gimmicky.



Part Two: Running a social challenge prize – practical considerations

One early priority should be to mobilise any existing networks or contacts you have, either those based on the specific challenge being addressed by the prize, or those that are already plugged into the sort of groups you want to attract.

Effective engagement activities can include:

- / Identifying key, **influential individuals** within your target communities and recruiting them as advisors and supporters. MPs might be a good example.
- / Using **road shows or events** as a way of testing your messages face-to-face and creating interest in specific localities. Over 800 groups and individuals registered an initial interest in the Big Green Challenge, and 609 of these considered attending a regional event. 424 of them did.
- / Working with **partner and advocate organisations** who share the same values as the prize.
- / Creating a **website or page on your website** that gives all the information about the prize and allows people to interact with it. Include links to your partner organisations and other organisations relevant to the issue your prize is focused on.
- / Using national, regional or local **press and broadcast media** where you can.
- / Using **social media** to engage actively with people: create a Facebook page or Twitter account for your challenge prize.
- / Remember that **word of mouth and direct contact** with local groups may well be the most effective forms of publicity you have.

Brands are also a good way of creating a sense of belonging, and can help in promotion and PR. We also created separate logos for the winners of each stage, which recognised their achievements in the prize, and which they could then use for their own publicity – for example, Top 100 Challenger, Top 21 Challenger, Finalist.

As the result of our engagement activities we received 355 eligible applications for the Big Green Challenge, spread across the UK. There was broad representation from small groups, both formal (like charities) and informal. Just under half came from those set up less than five years ago and 51 groups came together for the first time to be part of the Big Green Challenge.

Ideas Collection

Competitors put forward their initial ideas

1

From ideas to projects

Competitors prepare and submit detailed plans

2

Delivery and monitoring

Finalists' projects are delivered

3

Judging and prize-giving

Judges select prize winners

4

Delivery of the stages of your social challenge prize

The Big Green Challenge used four stages. You might use a different number. Many of your practical considerations will be similar, so this section should still be useful to you.

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Ideas collection: Competitors put forward their initial ideas

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Stage 1 – Ideas collection

In this stage you should be aiming to gather as many credible responses to the challenge as possible. The process for collecting initial ideas needs to be simple and accessible. There's little point going to lots of effort to engage people in the prize and then confronting them with a complex application process that would put off all but the most experienced grant-seekers. Creating something clear and simple can be harder than it sounds. It's all too easy to fall into the trap of 'putting everything in, just in case' in an attempt to be transparent and fair.

During this initial stage **ask for the minimum of information** from competitors so you can keep the entry bar low and attract as many applicants as possible.

One of the more complicated elements in this early stage is judging the **level of resources** needed to review all the applications, because you won't know in advance how many you will receive. You could end up with a very large number of entries, and if this happens you should, if possible, allow more time to cope with it rather than bring in extra people to handle it. Keeping the number of Reviewers/Judges smaller will help with consistency.

We would highly recommend you allow time to arrange for the Reviewers/Judges to meet and discuss their role, the scoring system (which you should also keep simple at this stage) and their understanding of the criteria. It is useful in this meeting for them to go through two or three practice applications together.

At the end of Stage 1 you should have whittled the number of your entrants down to those you will invite to move to Stage 2. It's worth knowing that it is unlikely that all of these will complete the second stage, as you'll be asking for a bigger commitment of time and resources from them.

In the Big Green Challenge we asked for basic information about the type of group applying (using set categories where possible, to help with analysing data later), a brief summary of the idea (with a word limit of 500 words), and briefly how the group believed their idea could deliver on each of our criteria (300 word limit per question).

Part Two: Running a social challenge prize – practical considerations

Tips for success – the application process

- / Make the application form short and straightforward, and if your resources allow make it available online as well as electronically and on paper.
- / Develop a **simple open question** to ask in relation to each of your criteria and set a word limit for the answers.
- / Ask for a **short project summary**, again with a word limit.
- / Ask for some **basic information** about your applicants that will allow you to assess them against your eligibility criteria.
- / Design a **clear scoring system** to evaluate the responses.
- / Train those who will review the applications so that they are **assessed consistently**.
- / Remember that at this stage you are **assessing potential** rather than track record, the detail of delivery plans, or the ability to write a good application.
- / Allow Reviewers the **flexibility to flag applications** that may have scored low, but seem to have the germ of a great idea which could be developed.
- / Keep a good **paper trail** so that you can respond to future queries, especially if it's a high-profile prize.
- / Inform those who haven't been successful in a timely manner, offering **individual feedback** where possible.

