Partnersing for Impact
Results and Insights from the Scaling Frontier Innovation Program
What is an Investigative Study?

Investigative studies are part of a series of focused knowledge products produced by Moonshot Global and Living Collaborations—the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Partners for the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) Scaling Frontier Innovation (SFI) Program.

Investigative studies support learning about topics related to the SFI Program as well as the broader interests of DFAT and Asia-Pacific entrepreneurship and impact investing ecosystems.

Investigative studies are in-depth studies covering the SFI Program’s Key Learning Questions as prioritised by DFAT. Before commencing an investigative study, a concept note with questions to be explored, the methodology used to explore them, and the parties involved in the exploration are developed and approved. Then, the investigation is carried out, and findings, analysis, and recommendations are validated and disseminated.

This investigative study reviews partnerships formed to implement the SFI Program to draw from this experience and inform DFAT’s partnership approach. For additional information on the topic covered by this investigative study, please contact Michelle Halse at michelle@livingcollaborations.com.
## Contents

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE SFI PROGRAM

### 2.0 OVERVIEW OF PARTNERSHIPS IN THE SFI PROGRAM

- 2.1 SFI Program Overview 8
- 2.2 SFI Partners 11
- 2.3 Partnership Classification 16

### 3.0 APPROACH TO THE INVESTIGATION

- 3.1 The SFI Performance Framework 19
- 3.2 Goals and Research Questions 20
- 3.3 Methodology 21
- 3.4 Partnership Measurement Framework 23

### 4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

- 4.1 Emerging Practice in Evaluating Partnerships in International Development 28
- 4.2 Multi-stakeholder Partnerships in the Development of the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem 31

### 5.0 CASE STUDY ON OPERATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

- 5.1 About the SFI Operational Partnerships 33
- 5.2 Findings across the Partnership Measurement Dimensions 34
- 5.3 Added Value: Partnering to Design and Test the Gender Lens Incubation and Acceleration Toolkit 45
- 5.4 Insights from the SFI Program 48
- 5.5 Recommendations for Future Programs 51
Introduction to the SFI Program
The Scaling Frontier Innovation (SFI) Program is an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) innovationXchange (iXc) that supports social enterprises to scale their development impact in the Asia-Pacific region.¹

SFI’s components (Frontier Innovators, Frontier Incubators and Frontier Brokers) focus on different but interdependent parts of the ecosystem that supports entrepreneurs. The goal is to catalyse growth in enterprises, stronger acceleration support, greater connectedness and larger capital flows to Asia-Pacific enterprises achieving development impact.

The iXc was established in 2015 to facilitate greater experimentation, partnership building, and learning across DFAT.² This came at a time when international development donors began to embrace the view that solving the world’s most persistent and complex challenges requires collaboration with external, often atypical partners.³⁴

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¹ https://www.scalingfrontierinnovation.org
2.0

Overview of Partnerships in the SFI Program
The SFI Program was a collaborative endeavour from its origins.

2.1 SFI Program Overview

Its design emerged from widespread research and conversations with many people involved in the entrepreneurship and impact investing ecosystem globally with particular consideration of the Asia-Pacific context. As Christine Heenan from The Rockefeller Foundation noted, “Asia in particular sits at the crosshairs of some of the world’s most pressing challenges – from climate change to preventable diseases to inequality. But the region also possesses tremendous assets waiting to be unleashed to help solve these problems. It has [a] unique culture of entrepreneurship. Through partnership, we can ensure these forces converge to help all of humanity rise.”

DFAT identified the opportunity to play a catalytic role by investing in diverse aspects of the entrepreneurship ecosystem, and selected three key components to achieve the following goals:

1. Create sustainable poverty reduction in the Asia Pacific region through scaling of the aggregate impact of social enterprises; and
2. Influence the delivery of aid in the Asia Pacific region by demonstrating the efficacy of new market-based approaches in achieving development impacts.

SFI Program partnerships include players that are well situated within the broader innovation system. A few examples include the advisory group, capability development providers, and panelists and guides for the Frontier Innovators component; best practice providers and the advisory board for Frontier Incubators component; collaborative networks interested in SFI communications products, and other funders and research partners active in the ecosystem. These wider SFI Program partners bring their experience and current relationships with other innovation system players to catalyse greater effects from the SFI Program than would otherwise be achievable.

The three components and a high-level view of the partnerships within them are:

**Frontier Innovators**

DFAT and their implementing partner SecondMuse designed the Frontier Innovators Program to promote the work of select social enterprises or ‘innovators’ by providing them with opportunities for peer learning, grants of AUD100,000, guides to offer one-on-one advice, an in-person training, and customised technical assistance to grow their impact.

**Frontier Incubators**

Frontier Incubators was designed to support the capacity development of incubators and accelerators in the region. To strengthen the quality and stability of support accessible to entrepreneurs by establishing capacity development partnerships between emerging organisations and global leaders in the field (Program Partners). The goal was to strengthen the connectivity of participating incubators and accelerators and build their capacity by testing and sharing global and regional good practices to make quality support available to more social enterprises and entrepreneurs in the region. Designed and implemented by SecondMuse, Conveners.org, and ygap, Frontier Incubators supported 30 incubators and accelerators in partnership with 11 Program Partners.

6. See page 19 for further detail of the SFI Performance Framework.
Frontier Brokers

Aiming to better connect social enterprises with the capital that they need to scale their development impact, the Frontier Brokers component supports new innovations in investment mechanisms and vehicles to attract new capital. Organisations developing these mechanisms were selected through a competitive procurement that included a co-creation workshop to encourage collaboration among ecosystem players and to help ensure a focus on gender lens investing and inclusivity. The selected teams include Athena Global Alliance (Biduk platform); Brightlight Group with Investing for Good, SecondMuse and University of Melbourne (Asia Pacific Impact Notes); Good Return with Palladium/Enclude (Impact Connect); and IIX (Equity at Scale program). DFAT is making a deliberate investment in supporting and encouraging networking among the Brokers, as well as between the Brokers and other intermediaries in the ecosystem, and between those organisations who participated in the Frontier Innovators and Frontier Incubators components.

These components commenced sequentially as demonstrated by the following timeline.

7. The Brokers’ co-creation workshop was held in November 2018. Contracting of the firms to implement the Brokers’ component was concluded April 2019.
This staged implementation and overlap of partners created the opportunity for DFAT to learn from each sequential procurement and refine the scope, type of organisation, selection criteria, and procurement method to best support deep collaboration on an experimental program.

Central to the flexibility and innovation in procurement was the creation by DFAT of the Innovation Resource Facility to manage and coordinate procurement and implementation for innovation programs, described in the box below.

**WHAT IS THE INNOVATION RESOURCE FACILITY?**

“The innovationXchange has established an Innovation Resource Facility (IRF) to provide Australian Aid with efficient access to high quality technical advisory services in frontier fields of aid and development. The IRF has been designed to provide access, more broadly, to non-aid-related innovation skills to enhance DFAT and other Commonwealth Government departments’ innovation capabilities.”

The Innovation Resource Facility (IRF) is a contracting mechanism that was set up to support the iXc and wider DFAT teams working on innovation. The IRF has a brief to engage new partners and private sector organisations, reflecting iXc’s objective to partner with new and diverse organisations. The IRF managed the procurement for Frontier Innovators and Frontier Incubators as well as for the monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) and communications partners.

The IRF was able to support procurement for such an unusual program by enabling DFAT to:

- Access private sector partners, particularly smaller companies that have less experience working with traditional aid programming but offer unique skills and expertise,
- Minimise procurement risk by serving as an intermediary between DFAT and partners to take on new programs, partners and approaches, through new contracting, and
- Achieve innovation program goals through fit-for-purpose procurement for flexible implementation approaches to adapt contracts and reporting to meet the expectations of all parties in collaborative relationships.

9. Held by DT Global Australia Pty Ltd (formerly AECOM).
10. In their learning report, R4D notes that internal DFAT partners of the iXc valued the provision of specific and deep expertise in finance, impact investing and MEL via the IRF.
### 2.2 SFI Partners

The following table describes the full set of SFI Program Partners and their roles.

#### TABLE 1: SFI Partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Funding Partners</strong></th>
<th><strong>Managing Contractor</strong></th>
<th><strong>MEL Partner</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>innovationXchange (iXc)</td>
<td>DT Global</td>
<td>Moonshot Global (Moonshot)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF)</td>
<td>Living Collaborations</td>
<td><a href="https://www.livingcollaborations.com">Living Collaborations</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**innovationXchange (iXc)**

The iXc is part of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), which is the international development donor funding the design and implementation of all three components of the Scaling Frontier Innovation (SFI). The iXc’s mission is to achieve impact through applying new tools and approaches, scaling capability and culture, empowering DFAT staff, and utilising innovation to maximise opportunity, security and strength for Australia and our region.

**Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF)**

The SPF is a private Japanese foundation that seeks to address the diverse and complicated issues that human society is encountering in the 21st century. The SPF partnered with DFAT and the Frontier Incubators Implementing Consortium (SecondMuse, conveners.org, and ygap) to fund the development and testing of the Gender Lens Incubation and Acceleration Toolkit.

**DT Global**

DT Global is an international development firm that serves as the managing contractor for DFAT’s Innovation Resource Facility (IRF). The IRF managed the procurement for and collaborated with Frontier Innovators and Frontier Incubators as well as for the SFI monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) partner.