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From ideas to projects: Competitors prepare and submit detailed plans

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Stage 2 – From ideas to projects

In this stage the remaining competitors develop detailed plans for the delivery of their ideas and you select your Finalists based on the assessment of these plans.

Competitors will need to demonstrate they have the ability to deliver their project, regardless of their prior experience. This could be a challenge for some of them as they may have little or no experience of project design and delivery or monitoring outcomes. This is why it's important to offer a **support package** (see p.32).

At the end of Stage 2 you should still be assessing the projects according to potential to delivery on your selection criteria. You are now also looking for information relating to the **likely successful delivery of the project**. This will include, for example, the appropriateness of their delivery plan, realistic finances, recognition of how they might monitor their progress and measure impact, awareness of the responsibilities and skills needed to deliver the idea and a sense of where these could be found if the competitor doesn't have them currently. In other words, you'll be looking for evidence that competitors have a high chance of achieving a measurable outcome, that they're prepared and able to monitor progress towards this and can respond to any obstacles that could impede progress.

Depending on the problem you're trying to tackle you may need to draft in **expert Reviewers** at this point. This was certainly the case in the Big Green Challenge, where we needed to draw on specialist scientific support in relation to CO₂ emissions.

The Big Green Challenge allowed six weeks for the competitors to develop detailed plans with support – eight to ten would probably have been better.

There were 88 detailed plans at the end of Stage 4 of the Big Green Challenge, and we allowed three weeks to assess them. With hindsight, this should have been longer. Twenty-one competitors were short-listed as a result, and were given ten days to prepare a five to ten minute **pitch to a panel of external Judges**. Once again, this timeframe could usefully have been rather longer. Some pitches were made in person, and others via video link, and they were scheduled over two days. All the short-listed entrants were given advice on the preparation and delivery of their pitches.

Part Two: Running a social challenge prize – practical considerations

You should also consider arranging an opportunity for your competitors (or a shortlist if you have many) to talk face-to-face with Judges about their ideas. This allows the Judges to meet the people behind the projects, and therefore to assess not only whether the idea is convincing, but whether the team is convincing too. It also gives the competitors a chance to talk about their project, and put across their passion and enthusiasm.

Tips for success – supporting the creation of detailed plans

- / Allow enough time for the entrants to make the most of the support on offer and develop their ideas while keeping up the momentum of the prize.
- / Hold workshops in locations that are **easily accessible** and give competitors as much notice as possible.
- / Keep detailed notes of the issues raised by competitors during the support (particularly group workshops) so the learning can be shared and acted upon.
- / Consider providing a **template for the competitors delivery plan** based on a set of guiding questions to provide clarity about the information you are looking for and consistency in the information being judged.
- / Use the same Reviewers as in Stage 1 to ensure consistency and build up their own knowledge.

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Delivery and monitoring: Finalists' projects are delivered

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Stage 3 – Delivery and monitoring

In this stage the Finalists you have selected put their ideas into action, their progress is monitored and this leads to the eventual selection of the prize winners. The focus throughout is on achieving successful implementation and evidence of outcomes. It's likely this stage will take anything up to a year in order to allow the competitors to properly demonstrate the effectiveness of their solutions.

Supporting effective delivery

You should provide a kick-off session to bring your Finalists together and make sure they understand your expectations for this crucial stage. You could also consider supporting each Finalist to set up a local launch event as a way of effectively starting their activities with their target communities/users.

The Finalists will continue to receive support throughout this stage and **tailored one-to-one and specialist help** should increase and focus on more specific, live and in-depth issues. They will also need **financial support** now to help get their projects up and running. You may be providing relatively small amounts of funding, but it can make all the difference in securing additional capacity, buying equipment, or holding events to engage the community. The phasing of the payment of financial support to linked milestones and formal progress reports should correspond to reporting you are asking of the Finalists as part of the prize process, rather than being additional.

You will have a plan for the support provided in this phase, and you should allow some flexibility to allocate days to trouble-shooting or re-structuring the original plan. The actual support given by the advisors could range from facilitating management meetings or away days, to one-to-one sessions with project leaders, phone and email advice and feedback, and research on possible financial models and business plans. Consider allocating a core advisor to each Finalist so the advisor can really get to know their issues and become a critical friend.