**Type of Contract: Direct to DFAT**

**Moonshot Global (Moonshot)**

Moonshot is an advisory services firm with corporate capabilities in: evidence, learning, and impact; innovation and entrepreneurship; capacity development; and investment advisory. Moonshot, along with Living Collaborations, is serving as SFI’s MEL Partner across all three components.

**Type of Contract: Through IRF**

**Living Collaborations**

Living Collaborations’s goal is to create and strengthen collaborations that are seeking to address complex development challenges by fostering social innovation and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Living Collaborations, along with Moonshot, is serving as SFI’s MEL Partner, focusing on evaluating SFI partnerships, across all three components.

**Type of Contract: Through IRF**
Communication Partners

TheStoryBoxes
https://www.thestoryboxes.com

TheStoryBoxes is a Brisbane-based storytelling studio that specialises in moving and emotive content with purpose. TheStoryBoxes were contracted through the IRF to design the original SFI and Frontier Innovators websites and to produce the Frontiers documentary series that highlighted three of the social enterprises involved in Frontier Innovators.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

Your Creative
https://yourcreative.com.au

Your Creative is an award-winning creative agency in Melbourne. They design and build brands, strategies and technology. Your Creative was contracted by DFAT to design an updated SFI website to integrate branding across Frontier Innovators, Frontier Incubators, and Frontier Brokers.

Type of Contract: Direct to DFAT

Implementing Partners

SecondMuse
https://www.secondmuse.com

SecondMuse collaborates with visionary cities, countries, nonprofits and startups, to develop the communities and networks that help drive social, environmental, and economic innovation. SecondMuse designed and implemented Frontier Innovators and collaborated with Conveners.org and ygap (the Implementing Consortium) to design and implement Frontier Incubators and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation for the development of the Gender Lens for Incubation and Acceleration Toolkit. SecondMuse is also part of the Brightlight consortium, along with Investing for Good and the University of Melbourne, that is implementing the Asia Pacific Note Series under Frontier Brokers.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

Conveners.org
https://www.conveners.org

Conveners.org has built a community of mission-driven conveners and accelerators to convene and learn from each other, build the larger capacity of the field, and construct pathways to more efficiently realise positive change. Conveners.org partnered with SecondMuse and ygap (the Implementing Consortium) to design and implement Frontier Incubators and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation for the development of the Gender Lens for Incubation and Acceleration Toolkit.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

ygap
https://ygap.org

ygap backs early-stage impact ventures in emerging markets as a means to support economic and social development, and currently runs programs in Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands and Australia. ygap partnered with SecondMuse and Conveners.org (the Implementing Consortium) to design and implement Frontier Incubators and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation for the development of the Gender Lens for Incubation and Acceleration Toolkit.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

Akina
https://www.akina.org.nz

Ākina is New Zealand’s leading social enterprise (SE) development organisation, operating in New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region. Ākina delivers a range of capability building programmes for SEs at different stages of development and provides specialist capacity building and advisory services in enterprise development, financing and market access, and sector development. Akina was one of the eleven Program Partners selected to provide custom support under Frontier Incubators.

Type of Contract: Through IRF
Fledge

http://fledge.co

Fledge is a network of conscious company accelerators and seed funds, searching the world of great mission-driven for-profit startups. By inviting 6–8 at a time to an intense 10–week accelerator, and investing in each using a unique revenue-based equity structure, Fledge creates a long-term relationship to continue guiding them from idea to success. (So far) Fledge runs programs in Seattle, Vancouver, Lima, Barcelona, and Padua, and are expanding in 1–2 cities per year. Fledge was one of the eleven Program Partners selected to provide custom support under Frontier Incubators.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

Global Entrepreneurship Network (GEN)

https://www.genglobal.org

GEN operates a platform of programs in 170 countries aimed at making it easier for anyone, anywhere to start and scale a business. By fostering deeper cross border collaboration and initiatives between entrepreneurs, investors, researchers, policymakers, and entrepreneurial support organisations, GEN works to fuel healthier start and scale ecosystems that create more jobs, educate individuals, accelerate innovation, and strengthen economic growth. Its extensive footprint of national operations and global verticals in policy, research, and programs, and ensures members have unparalleled access to the most relevant knowledge, networks, communities, and programs. GEN was one of the eleven Program Partners selected to provide custom support under Frontier Incubators.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

invest2innovate (i2i)

https://invest2innovate.com/

i2i supports startup communities in growth markets, and has been operating in Pakistan since 2011. i2i supports entrepreneurs via the i2i Accelerator, an annual four-month program that provides business support and access to mentors and investment. i2i has licensed and customised its curriculum to support a number of initiatives, including the National Incubation Centre Islamabad, the Grameenphone Accelerator in Bangladesh, and trainings for youth in Pakistan, Ukraine and Nepal. i2i was one of the eleven Program Partners selected to provide custom support under Frontier Incubators.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

Miller Center’s Global Social Benefit Institute (GSBI)

https://www.millersocent.org/

Miller Center for Social Entrepreneurship is the largest and most successful university-based social enterprise accelerator in the world. Miller Center’s Global Social Benefit Institute (GSBI) helps social entrepreneurs to help more people. Since 2003 GSBI programs have accelerated 900+ social entrepreneurs, who have raised over $940M+, and positively impacted the lives of 300M+ people. The Miller Center was one of the eleven Program Partners selected to provide custom support under Frontier Incubators.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

Social Enterprise Academy (SEA)

https://www.socialenterprise.academy/

SEA delivers transformational learning and development programs focused on leadership, entrepreneurship, learning and social impact for people working for social purpose at all levels, and organisations at all stages. 12 country teams are currently in development. With local adaptation and innovation by a growing team of partners across Africa, Asia and Europe, the Academy aims to help build the strength of the social enterprise movement. SEA was one of the eleven Program Partners selected to provide custom support under Frontier Incubators.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

Spring

https://spring.is/

Spring exists to change the world through entrepreneurship. A certified B Corporation, Spring supports entrepreneurs who are using business as a force for good through incubation, acceleration, leaders roundtables, funding training, workshops, and ecosystem development advisory services. Headquartered in Vancouver, Canada, Spring supports entrepreneurs via City Partners in over 10 countries around the world. Spring was one of the eleven Program Partners selected to provide custom support under Frontier Incubators.

Type of Contract: Through IRF
The Difference Incubator (TDi)
https://tdi.org.au/

TDI’s mission is to awaken the possibility of doing good and making money by returning to the roots of business. They work across Australia and the Pacific with entrepreneurs and businesses to create sustainable business models that create measurable impact. TDi combines their significant experience in entrepreneurship, finance and investment, innovation, design, development and measurement with a flexible and relational approach that builds capacity and sustainable results. TDi was one of the eleven Program Partners selected to provide custom support under Frontier Incubators.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

Uncharted
https://uncharted.org/

Uncharted is the next generation of accelerator that uses the power of an entrepreneurial accelerator to address major social and environmental issues like the future of food, urban poverty, and hate and discrimination. They scale and connect organisations in three ways. 1. Accelerate: Resourcing organisations with mentors, funders, and customised training. 2. Connect: Bringing together ventures who are all tackling the same problem so they can share insights and find collaboration opportunities. 3. Empower: Giving power away and empowering others to change the world, whether through one-off specialised training or licensing their world-class curriculum. Uncharted was one of the eleven Program Partners selected to provide custom support under Frontier Incubators.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

Village Capital
https://vilcap.com/

Village Capital builds bridges for entrepreneurs who are creating an inclusive and sustainable world. Their programs connect high potential, early-stage entrepreneurs with the people, institutions, and capital they need to succeed. Since 2009, Village Capital has supported more than 1,000 entrepreneurs through their programs, and partnered with affiliated investment funds, including VilCap Investments, that have invested seed capital in more than 90 program graduates. Through their VilCap Communities program, Village Capital provides an all-inclusive solution for program design, management, and implementation of a venture development program. VilCap was one of the eleven Program Partners selected to provide custom support under Frontier Incubators.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

Villgro
https://www.villgro.org/

Villgro Innovations Foundation is India’s oldest and one of the world’s largest social enterprise incubators. Villgro supports innovative, impactful and successful for-profit enterprises who are tackling some of the most pressing challenges in the developing world—access to healthcare, education and modernising agricultural practices. Villgro’s unique incubation model is being replicated in Kenya, Philippines and Vietnam. Villgro was one of the eleven Program Partners selected to provide custom support under Frontier Incubators.

Type of Contract: Through IRF

Athena Global Alliance
https://athenaglobalalliance.com

Athena Global Alliance (Athena) is an advisory firm focused on narrowing the gap between innovative ideas and access to capital. Working at the nexus of social entrepreneurs and impact investors, Athena strives to bring creative and positively disruptive solutions to those businesses, ideas and products that have been left out of the traditional financing space. Athena is leading the design and implementation of the BIDUK project under Frontier Brokers.

Type of Contract: Direct to DFAT

Brightlight
https://www.brightlightimpact.com

Brightlight is a “for profit with purpose” organisation formed in 2016, as an impact investment firm that provides institutional grade impact investment solutions. Brightlight is leading a consortium of SecondMuse, Investing for Good, and the University of Melbourne, to design and implement the Asia Pacific Note Series under Frontier Brokers.

Type of Contract: Direct to DFAT
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good Return</td>
<td><a href="https://www.goodreturn.org.au">https://www.goodreturn.org.au</a></td>
<td>Good Return is a social purpose organisation that is working to create a world without poverty. Good Return works in the Asia-Pacific, with low-income households, financial service providers, social enterprises, NGOs, governments and social investors to research, design and implement game-changing initiatives to support financial inclusion. Good Return is partnering with Palladium/Enclude to design and implement the Impact Connect project under Frontier Brokers. Good Return is also playing a network facilitation role to support collaboration, learning and communication between the four Frontier Broker consortia and other ecosystem stakeholders. Type of Contract: Direct to DFAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing for Good</td>
<td><a href="https://www.investingforgood.co.uk">https://www.investingforgood.co.uk</a></td>
<td>Established in 2004, Investing for Good (IFG) is a leading impact investing intermediary that has played a central role in developing the impact investing market in the UK and globally. IFG is part of the Brightlight consortium, along with SecondMuse and the University of Melbourne, that is implementing the Asia Pacific Note Series under Frontier Brokers. Type of Contract: Through BrightLight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td><a href="https://www.unimelb.edu.au">https://www.unimelb.edu.au</a></td>
<td>The University of Melbourne is a leading Australian research university, with the largest cohort of research students in Australia. The University of Melbourne is part of the Brightlight consortium, along with SecondMuse and Investing for Good, that is implementing the Asia Pacific Note Series under Frontier Brokers. Type of Contract: Through BrightLight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palladium/Enclude</td>
<td><a href="http://enclude.thepalladiumgroup.com">http://enclude.thepalladiumgroup.com</a></td>
<td>Palladium works with governments, businesses and investors to solve the world's most pressing challenges. Enclude, a Palladium company, are a partner of Good Return on the Frontier Brokers Impact Connect project. Type of Contract: Through GoodReturn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIX</td>
<td><a href="https://iixglobal.com">https://iixglobal.com</a></td>
<td>IIX is a global organization transforming the world through a new approach to sustainable peace. Over the past decade, IIX has built the world's largest crowdfunding platform for impact investing, Impact Partners, developed a proprietary Impact Assessment, created innovative financial products such as the Women’s Livelihood Bond, operated award-winning enterprise technical assistance programs and established an Impact Institute for training and education. IIX is leading the Equity@Scale project under Frontier Brokers. Type of Contract: Direct to DFAT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**2.3 SFI Partnership Classification**

Central to this Investigative Study was a decision to classify distinct types of partnerships operating across the program amongst the large number of participating organisations. These distinctions call for different types of analysis and lead to different conclusions. In recognition of the diverse collaborations created and active throughout the SFI Program, over the course of the study, three discrete types of partnerships were identified.

**01. Operational Partnerships**

Operational partnerships that helped DFAT/iXc leverage diverse skills, resources, and connections that enhanced program design and implementation. These fit-for-purpose partners, drawn in to collaborate on the SFI Program with the iXc in various consortia, brought diverse skills, resources, and connections. They were awarded roles through competitive procurement processes and had roles in program adaptation and implementation; monitoring, evaluation and learning; and communications. This study outlines the enablers and obstacles to partnering and shares accounts of additional value created through the partnerships. ‘Operational partners’ is used to differentiate from ‘implementation partner’, which may imply more traditional contracting for specific and predetermined implementation against an agreed design, than an equal and collaborative relationship.

**02. Capacity Development Partnerships**

Capacity development partnerships that strengthened the ecosystem by providing access to leaders from accelerators / social impact organisations / investors who delivered targeted capacity building and business support. Frontier Incubator cohorts (Cohort Partners) gained access to these leaders (Program Partners) for targeted capacity development and business support. This study leverages data from the developmental evaluation methodologies applied throughout the SFI Program implementation to surface experience and value that resulted from the carefully brokered, customised, and equitable partnerships formed between Cohort Partners and Program Partners.

**03. Peer Networks**

Peer networks that catalysed connections within and across all components of the SFI Program to yield more integrated, adaptive, and agile implementation rather than a siloed approach focused on achieving predetermined objectives, and on creating the conditions for added value from peer learning, strengthened regional connectivity and serendipitous opportunities for collaboration. Peer networks underpinned other programmatic activity in Frontier Innovators, Frontier Incubators, and Frontier Brokers in recognition that network connections bring value in and of themselves, as well as the potential for shared action, influence, and scale. The Scaling Frontier Innovation Program has activated global networks to gather insights to inform feasibility and design, to expand recruitment of entrepreneurs and accelerators, to surface evidence from selection processes, and to activate ties between program participants and key players in the ecosystem. It is anticipated that this network-centric approach contributed to a network effect from DFAT’s investments.

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11. Kelly, L. and Roche, C., (2014) in a report for ACFID also recognise and recommend distinguishing between different types of partnerships.

12. In ICVA’s case study of UNICEF-NGO partnerships, they state “the term ‘implementing partners’ does not reflect an equal partnership”


14. One of the reasons for the network focus was the network-centric approach of Innovators/Incubators lead contractor, SecondMuse.
3.0
Approach to the Investigation
The intention to investigate the diverse partnering approaches used across the SFI Program emerged as important in mid-2018 following the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Strategy co-creation workshop led by the MEL partner team of Moonshot Global and Living Collaborations.

Several factors influenced this decision:

- MEL partner team expertise in the measurement of multi-party partnerships in place on complex programs,
- Recognition of the complex context for the SFI Program and that implementation was likely to be iterative and responsive to learning,
- Awareness of the place of multi-stakeholder partnerships in ecosystem / system-level change,
- The large number of participating organisations collaborating across SFI on many levels and in different ways,
- iXc desire to optimise partnerships and awareness that the strength and effectiveness of collaboration could influence the outcomes of the program, and
- iXc demand for learning from the processes and experiences of collaboration for future program approaches.

This investigative study reviews internal partnerships formed to implement the SFI Program to draw from this experience to inform the formation and implementation of other partnerships in the iXc and DFAT more broadly. The study focuses on internal partners involved in program implementation. As a result, this study is complementary to the retrospective research that is being undertaken by Results for Development (R4D) to explore what the iXc has learned about the best ways to partner with other entities within DFAT and with external partners, to leverage opportunities for impact.

The investigative study also informs the performance evaluation of the SFI Program by reviewing the extent to which the SFI Program contributed to the strengthening of the ecosystem in the Asia Pacific for scaling the impact of social enterprises (See Outcome Area 2 in the Performance Framework below). The MEL partner team adapted the SFI Program Performance Framework in mid-2019 to include a specific measure related to partnerships. Outcome area 2.4 (see figure 2 below) measures the extent to which Scaling Frontier Innovation solutions prioritized strengthening connections between and among innovators, incubators, and brokers. Two indicators were developed: percentage of SFI ‘family members’ who cite added value from participation in the SFI program and percentage of brokers who cite increased engagement in the Brokers network as a result of network convening activities. The second of these two indicators relate to the role of network convenor played by Good Return, which will be reviewed in the addendum to this investigative study.

8. The McConnell Foundation, 2018. 12 Lessons Shared
9. The term SFI family was coined by the MEL partner team in the MEL Strategy document to signify the array of partners involved in SFI Program design and implementation.
3.1

FIGURE 2:
The SFI Program Performance Framework

GOAL
The SFI Program is creating sustainable poverty reduction in the Asia Pacific region through scaling the development impact of social enterprises.

Outcome Area 1
Capability of social enterprises in the Asia Pacific region to scale their development impact increased.

Outcome 1.1
Capability of selected social enterprises in the Asia Pacific region to measure and communicate their development impact increased.

Outcome Area 2
Ecosystem for scaling the impact of social enterprises in the Asia Pacific region strengthened.

Outcome 2.1
Access to effective incubation and acceleration services for social enterprises in the Asia Pacific region increased.

Outcome 2.2
Effectiveness and efficiency of impact investment deal brokering process in the Asia Pacific region improved.

Outcome Area 3
Availability of private sector capital for social enterprises in the Asia Pacific region increased.

Outcome 3.1
Capital accessible to social enterprises in the Asia Pacific region increased.

Outcome 3.2
Capital provided and brokered to social enterprises has a positive effect on women and girls.

Outcome Area 4
Awareness of social entrepreneurship and impact investment as mechanisms for achieving development impacts in the Asia Pacific region increased.

Outcome 4.1
Awareness of SFI Program objectives, activities, and outcomes increased among ecosystem partners, development partners, and DFAT.

Outcome 4.2
Access to evidence, knowledge, and lessons regarding the implementation of market-based approaches to the achievement of development impacts increased.

Outcome 2.3
Solutions supported by DFAT prioritize increased capacity of stakeholders in gender lens investing.

Outcome 2.4
Solutions supported by DFAT prioritize strengthening connections between innovators, incubators, and brokers.

The SFI Program influences the delivery of aid in the Asia Pacific region by demonstrating the efficacy of new market-based approaches in achieving development impacts.
3.2 Goals and Research Questions

The goals of the study are to:

• Investigate the partnerships formed to implement the SFI Program, and draw from this experience to offer recommendations to inform the future formation and implementation of other partnerships across the iXc and DFAT,

• Understand the added value arising from the incorporation of partnerships in the SFI Program—to DFAT, to partners, to beneficiaries/program participants and especially the contribution to a ‘network effect’ or ecosystem change beyond the core programmatic activity,

• Gather evidence to inform the practice of engaging and working with new SFI Program partners, and

• Explore and understand the complexities of collaborating on a Government-led initiative.