During this stage each Finalist received a personalised support package of 20 days' consultancy, sourced and managed by UnLtd. This was tailored to their specific needs but generally followed the following format:

- / Two to three days in the first two months, to help **get the project off the ground**.
- / Ten to twelve days over the next six months, to **accelerate the development of the organisation**. This tended to include work on communications and engagement strategies, as well as legal and financial advice.
- / Six to eight days on the **strategic or technical issues** needed to maximise their chances of winning the Challenge.

Part Two: Running a social challenge prize – practical considerations

Advisors can bring in more specific technical (e.g. legal) expertise if required. Whilst your advisors should not inform the judging process (they will be too closely involved with the Finalists), they will have invaluable insights to offer you about the way your challenge prize evolved.

Monitoring

It is in this stage that the competitive element really kicks in, so you have to ensure you are both equitable in the provision of support and rigorous in your monitoring, however you choose to do it.

Data collection and reporting can create a sense of urgency and momentum and a clear focus for Finalists and the communities they are working with. Delivered well, it forces clarity of vision for the delivery of specific activities and outputs and a focus on ensuring these are carried through. At the same time, you should be aware of the risk of overburdening Finalists in your quest for rigour.

Here are some key questions to consider as you design and deliver your monitoring:

- / How will you **baseline projects** at the beginning of the year to ensure you have a clear set of initial data to use in evaluating progress?
- / How will you **monitor progress** during the delivery period? What kind of reporting mechanisms do you need – visits, independent data collection, self-reported information (written or other formats)? Bear in mind that having the data independently verified will be important to ensure fairness.
- / Are there **existing measures or monitoring systems** you can use or supplement?

In the Big Green Challenge we asked for **quarterly reports**, showing progress against the agreed criteria. These told a particularly rich story, and provide a valuable evidence base. We provided templates for the reports and the first and last reports contained a different set of questions to try to establish a baseline for the non-CO₂ data and to provide an overall picture and final evidence of impact.

We also had to work with a **technical partner** to create a new mechanism to baseline and monitor CO₂ emissions, as those already available were not suitable for community projects. The Big Green Challenge piloted a new tool that, with hindsight, caused a number of difficulties. It gave the prize extra credibility with external opinion-formers. This was arguably outweighed by the additional burden it placed on the Finalists themselves.

We arranged **two visits from NESTA and the external Reviewers and Judges**. The last visit coincided with the Finalists' last report. Due to the high profile nature of some of the Judges in the Big Green Challenge we experienced difficulty in arranging some of the visits and some projects felt burdened by the logistical arrangements involved. Overall, Finalists were very positive about the visits, commenting that they were enjoyable events in which the whole community could get involved and that they helped projects to see their work with outside eyes and so prompted reflection.

- / How will you **balance the need for rigour without over-burdening** your Finalists? Your data needs to be good enough to be accountable and credible, rather than perfect.
- / How will you incorporate **feedback loops** to the Finalists during the delivery period so they can get a measure of how they are performing in different areas?

Almost all Finalists in the Big Green Challenge felt it had been a valuable experience and one they would do again. They strongly preferred the outcomes focus versus the normal outputs focus on many funding programmes. The financial and consultancy support they received through the delivery year was warmly welcomed, though some felt it was insufficient compensation for the burden of the competition, in relation to problems caused by the online CO₂ monitoring system they were asked to use, for example.

Independent Reviewers in the Big Green Challenge

Three independent Reviewers were recruited to support the final data collection and processing phase. They all had experience in the field of social innovation and knowledge of the environment and/or climate change. Reviewers were engaged in the following activities/tasks:

- / A light touch review of projects to familiarise them with the projects and contribute to feedback to Finalists before the end of the year.
- / Accompanying Judges and NESTA on visits to Finalists.
- / Meeting to ensure consistency of understanding and application of the scoring framework.
- / A final review of each Finalist, scoring them against the criteria, and providing a clear written assessment that would enable the Judges to consider each project thoroughly.

Tips for success – monitoring outcomes

- / The following are crucial in the measurement phase: **proportionality, comparability, reasonable attribution** (can the outcomes be reasonably said to be as a result of the Finalist's solution) and **credibility of data**.
- / Aim for a measurement mechanism that is clear at the start of this stage and reasonable in terms of the **time and resources** it demands from the Finalists.
- / Ensure that you **allow enough time** to collect baseline data.
- / **Support the Finalists with the report-writing process** – many will have little experience of doing this – and provide **feedback** on how well the reports are demonstrating evidence against the criteria.
- / Arrange **visits by Judges** to see Finalists in action in their communities and put other more technical information into context. Ideally every Judge should visit every Finalist at least once during the delivery period.