The following research questions were pursued, to meet these goals:

• To what extent have partnerships been integrated in a deliberate and strategic way within the SFI Program?

• How has the partnering approach influenced implementation?

• What added value has been created as a result of the partnerships within the SFI Program?

• How does intentional partnership formation and management of the partnership process influence perceptions of success and added-value?

• From the perspective of partners, has the integration of partnerships contributed to additional benefits for women or other marginalised groups?

• Were there common characteristics across partnerships that supported success or created challenges to collaboration? What were they?

• What, if anything, from the approach of integrating partnerships under the SFI Program should be applied to the definition of an approach for partnerships for future DFAT programming?
3.3 Methodology

A non-experimental, mixed-methods approach was used to facilitate triangulation, enable the examination of questions from different perspectives, and incorporate as many partner perspectives as possible. These partners included DFAT / iXc, DT Global (IRF) as supporting contractor to SFI, and those organisations who were implementing Frontier Innovators, Frontier Incubators, Frontier Brokers, and crosscutting functions such as MEL and communications.

A range of qualitative and quantitative methods were employed:

- Network mapping to document the many and diverse partnerships and connections,
- Reviewing project documents and some of the key literature on evaluating partnerships and networks,
- Conducting semi-structured, in-depth key informant interviews (by video conference or phone) with the core SFI partners, the iXc and relevant others at DFAT and within the impact investing ecosystem,
- Analysing observational data collected throughout program implementation through the developmental evaluation approach employed by the MEL partner,\(^{18}\)
- Reviewing program documents (e.g., grant reports, learning reports, etc.),
- Conducting a survey using the Partnership Learning Loop analysis framework and tool,\(^{19}\)
- Identifying trends across program components that could influence outcomes attributable to the partnering approach, and
- Synthesising lessons learned based on the study’s analysis framework.

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18. The Moonshot–Living Collaboration team applies a hybrid traditional–developmental evaluation (DE) approach to respond to the the complex nature of the SFI Program and the contexts in which it is being implemented. DE leverages processes—such as results reflections, most significant change inquiries, and ethnographic observations—which provide real-time, or close to real-time, feedback to program staff thus facilitating a continuous development loop.

19. The Partnership Learning Loop Analysis Framework © formed the basis for the development of the specific SFI measurement framework and investigative study survey and interview questions (http://www.learningloop.nl/). The Partnership Learning Loop is an interactive process including an online tool that assesses different layers of partnerships. It provides insight into how a partnership functions in reality, whether it responds to partners’ needs and how it evolves over time, providing information to help steer and strengthen future collaboration.
Network Mapping:
An interactive network map shows all SFI participating organisations, with differentiated connections to demonstrate different kinds of relationships such as direct connections, indirect connections, and network participation.

Key Informant Interviews:
Purposive sampling was used to identify interview participants from DFAT/iXc, DT Global, SecondMuse, Convenors.org, ygap, Moonshot Global, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, IIx, and Good Return and all Frontier Brokers, selected for their participation in various types of partnerships throughout the SFI Program. Interviews were conducted with 26 individuals (some participated in multiple interviews), representing fourteen partner organisations. The interviews were conducted largely via video conference (Zoom), with a small number face-to-face. A semi-structured approach was taken to conduct the interviews, which allowed for the exploration of unanticipated responses and examples of emerging and unexpected benefits from the partnerships. Interviews were transcribed and coded using qualitative analysis tools (Dedoose), and themes were identified to reflect and group findings.

Observations:
Relevant data on partnerships was extracted from notes on observations made from the Process Historian\(^20\) methodology applied by the MEL partner on all components of the SFI Program. Throughout the program, pre/post-workshop surveys for Frontier Incubators and Frontier Brokers included partnership-related questions.

Surveys:
The primary survey conducted in August–September 2019 using the Partnerships Analysis framework gathered data about the Capacity Development Partnerships formed for Frontier Incubators, and the Incubators Peer Network. Using the Partnership Learning Loop customised partnership review tool, this survey was sent to 25 organisations, with the option of up to two individual responses per participating organisation. Thirty total responses were received from 20 Cohort Partners (from a possible 19 organisations), six Program Partners (from a possible 11 organisations), and four from the Consortium and Government partners. Geographically, the respondents were from South East Asia (13), South Asia (8), UK/Europe (2), North America (2) and Australia (1). Participation was voluntary, responses were anonymous, and all questions were optional.\(^21\)

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\(^{20}\) The Process Historian methodology was developed at DAI and first co-implemented by Moonshot staff Claire Daley and her then DAI colleague Komal Bazaa Smith. It is a DE approach that pairs an individual from the MEL team with implementers to observe program nuances, document iterations, identify and respond to challenges as they arise, and help showcase successes with a focus on utilisation of learning. It employs a mix of social science tools and learning approaches—systems mapping, network analysis, social learning and participatory evaluation, outcomes harvesting, rapid feedback loops, data visualisation—to assist experimental program implementers to iterate throughout implementation, contribute to institutional memory, inform future decision-making, capture lessons learned, and contribute to continuous learning and improvement.

\(^{21}\) As part of the MEL consortium, the primary researcher had access to all of those involved in the SFI Program. Participants were contacted by the researcher by email and were asked to complete the survey. Surveys were sent to respondents in the form of a link. The survey had two sections: part 1 was completed by Cohort Partners and Program Partners, part 2 was completed by all Frontier Incubators participants (Cohort Partners, Program partners, Implementing Consortium, DFAT and DT Global).
The SFI Partnerships Measurement Framework uses three of the five dimensions from the Partnership Learning Loop Analysis Framework\(^2\), for measuring partnerships across the critical areas of forming partnerships, collaborating on implementation, and discovering the added value that a partnership approach may generate. This framework guided our inquiry into the different types of partnerships, framed the interview and survey questions, and enabled reflection on the significance of various process elements, personal characteristics, and behaviours to strengthen collaboration.

Figures 3-6 elaborate on the three dimensions and indicators.

**Setup, design and daily operations which addressed:**
- Setup and design
- Effective management
- Communication
- Decision making
- Sound leadership

**Collaborative mindsets and skills which addressed:**
- Diversity
- Equity
- Genuine Interest and Support
- Openness and Transparency
- Partner Engagement

**Added value arising from partnerships and networks which addressed:**
- Added Value for Entrepreneurs and the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem
- Added Value for Organisations
- Partnership Synergy
- Types of Added Value
- Collaborative Spirit of the Network (Networks only)

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22. The Partnership Learning Loop (PLL) Analysis Framework includes the dimensions Set up and design, Daily operations, Results, Collaborative mindsets and skills, and Added value. For the SFI Measurement Framework, we adapted the PLL Framework by combining Setup and design with Daily operations, and omitted Results which were collected through other elements of the evaluation strategy.
The Setup Design and Daily Operations Dimension observes process features associated with the beginning of a partnership or collaboration as well as the systems and processes that become regular, daily rhythms for partners working together.

**FIGURE 4:**
Setup, Design and Daily Operations Indicators

- **Setup & Design**
  - Shared objectives
  - Individual objectives
  - Roles and responsibilities
  - Involvement in the design phase
  - Resourcing

- **Effective Management**
  - Collaborative systems and procedures
  - Managing differences
  - Partnership facilitation

- **Communication**
  - Feedback and learning
  - Gaps or duplication being addressed
  - Flow of relevant information

- **Decision Making**
  - Consideration of different points of view in decision making
  - Clarity in decision making processes

- **Sound Leadership**
  - Being empowered to share ideas
  - Resources and power
  - Strategic guidance
The **Collaborative Mindsets and Skills** Dimension observes individual and collective behaviours, practices, and experiences that are known to foster trust and create the conditions for collaboration and innovation.

**FIGURE 5:**
Collaborative Mindsets & Skills Indicators

- **Diversity**
  - Incorporating individual expertise & ways of working
  - Valuing diversity of partners
  - Flexibility in approach

- **Equity**
  - Respect for input from partners
  - Inclusion in decision making

- **Genuine Interest & Support**
  - Supportive culture
  - Clear expectations
  - Relationship building

- **Openness and Transparency**
  - Seeking of feedback or advice
  - Comfort voicing concerns
  - Being clear about limitations

- **Partner Engagement**
  - Commitment
  - Sharing risk
  - Regular exchange of ideas
The **Added Value** Dimension observes different types of value experienced by individual partners themselves (people and organisations), partnership synergy meaning the value from working together, and value experienced by actors in the ecosystem.

**FIGURE 6:**
Added Value Indicators

- **Added Value for Entrepreneurs & the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem**
  - Wider reach
  - More impact
  - Stronger influence on ecosystem

- **Added Value for Organisations**
  - Ambitions & interests met
  - Worth the investment

- **Partnership Synergy**
  - Complementarity
  - Leveraging expertise & resources
  - Emergence of new approaches
  - Better results from collaboration

- **Types of Added Value**
  - Learning knowledge & expertise
  - Networking
  - Skills & capacity building
  - New opportunities
  - Contributes to scaling
  - Increased effectiveness
  - Gaining recognition & respect from others
  - Innovation
  - Financial or in-kind benefits
  - Increased advocacy power

- **Collaborative Spirit of the Network**
  - Sense of pride
  - Enthusiasm
  - Care for the future
  - New experience of partnering
  - Comfort amongst partners
4.0 Literature Review
A desk review of literature was conducted to understand (i) emerging practice in evaluating partnerships within international development, with a particular focus on how others have considered collaborative mindsets and skills as important dimensions of successful partnerships, and (ii) the role that multi-stakeholder partnerships play in the development of the entrepreneurship ecosystem, and in supporting social entrepreneurs. The research drew on a range of materials from practitioners, researchers, think tanks, Government and foundations, professional associations, and consulting firms.

4.1 Emerging Practice in Evaluating Partnerships in International Development

Non-exhaustive research in this area revealed that the SFI Program investigative study is focusing on similar questions that have recently been explored on a limited basis by others. Key focus areas that are the most relevant to the SFI Program investigative study include a survey of partners to surface lessons on partnerships, efforts to develop a typology of partnerships, and measurement tools and approaches:

Lessons Learned on Partnerships

Across the literature, themes emerged about the importance of flexibility, openness, diversity, communication, clarity, trust, shared ownership, and measuring outcomes and impact:

- The International Council of Voluntary Agencies undertook a case study of UNICEF and its nongovernmental organization (NGO) partnerships for humanitarian response. This case study derived from interviews and surveys of a large number of NGO partners to UNICEF offers many lessons, which are commonly understood but less often mentioned. A summary of findings from UNICEF’s partners was:
  - Aligned goals are critical;
  - Innovators highly value support for atypical interventions;
  - Top–down designed solutions are not always the right solutions;
  - Donor partners need to share public visibility with partners; and
  - Partnerships require deep trust and ongoing communication and engagement, sharing of perspectives and problem solving / solution shaping.

McConnell foundation discovered in its ‘12 Lessons Shared’ learning report (2018)\(^{24}\) that openness, respect, and ‘candid personal relationships’ are key to establishing successful collaborations. In the same vein, complementing this lesson, Rockefeller also emphasises that good partnerships require humility, a willingness to compromise, and the ability to look past differences and remain open-minded to new ideas and approaches.

“Philanthropic partnerships, when successful, are fueled by the same characteristics that contribute to any kind of successful partnership: mutual respect, complementary strengths, and the synergy that makes their cumulative impact greater and more far-reaching together than independently.”\(^{25}\)

McConnell goes on to say that collaborations flourish around strong visions that are loosely held (McConnell, 2018).

‘Defining the scope of innovative collaborations is a delicate business. Too specific and you leave little room for the contributions of your partners. Too open-ended and your collaboration lacks direction. To address this paradox, collaborators must learn to hold a vision, without getting too attached to their ideas.’ (Lesson 7, 12 Lessons)\(^{26}\)

McClure and Reichardt suggest a foundation of trust is paramount, along with aligned goals, clear roles, shared processes, inclusion of differing approaches, reflection, learning, measurement, and adaptation.\(^{27}\) They also see as essential the role of a ‘choreographer’ in a collaboration—sometimes called a ‘partnership broker’ and often not formally identified. The partnership broker contributes to success through key functions of collaborative leadership such as: community building, convening, knowledge management, amplification and advocacy, resource mobilisation and implementation coordination.\(^{28}\)

Other pieces of literature\(^{29}\) write about ‘partnership brokering’ emphasising the diverse leadership skills required to build collaborative capacities in partners, to foster equity, inclusiveness, and experimentation, to navigate different stages in the life of a partnership, and to hold space for resolution of differences and conflict.

Riddell and Moore\(^{30}\) explored peer learning in partnerships and found that specific aspects of their ‘applied dissemination’ (or ‘scaling’) learning process and design were critical for peer-learning, including a) participant selection (working on different challenges but with shared context around ambitious social change enabling mutual support), b) the conditions created by the convenors c) the culture and environment the learning group created and nurtured together, and d) the timely introduction of content and frameworks to support learning.”

28. Seen as essential by Scriven in an ALNAP Study (cited by McClure and Reichardt, 2019)
Typology of Partnerships

- The Australian Council for International Development to gain a “deeper understanding of the changing landscape of partnerships developed a typology to help understanding of emerging partnerships models being used (particularly by Australian NGOs).”\(^3\) It recognised the challenge of demonstrating the added value of working in partnership to achieve development outcomes and concluded that value depends on the purpose of the partnership. They describe the following different types of partnerships:
  - Partnerships for more effective development at the local level - building the capacity and independent ability of the local organisation
  - Partnerships to support civil society development - capacity building organisations to work together
  - Partnerships which leverage a more effective response to complex change situations
  - Partnerships which add quality to the work of all partners
  - Partnerships and alliances for social change

- McClure and Reichardt also classify three specific types of collaboration, fit for humanitarian action,\(^3\) and suggest each one is treated uniquely with customised tactics, underscoring the benefits of identifying and structuring different collaboration types, as we have attempted for the SFI partnerships.

Measurement Tools and Approaches

- Hardy et al. (2003),\(^3\) from the UK Government Strategic Partnering Taskforce, provide an assessment tool, which addresses six principles that emphasise clarity in purpose, shared objectives, and values between partners, understanding partners’ priorities, use of trust-building behaviours, network perspectives, deep partner engagement, clear arrangements and systems for collaboration, measurement, and learning. The six principles are:
  - Recognise and accept the need for partnership
  - Develop clarity and realism of purpose
  - Ensure commitment and ownership
  - Develop and maintain trust
  - Create clear and robust partnership arrangements
  - Monitor, measure and learn

- The Partnering Initiative, with UN DESA,\(^4\) published a guidebook that distinguishes between the following two types of value creation from partnerships targeting development impact (or SDGs) and strongly endorses and supports with a framework and tool, measuring outcomes and value creation from partnerships.
  - Added-value of the partnership - which incorporates both added value from partnering (i.e., ‘collaborative advantage’ in this model) and stronger outcomes by working together (the idea of the outcome being ‘greater than the sum of the parts’)
  - Added value to each partner individually.

32. Including tightly integrated connections; side-by-side performance; and forming dynamic, adjustable networks to respond to shifting needs - which map remarkably closely onto different SFI partnerships, for example the operational partnerships (tight integration); brokers experiments (side by side performance) and networks (in each component)
34. The Partnering Initiative and UN DESA, 2018. Maximising the Impact of Partnerships for the SDGs.
4.2 Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships in the Development of the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

• Both Keystone Accountability, with iScale, and the Center for Evaluation Innovation, address network evaluation approaches, with an emphasis on the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in influencing the development of an entrepreneurship ecosystem.

• The Singapore government, which is committed to supporting social innovation, recognises ‘that cross-sector partnerships are needed for an ecosystem that supports innovation and social impact, because “not all problems can be solved by merely business or [the] social sector.”’

• The McConnell Foundation’s partners reflect that (social) ‘innovations don’t emerge, they are patiently excavated from the status quo,’ and that it is ultimately institutions (regulatory, financial, and others) that determine whether an innovation sees the light of day. McConnell’s story of Dark Matter Labs underlines the importance of focusing on removing institutional barriers, such as old manufacturing models, to innovation.

• FSG identifies multi-stakeholder partnerships as a key element of investing in ecosystems. The Omidyar Network engaged FSG to: 1) develop a taxonomy for the different ways that Omidyar Network approaches ecosystem investments, 2) identify best practices in the field for evaluating ecosystem investments, and 3) recommend how these practices might be applied to Omidyar Network’s investment, strategy development, and learning processes. The authors identify multi-stakeholder partnerships as one of the four principal methods used in ecosystem investments, along with research, convening, and policy influence.

• The ‘Collective Impact’ approach, pioneered by Harvard Business School, mandates five essential elements of a system-focused collaborative endeavour:
  - A common agenda—A shared vision and joint approach to change that addresses each participant’s interests and contributions;
  - A shared measurement system—Performance framework to understand results and success and support learning and adaptation;
  - Mutually reinforcing activities—Diverse but complementary action by many different actors, addressing different aspects of a problem;
  - Constant communication—Discipline of frequent and structured communication, trust-building and learning;
  - Dedicated “backbone” support—Dedicated staff to guide vision and strategy, support activities, establish shared measurement practices, build public will, advance policy, and mobilise resources.

39. As Omidyar Network evolved its philanthropic investments from scaling individual organisations towards a focus on influencing systems or sector-level change, now referred to as ‘ecosystem investments’. Mack, K., et al, 2016.
5.0

Case Study on Operational Partnerships
These organisations have worked closely together, within consortia and with the iXc and DT Global, on all aspects of the evolving design and adaptive implementation throughout each SFI Program component. The close working relationship with the iXc, in particular, has been a very different experience from a traditional contract with a government donor. We were interested in learning how the partnerships worked, what factors underpinned their success, and whether there was value in this way of working within this context.

As explained in the ‘Partnership Classification’ section, we selected the term ‘operational partner’ in place of ‘implementing partner’ despite the latter being more commonly used. We wanted to distinguish from situations where organisations are engaged to implement a predetermined program and relate to DFAT principally through tightly contracted terms even if they are called ‘partner.’ We are signalling a different, deeply collaborative way of operating as partners for this global program.