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Judging and prize giving: Judges select prize winners

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Stage 4 – judging and prize-giving

This final stage will be tense for both competitors and Judges as the final data about Finalists' projects is collected, processed and judged, and the prize winners are announced.

Final judging

You need to bear in mind that, as the decision-making point gets closer, the Finalists will become more anxious about whether or not they're likely to win, or how to cope if they do. Having committed so much effort and resource to delivering their projects, the Finalists may begin to believe that 'everyone should be a winner', so it takes careful and sensitive planning to ensure you have a transparent and, as far as possible, a supportive judging process. You also need to remain focused on the fact that it's in the nature of the prize approach that **not everyone is likely to win**, and the real value lies in the quality of the outcomes achieved.

The judging process begins in the months leading up to the final decision meeting as the various sets of monitoring data are collected and processed. You will have gathered a significant amount of information from a range of sources (Finalists, independent Reviewers, the central team and Judges), which will need analysis before presenting to Judges.

Critically, you need to provide information to Judges which gives them a picture of the whole project in order that projects can be assessed in light of all the criteria you established up-front.

Judges for the Big Green Challenge received regular updates throughout the delivery period. NESTA also ensured that Judges knew why Finalists had originally been selected at Stage 2 and what was expected of them, as well as highlighting their key successes from the delivery year, their future potential and issues/challenges.

During the Big Green Challenge NESTA gave a significant level of advice to the Judges, partly because there was so much material to assess, and partly because we had in-depth insight and knowledge of the projects, without being too close to them (as the advisors were).

These scores were shared with the Judges in the Big Green Challenge, as a starting point for their discussions. Judges could agree or disagree with the scores, share their views as to why, and start to make **comparisons between Finalists**.

We felt the advisors in the Big Green Challenge were too close to their entrants to offer an objective view and we wanted to preserve the productive relationships built up between Finalists and advisors.

Part Two: Running a social challenge prize – practical considerations

Here are some key questions to bear in mind when devising the final judging process:

- / What **information will your Judges need** in order to make informed decisions, both before and during the final judging meeting?
- / To what extent should the **organising/central team inform the Judges** in their decision-making? Does the central team have significant knowledge of the Finalists' projects that should be shared with Judges? Or, are they 'too close' to the projects for these insights to be objective?
- / Do the Judges need to **interview each Finalist** on judging day? Would meeting the Finalists help or hinder the decision-making process? If Judges have previously met the Finalists then it may not be necessary and could be a significant burden on Finalists at an already stressful time.
- / Should **advisors' views or reports** be part of the judging process? This will depend on the role advisors have played and the nature of their relationships with Finalists. How objective do you think they would be?
- / How will the **decision be reached**? You need to ensure there is a clear agenda and process for the final decision-making, and that everyone understands their own role.
- / How you will ensure the decision is **based on achievements**, i.e. not influenced by how Finalists choose to spend any money they win? It is inevitable that your Judges will be interested in how Finalists would spend any prize money awarded to them. As organiser, you need to be clear that this isn't a criteria for decision-making.

In the Big Green Challenge each Judge asked to come to the final meeting with their own view of the one or two 'front-runners', based on the material given to them beforehand. The Judges then discussed each one in detail, in relation to the five criteria. The final decisions were based on a majority vote, with the Chair holding the casting vote.

In the Big Green Challenge, criteria around sustainability and scalability gave Judges useful insight into the future potential of the Finalists' projects. Plans for use of the prize are likely to be part of Finalists' future plans for their projects, so were taken into consideration *only* in this sense.

Due to the large amount of information and documentation available on each Finalist's project, NESTA created two information packs for Judges as a way of prioritising the data and providing ease of access.

A core information pack included processed data and other information from a **range of sources**, including NESTA, independent Reviewers and the Finalists themselves. In combination they gave a balanced view of achievements, progress and issues. A set of supporting information was also provided for each Finalist.

/ How and when will you **announce the decision?**

Once the decision has been made, you should aim to inform the Finalists of the outcome as soon as possible. If your prize has attracted significant media attention it is likely that your Finalists will appreciate some training on media management so they can manage this part of the challenge effectively.

Prize-giving and ending the journey

A critical part of your role and responsibility is to ensure the journey of the competition ends well for all parties.

Consider how will you give **feedback to the Finalists**.

You need to show respect for the commitment all your Finalists have shown by ensuring they receive full and meaningful feedback once the decision is made.

Make sure there are also formal and informal opportunities for the entrants to give **feedback** about the process – both what worked, and what didn't.