5.1
About the SFI Operational Partnerships

This Case Study reviews the relationships between the iXc and its core SFI operational partners, including SecondMuse, Conveners.org, ygap, DT Global, Moonshot Global and Living Collaborations (the MEL team) and Good Return (as Frontier Brokers Network Facilitator). We refer to choices made under Frontier Brokers to support collaboration, which are addressed more fully in 7.0 Case Study on Peer Networks.
This chart shows the organisations working in operational partnerships with the iXc.

### 5.2 Findings Across the Partnership Measurement Dimensions

The findings from our investigation of the intentional partnering approach taken on the SFI Program’s operational partnerships reflect the experience during the Frontier Innovators and Frontier Incubators components, while including some reference to the setup and design phase of Frontier Brokers. Data was gathered primarily from semi-structured, in-depth interviews with operational partners, and is presented against the dimensions and indicators of the Partnership Analysis Framework, namely:

- Setup, design and daily operations,
- Collaborative mindsets and skills, and
- Added value arising from partnerships.

“This has been much more collaborative than I had envisaged. Multiple stakeholders, sub-components, emergent design… It demonstrates leading ways to be collaborative. I haven’t seen a great deal of other development programs like this. It has set the standard for how we should work in a decentralised and remote way - a big learning experience.”

– Innovation Resource Facility Partner
5.2.1 Dimension 1: Setup, Design and Daily Operations of SFI Operational Partnerships

This dimension observes processes associated with the beginning of a partnership as well as the systems and processes that become regular, daily rhythms for partners working together. The expectation is that each of these processes contributes to strong and effective partnerships. Further, this dimension addresses the actual setup and design (objectives, roles, participation in design); effective management and leadership (that empowers all partners, addresses power, mobilises resources); communication and clarity; and participation in decision making.

The findings reveal that for the SFI Program, the iXc acted in new and important ways to set up, design, and operate these operational partnerships in a collaborative way that yielded an innovative and adaptive program.

Indicator 1: Setup and design

This first indicator recognises the importance of partners sharing objectives and incorporating their individual objectives into the joint work of the partnership. Participation in design to build ownership, clarity in roles, responsibilities and resourcing also establish strong foundations for collaboration.

The SFI Program showed positive results against this indicator: SFI Partner selection and procurement approaches, including risk management, increased the chance of collaborative relationships.

The SFI Program’s partner selection process illustrates how shared and individual objectives were incorporated into the work: SFI Partner selection was focused on identifying organisations that had shared objectives and mission alignment with SFI Program goals, who were comfortable with ambiguity, co-design and collaboration, and who were keen to do something ambitious together in this field. Lead partners were contracted through the IRF and directly to DFAT through both nontraditional and traditional procurement mechanisms.

“The way we framed what we wanted to achieve, attracted these organizations that are mission-driven, and [who knew] we were always going to need collaboration… The selections contributed to establishing a collaborative culture, without really working to overtly create it.”

– iXc

These lead partners in turn formed partnerships with other subcontractors who also shared the objectives and mission and brought complementary skills and expertise. For example, the Frontier Incubators Consortium of SecondMuse, Convenors.org and ygap combined expertise in innovation, convening and incubation; the MEL Consortium of Moonshot Global and Living Collaborations combined expertise in innovative finance, learning and partnering as well as developmental and traditional evaluation. Mission alignment and commitment to outcomes also brought high expectations and ambitions, which were sometimes difficult to reconcile with real and constrained budget envelopes.

The staged implementation of each component, and overlap of partners involved, created the opportunity to learn from each sequential procurement and refine the scope, type of organisation, selection criteria and procurement method to best support deep collaboration on an experimental program. All contracted parties were called partners and given opportunities to contribute to program design.
For example:

- iXc/DT Global learned from their procurement experiences and shifted towards more flexible arrangements, making good use of initial strategy and design contracts followed by implementation contracts to enable adaptive and collaborative work.

- In the Frontier Brokers component, the iXc and DFAT’s Procurement team piloted an innovative procurement mechanism—a two-stage co-creation, involving an initial co-design workshop with potential partners, to refine the final Request for Proposal and encourage connections. This method resulted in more nuanced projects based on market experience and expertise of the bidders (rather than iXc being prescriptive, which is often the case with government procurement).

- In addition, under Frontier Brokers, the iXc allocated a portion of funding to one organisation to play a network facilitation role among all of the contracted organisations. This arose out of the procurement process where it became clear that all players in the brokering space would benefit from more interaction, sharing and learning with each other.

The role of the IRF as a facilitator and administrative coordinator of a myriad of contracting arrangements supported DFAT in maintaining clear roles, responsibilities, and resourcing in a participatory manner across the SFI Program: The iXc, through the IRF, had access to procurement and contract management which could support partnering with new and diverse (and sometimes smaller) organisations. Through the IRF, it was possible (and important) for the managing contractor to hold some of the risk of such an innovative program (such as higher uncertainty of outcomes from experimental projects, working with new partners less familiar with DFAT requirements), instead of shifting risk to the implementing organisations.

For the SFI Program, the IRF program manager built in maximum flexibility in how the work could evolve, within a contracted environment.

For example:

a. To accommodate a developmental evaluation / adaptive management approach, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Partner contract included specifications for a suite of deliverables (knowledge products / reflection points / learning events), while also allowing the specific content of those deliverables to be determined based on DFAT and emerging programmatic needs.

b. The early contracts were written to transfer all the risk from DFAT—as per a standard aid environment (eg, with clauses such as ‘on a reimbursable basis’, ‘payment in arrears’). However, in the transition from Frontier Innovators, to Frontier Incubators, the IRF revised the contracts, deliberately holding more risk, for example through pre-payment of program expenses (e.g. for large, international convenings).

c. In future procurements, for example, in contracts for Frontier Incubators Program Partners, it was critical for the program that the IRF could navigate the bureaucracy without allowing it to prevent the innovation.

“It’s about how you go to the market - how you pitch your program, what you’re looking for - expertise, not just tendering with fully scoped design and asking for response - instead, [saying] we want this outcome, have a problem to solve, leaves room for mission aligned organisations to come on the journey with you.”

- iXc
“We’re trying to bring in more, better quality social enterprises to grow and scale businesses. That is the intent of this program. It comes back around to trust, having relationships, meeting people face-to-face and building genuine relationships... we’re explicitly writing [flexible, outcome-focused] contracts which can accommodate adaptation; which carries risks for everyone. But relationship management then becomes important, so you’ve got to be aware of what’s going on and where.”

– IRF Partner

Indicator 2: Effective Management

This indicator explores the systems and procedures established to support collaboration, how differences are managed, and the presence of partnership facilitation.

The SFI Program showed positive results against this indicator: SFI operational partners drew on multiple collaboration platforms and tools, and exhibited partnership facilitation behaviours to support a collaborative culture.

SFI Program partners worked remotely for the most part, across many time zones, and drew on a wide range of tools—for communication, project management and administration—including Zoom, WhatsApp, Slack, Airtable, and Google Drive. These flexible collaboration platforms and tools are not uniformly available for DFAT when working with external partners, however, iXc was able to pioneer their use, and demonstrate how essential they are for the highly collaborative manner of working that was established within the SFI Program. It also should be noted that the SFI Program used Govteams, to provide visibility and access to key documents to the iXc and DFAT departments. While this facilitated basic file sharing, SFI Program operational partners favored other collaboration platforms noted above. The Govteams link was limited to document sharing between internal DFAT teams.

While there was no specifically nominated partnership facilitator, all partners exhibited partnership facilitation behaviours such as ensuring open flow of information, co-creating meeting agendas, drawing on each other’s strengths, and sharing facilitation of reflection meetings. The iXc played a conscious role in shaping this collaborative culture of openness and learning.
Indicators 3 & 4: Communication and Decision Making

These two combined indicators explore information flows, accommodation of different points of view, feedback and learning, how partners address gaps or duplication, and how decisions are made.

The SFI Program showed positive results against these indicators: Operational partners placed a high value on communication and established an important practice of deeply collaborative and strategic meetings.

SFI partners held fortnightly meetings, taking a deeply collaborative approach; the meetings included progress updates, reflection and learning, addressing strategic questions, risk mitigation, joint problem solving, co-creation and identifying and shaping new opportunities. Leadership and decision-making was shared. Each meeting’s agenda and decisions were documented in shared, dynamic, continuous Google Docs, which helped in ensuring clarity, efficiency and collective memory. All partners found these meetings to be very important and also considered them unusual in their experience. Communication and record keeping were adapted to the collaborative implementation and virtual nature of this work. Accountability and focus on outcomes were the same, if not more significant than in transactional relationships. Communications and decision-making were shared, open, and were not one-way or hierarchical.

Using Zoom for video meetings rather than phone conference enabled the essential face-to-face connection which partners identified as a key success factor in these relationships.

“Under SFI, the engagement between DFAT and partners has been very different - always strategic rather than operational, e.g., the fortnightly calls with the MEL partner are totally strategic and unique. There is such strong engagement, a sense that we are all in it together.”

– IRF Partner

Partners placed a high value on communication and maintained a pattern of constant, regular communication within consortia and with the iXc/DT Global team. This created intentional feedback loops which enabled rapid problem solving and finding opportunities for new partnerships and collaboration.

With geographically dispersed partners and most collaboration occurring remotely, partners found the occasional opportunity for face-to-face connection invaluable to build relationships and create a sense of team. For example, partner meetings were scheduled alongside AVPN Summits to leverage planned travel for multiple purposes.
Indicator 5: Sound Leadership

This indicator explores how leadership within partnerships empowers sharing of ideas, how resources and power are managed, and the presence of strategic guidance.

The SFI Program showed positive results against this indicator: Based on findings from the interviews, DFAT’s framing of relationships among implementing organisations as partnerships contributed to, as well as reflected the reality, that:

- Working relationships were close and shared power and in some cases resources;
- Program, activities, measurement and (learning/communication/tools) products were often co-designed and adaptive;
- Efforts were made to understand each other’s strategic interests and incorporate mutual benefit and equity;
- Risk was shared across partners, and
- There was a collaborative spirit.

This framing of what it meant to be partners, emerged from experience (and mission alignment, shared values and desire to work collaboratively) rather than from any overt discussion on setup, and reflected the partners collectively taking a partnering approach.

5.2.2 Dimension 2: Collaborative Mindsets and Skills of SFI Operational Partnerships

This dimension observes individual and collective behaviours, practices and experiences known to foster trust and create the conditions for collaboration and innovation and looks for evidence of diversity, equity, openness and transparency, genuine interest and support amongst partners, and the engagement or commitment of partners, understanding that each of these behaviours are trust-building, and foster belonging and safety to underpin experimentation.

SFI Program Partners brought (and defaulted to) highly developed collaborative mindsets and skills which underpinned the capacity to sit comfortably with ambiguity, reflect collectively, share leadership and adapt.

Indicator 1: Diversity

This indicator explores how diversity is incorporated at many levels including ways of working, expertise, types of partners, and how flexibility for different approaches is shown.

While strides were made over the course of implementation, notably with the development and operationalisation of the Gender and Power strategy, there is room for improvement in this area: As a global program, SFI has embraced diverse organisations and cultures and ramped up influence around gender-lens investing, but there is room for improvement when it comes to diversity in language.

Diversity was built into the design of SFI, by selecting to span the diverse countries, languages and cultures of the Asia Pacific region. The different types of organisations involved added an additional layer of diversity.

41. Daniel Coyle (in his book ‘Culture Code’) emphasises the micro-behaviours which, when deliberately practiced, foster belonging in teams. In our Analysis Framework, we seek to capture this element by identifying examples of ‘genuine interest and support’ such as sharing personal joys and concerns, building in shared fun and relaxation, adapting to meet partner needs - believing these contribute to creating a culture of trust from which creativity and innovation arise.

42. Diversity in language was more challenging, and while delivered in English this limitation was acknowledged and some accommodations were made to support speakers of other languages as the program adapted. Creative solutions to working across multiple languages are sought.
Leveraging expertise and trusting each other’s contribution has been a feature of these consortia relationships. While not specifically within the Operational Partnerships considered here, the broader SFI Family’ includes organisations large, medium, small, local, global, public, private, social, charitable, academic, generalist and specialist. Participants have gained value from the opportunity to engage with organisations they otherwise would rarely encounter and examples are emerging of these new connections yielding beneficial outcomes.

As the SFI Program matured, the emphasis on gender was also strengthened, leading to the development of a specific gender strategy, which was then operationalised through MEL, Frontier Incubators and Frontier Brokers; ygap stepped into an expanded role in leading a gender lens incubation and acceleration theme for Frontier Innovators, and the MEL team developed a gender-specific measurement framework for the Frontier Brokers component, in collaboration with all Brokers partners.

However, there is still room to improve in accommodating diversity, especially in language proficiency, and in voices that offer a reality-check from contextualised field experience.

“I would have loved to see more people in the room from the regions we’re working in. Very hard to do this. In the design phase, ygap was the only one to say ‘this might not work’… brought a more realistic voice. Let’s bring cohort partners into the next phase.”

— ygap

**Indicator 2: Equity**

This indicator explores equity (seen in respect and inclusion) as a partnership-building principle because of its equalisation of power.

**The SFI Program employed new approaches that led to better than expected results in this area: Co-creation and sharing decision making contribute to equity within relationships that by nature are driven by contracts.**

Respect for each other’s contribution and the desire to make the best, joint decisions and achieve the strongest outcomes possible created the foundations for the collaborative dynamic between SFI operational partners. In reality, this means sharing power, which can be challenging in a contracted relationship, where money is the dominant resource and comes from one source (DFAT). DFAT staff are aware of the large amount of power they possess as the commissioning donor and tried to shift this dynamic in the SFI Program through the collaborative way of working and by not making unilateral decisions.

Equity was an overtly intentional principle underpinning the Frontier Brokers two-stage procurement, creating the opportunity for diverse organisations to shape the priorities of the program, and to build partnerships before bidding competitively. During the co-creation workshop, gender and power dynamics were specifically prioritised, which altered the dynamics between the mix of organisations.

“We went into the Brokers procurement with recognition of gender and power - in Jakarta (co-creation workshop), this conversation shifted which voices were authoritative. Everyone began to prioritise that expertise.”

— iXc
Indicator 3: Genuine Interest and Support

This indicator recognises the supportive culture and relationship building that is the glue in partnerships, keeping people committed and holding things together through challenges.

This was one of the key strengths of the SFI Program: SFI Operational Partners recognise the significant opportunity they have had to work in genuinely supportive relationships for this experimental program.

Partnerships often rise or fall depending on the people involved, and this program is no exception. Partners recognise the significance of the diverse yet aligned mix of people, organisations, mindsets and skills coming together at this point in time when it was possible to work in this collaborative way on a prototype program.

Specific examples of partners showing genuine interest and support to each other include:

- There was hands-on involvement from the iXc partner. The iXc team members were active partners, not detached funders, and they committed considerable time to regular meetings, and engaging with the wide network of participants.
- The approach to meetings, where it was expected that all voices would be heard and ideas would rise and fall on their merit. People leading various tasks would be given generous feedback and suggestions, and the space to reflect and decide whether to accept or not the feedback on their way to a solution.
- The SFI Family invested time and effort into forming genuine personal relationships. Spending time together after hours, having fun in both work and social settings, and enjoying co-implementation of work all contributed to the success of the collaboration.

“I think everyone’s personality and intention [contributed to success]. Maybe it’s about the type of work we are trying to do. I think there is an extra level of goodwill from the leads on most of the partners and contracts. Everybody wants it to succeed, because they believe it’s of value.”

– iXc

Indicator 4: Openness and Transparency

This indicator reflects on the trust-building quality of openness, observed in the comfort partners feel to voice concerns or limitations, and the ways partners seek or give feedback/advice.

The SFI Program showed positive results against this indicator: Openness has been a characteristic of the Operational Partnerships within SFI, as highlighted by partners describing their feedback loops, reflection and learning-focused discussions. This has been particularly evident in the consortia relationships which were formed, tested and strengthened under SFI, and who have gone onto further collaborations.

It was a deliberate decision by the iXc to be fully engaged, alongside the Consortium, with Incubator Program Partners and Cohort Partners, rather than to remain behind the scenes, which has been reported to be a major contributor to building trust in this wider group of organisations —something that was especially important while undertaking experimental work in the Pacific region.

43. In his book ‘Creativity Inc,’ Ed Catmull, founder of Pixar describes the culture of their ‘Braintrust’ meetings, where peers review early versions of films, identify what is not working, and offer ‘good notes’ to the Directors, ie constructive diagnostic feedback that helps identify where attention is needed and to encourage and inspire the next step in creating the best possible film. ‘Frank talk, spirited debate, laughter and love’ are the essential ingredients. This is the idea of ‘genuine interest and support’ for each other in the work, for the sake of the bigger goals.
Indicator 5: Partner Engagement

This indicator considers the commitment of partners, approaches to sharing risk, and the regular exchange of ideas.

Partner engagement refers to engagement by the various partners including direct participants and also the commitment from their wider organisations to help achieve the partnership objectives and to share risk.

The SFI Program employed new approaches that led to better than expected results in this area: In SFI, partner engagement was experienced in:

- Genuine co-creation; especially the iXc being open to suggestions from partners and willingly running with those ideas
- Connection to wider teams within DFAT for information sharing, learning events and potential collaboration
- Operational partners carefully managing potential or perceived conflicts of interest in a public sector context. For instance, when elements of program design came up against partners’ existing products and services, they could not be seen to engage or advantage themselves (e.g. Consortium partners had programs which easily fit the scope of SFI, but in their role as implementing partner they could not play a dual role).

Some limitations were experienced as a result of DFAT processes and budget constraints, which can be slow and restrictive and not always fit-for-purpose for engaging with private sector agencies working with DFAT on innovation. For example, travel rules and budgets limited movement and face-to-face engagement opportunities; and partners would have valued more access to DFAT Posts to engage them in the local ecosystem activity.

“At the Singapore Incubators workshop where DFAT set the stage for the program - a lot of people felt that we were making ourselves vulnerable by being so open, doing things that might be risky, but we hoped others would have the same approach. This happened for a lot of people in Singapore. It set the stage for people to have the courage to open up.”

– iXc

Other examples of openness and transparency include:

- The first agenda item of the regular partner meetings was open sharing of any wider news or change, particularly within DFAT, which may be relevant to partners.
- Partners making connections between their networks, prior work or opportunities, for each other’s benefit.
- Working collaboratively on major deliverables, reviewing draft documents, supporting workshop designs, and planning major events.
5.2.3 Dimension 3: Added Value from the Operational Partnerships

The Added Value Dimension observes different types of value experienced by individual partners themselves (people and organisations), partnership synergy (meaning the value from working together), and value experienced by actors in the ecosystem. This dimension asks whether partners’ interests and ambitions were met and whether partnering was worth the effort. Were there better results from collaborating, such as the emergence of new approaches or opportunity to leverage partners’ expertise?; Did we achieve greater reach, impact and influence in the entrepreneurship ecosystem through this collaborative approach?