You should award the prize in such a way that celebrates both the success of the winners and the extensive effort, commitment and achievements of all the Finalists.

Consider holding a celebration event that allows all the Finalists to showcase their work. This should be an event for all partners and participants in the process, and you should consider inviting other organisations or individuals who might further support the Finalists in future.

The public nature of the prize process can create issues for all Finalists – winners and losers alike. The prize money can make a significant difference to the size and scope of the winning organisations, and what they can deliver. Likewise there will be significant disappointment for the losers and the communities they work with. You should plan an appropriate, **optional package of support** for all the Finalists and consider how you can work with them in the future. This is not about extending the prize process itself, but about helping the Finalists plan their ongoing work.

In the Big Green Challenge feedback included a detailed evaluation against each of the criteria, and the Judges' comments on the future direction the Finalists' work might take.

The Big Green Challenge offered all Finalists three days of mentoring support following the awarding of the prize. This could be with their previous advisor or with someone new and was appreciated as a chance to reflect on the question of 'where next'? We also held a 'Learning Day' for Finalists to come together and share their experience of the whole process as a group. They were able to tell their stories in their own words and to discuss the process, warts and all. It was a crucial opportunity for NESTA and the evaluation team to gather first-hand an honest and open appraisal of the prize approach.

The Big Green Challenge set up a diffusion project as a focused attempt to replicate and scale innovative approaches and models developed through the prize approach. Finalists were invited, alongside similar projects from outside of the competition, to bid for small amounts of further funding to work with NESTA to explore how to encourage others to adopt or adapt their solution.

Tips for success – the final judging

- / Make sure there's a **clear process and timeline** for the final data collection (from Finalists and Reviewers).
- / Allow enough time to pull together the reports for the Judges, and **analyse the data properly**, especially where it's technical or scientific.
- / Ensure the Finalists are clear about the **final judging criteria** and any weighting attached to them.
- / Be clear with Finalists, Reviewers and Judges that winners are to be selected on the basis of **clear evidence** of progress against the competition criteria.
- / Plan for **detailed feedback** for both winning and losing Finalists. Celebrate success, and give support to those who do not win.

You can also maximise the **ripple effect of the prize** by creating opportunities to share and spread the learning and practices developed by Finalists and securing even greater impact. Consider up front how you will look to share the solutions developed through the prize and encourage take up in other localities or with other communities. Don't rely on diffusion of learning and innovation being directed by the Finalists, as they may be unsure how to resource this without it distracting from the future development of their work. Throughout the competition it is very useful (for longer-term impact) to engage external stakeholders who could influence or hinder the future ongoing delivery, growth or replication of the competitors' solutions.

NESTA also worked with Finalists to share their powerful stories through events and networking opportunities. As well as promoting individual projects, this can be a way of demonstrating the value of social innovation and community engagement in a very real way. Having real stories to tell about projects that have made a clear impact can be compelling and engaging for a range of stakeholders and partners, and especially policymakers.

The Big Green Challenge allowed NESTA to learn a great deal, both about the challenge prize approach itself, and also about community-led innovation in response to climate change and more broadly. These lessons were shared along the way with relevant organisations and individuals to help inform their work, and are included in the following publications (available on the NESTA website): 'Galvanising community-led responses to climate change'; 'Working with communities to tackle climate change – practical approaches for local government'; 'Mass Localism'; 'The Big Green Challenge evaluation'.

Part Two: Running a social challenge prize – practical considerations

Conclusion

A social challenge prize can be a compelling and effective way to fund innovation to achieve a specific outcome. We have found it to be particularly effective for galvanising community action and testing community-led innovation. For many funders it will be a very different approach to take. In particular, those running social challenge prizes need to be willing to be more open-minded about exactly how the desired outcome is achieved.

Using a staged process eliminates a good deal of the risk for funders, making smaller amounts available at the start, channelling more support to projects with the greatest chance of success, and the largest investment to solutions that are proven to work. It is important in designing the prize to make sure that benefits for competitors are developed at each stage, the administrative burden is kept to a minimum and competitors are made aware of the risks they are taking. If designed with these considerations a social challenge prize can produce significant benefits for both funders and competitors.

We hope this guide has given you the information you need to start designing and running your own social challenge prize or a programme inspired by similar principles. We are interested in following the progress of organisations following similar approaches, and together building a wider set of experience, examples and lessons to share with others. We would also welcome feedback on this guide to inform the development of future practical guides from NESTA.

For more information, and to share your experiences and feedback, please contact vicki.purewal@nesta.org.uk

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