This was one of the key strengths of the operational partnerships: SFI partners offer evidence of added value at each of these levels.

In the majority of interviews, respondents noted that iXc’s SFI Operational Partners have ‘gone above and beyond’ their contract terms, delivering more value to the program, the participants and DFAT than anticipated. This was attributed to the deep commitment of mission-driven organisations to the impact of the work. An example of ‘going above and beyond’ on the Incubators component: the Consortium (SecondMuse, ygap, Convenors.org) openly shared with the Incubators Network their approaches to designing and implementing the program, adding another layer of learning and modelling remote collaboration. They also openly exchanged results, research and ideas for ecosystem building, in anticipation that it may lead to something unexpected.

“All the organisations and individuals are personally invested in this work. They believe in entrepreneurial potential as a means of contributing to localised empowerment and sustainable development. It’s a personal pursuit.”

– SecondMuse

Partners also experienced the benefits of being involved in a dynamic and leading edge program that incorporated solutions to different aspects of problems to be solved in entrepreneurship strengthening. Based on findings from the interviews, partners conveyed that the SFI Program has brought increased global recognition and respect for all Operational Partners; to DFAT for the unique investment at ecosystem level; and to SecondMuse and Consortium partners specifically for their role in catalysing ecosystem change across Asia Pacific. Table 2 below provides examples of added value experienced from taking a deliberate approach to partnering on the SFI Program.
### Added value for entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurship ecosystem

- Emergence of a new partnership between Consortium members and Sasakawa Peace Foundation to create a Toolkit for Gender Lens Incubation and Acceleration (See section 5.3 for the story).
- Capacity to crowd-in other stakeholders and connect with other programs. For example, at the Incubators Workshop, the IRF Partner were able to introduce the SFI Communications Partner, The StoryBoxes, to a key contact from the Yunus Centre at Griffith University School of Social Business. Through this connection, and reintroduction to the iXc, Griffith University is developing a side project to use the ‘Frontiers’ documentary series in their Social Enterprise course curriculum.

### Added value for the partner organisations

- The iXc and the SecondMuse-led Consortium are jointly shaping the model for the next phase of ecosystem support investment, emerging from the collaborative, learning-focused partnership and feedback loops from the ecosystem, thereby offering all partners greater confidence in the relevance and potential for impact of the future design.
- A new global peer-network of Incubator CEOs, formed out of the face-to-face connection at the Incubators Workshop, self-organised to meet virtually on a monthly basis to support each other strategically and have even arranged an international F2F meetup, demonstrating the extent of the personal and professional value they found in the face of this collaboration.

### Partnership synergy

- ygap have deepened their capacity and created new opportunities for gender-focused leadership, particularly through delivering the gender thematic for Frontier Incubators and the GLIA Toolkit in a new partnership with Sasakawa Peace Foundation (See ‘Mini Case Study’ in section 5.3).
- Convenors.org have had the opportunity to use their ‘Convening Circles’ product in the GLIA Pilot, and develop an accompanying guide.

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**TABLE 2:** Examples of Added Value from Operational Partnerships
5.3

**Added value: Partnering to Design and Test the Gender Lens Incubation and Acceleration Toolkit**

A unique partnership, which emerged from connections made during the Frontier Incubators program, illustrates unexpected value that arose from the open-minded and collaborative approach taken by the SFI Program Operational Partners. The partnership, formed between the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF) and ygap, Convenors.org and SecondMuse through connections made during Frontier Incubators, emerged from shared interest in making incubators, accelerators and investment more inclusive for women. A new partner contributed additional resources enabling the development of a new toolkit that brought additional value to entrepreneurs and SFI Operational Partners.

“*It’s been a dream partnership for us. Everyone is so passionate and cares about this product. I’ve learned a lot from our partners. We’ve been doing work around developing a toolkit from the research side but working with practitioners and having pilot partners involved in design and continuous feedback - resulted in a fruitful collaboration. I’ve learned so much from seeing this process from their eyes as well. I highly recommend the partners to other organisations - if we were to try to do it alone, the final output would not be as good as what we’re coming towards. Collective action has brought a lot of extra value for us.*”

— Lily Yu, SPF

The free, interactive GLIA Toolkit emerged from the content ygap created for the Frontier Incubators. In a highly collaborative process, the toolkit was piloted by six Frontier Incubator organisations across Southeast Asia.

“We had ongoing discussions with Sasakawa—about their interest in creating access to capacity building for marginalised groups, particularly interested in gender in marginalised communities. They were asking ‘Can you develop a toolkit for intermediaries?’ ygap also had that in mind. We both wanted to make the content available widely. And how to disseminate was a great role for Convenors.”

— Manita Ray, ygap
Several **preconditions** set the stage for this partnership to emerge:

- The iXc and operational partners decided to incorporate a gender-lens in the design approaches for both Frontier Incubators and Frontier Brokers and had begun integrating this lens into strategy, approaches and results frameworks.
- ygap was awarded a small additional contract to take the lead on operationalising the Gender and Power strategy in the Frontier Incubators component by developing a curriculum to support incubators/accelerators in gender lens investing. This curriculum was introduced at the Design Workshop in Singapore in November 2018, and through Incubators Network thematic sessions.
- SPF has a history of active investment in GLI research and their Asia Women Impact Fund. They were interested in practical guidance to support women entrepreneurs, and saw a gap in the available tools for intermediaries in Asia. SPF was aware of the SFI Program and connected to the iXc and DFAT gender-focused teams.
- SecondMuse, Conveners.org and ygap, took a network-centric approach, leveraging global networks to strengthen the design, discover the Asia-Pacific actors, add value to events, develop capacity and build the ecosystem. They hosted the Frontier Incubators Design Workshop concurrently with AVPN in 2018, and invited guests, including SPF, to attend the final day when gender-lens was the focus.
“DFAT’s openness and flexibility has been a great benefit for SPF. Open to expanding scope, sequencing new opportunity, bringing in a new partner, leverage new resources, and not grabbing all headline and control... This is the power of bringing people of similar interests together - passionate and dedicated to supporting the end users. We would not have been able to achieve that ourselves. Foresight by DFAT to design Frontier Incubators in a way that could draw other partners in. ... We attended (Singapore workshop) as an observer and determined this was the right team, who were highly skilled and all brought something different but complementary. It was an easy decision that this team could really deliver.”

– Lily Yu, SPF
5.4 Insights from the SFI Program

An analysis of findings from this investigative study surfaces the following insights about the partnering experience of the operational partners on SFI Program.

1. Partnerships work best and create added value when they are deliberately undertaken.

Building on the conclusions and recommendations from R4D’s learning report on the progress of the iXc’s first three years, partnering on innovation-led programs should ideally feature

- Alignment of partners and participants on goals and development impact,
- Allocation of dedicated resources to participate in and manage the collaborative relationships,
- Management of geography and timezone challenges with collaborative tools, and
- Experimentation with appropriate procurement to enable partnering with a range of less typical actors.

As one of the flagship programs for the iXc the SFI Program has prioritised seeking new ideas from innovators outside DFAT and learning how to partner effectively with a more diverse range of organisations, in this case, highly specialised organisations. All parties involved in the SFI Program have demonstrated a continued commitment to upholding the same features mentioned by the R4D report throughout the life of the Program. Through robust partnering, the SFI Program has manifested the desired ‘more holistic ecosystem model for supporting change agents in challenging contexts, driving market and policy-level change’ in addition to supporting specific innovations.44 Central to achieving this has been the deliberate focus on forming, managing, and measuring and adapting partnerships. This primary approach has been supported by skilled staff from both the DFAT and the contractor sides, and a collaborative mindset that values flexibility and co-implementation, practised by all parties.

2. Collaborative relationships are possible within a contracting environment.

Creating collaborative relationships with shared strategic interest, risk, and governance is not straightforward within a contracting environment. Contracting can make this more difficult since contracts may cause organisations and individuals to revert to transactional and hierarchical dynamics. However, the partnering experience on the SFI Program demonstrates that partners bound by contracts can achieve deep collaboration and adaptive programming where there is an intention to

- Build trust and relationships between all parties,
- Leverage diverse contributions,
- Create dynamics of equity for innovation, and
- Allocate risk where it is best managed.

The SFI Program set up mechanisms for shared decision-making; leveraging and valuing contributions or additional resources from partners for the benefit of the partnership; and adapting scope, plans, or approaches to suit emerging priorities or opportunities. The SFI Program managed risk through close engagement and collaboration, reinforcing contractual mechanisms with mission and activity alignment and trust among partners.

“I feel like with the MEL partner, it was more evolving and adaptive - we had a clearer intention that they are our partner working with us on the journey. Whereas the communications contract was to make a documentary, and manage delivery. Even though they have become our partners - I didn’t know [at the beginning] it was our intention.”

- iXc

“Our traditional mechanisms, focused on risk and compliance, are not the way to deliver aid, they do not achieve change, innovation or impact.”

– IRF Partner

For donor/funding bodies who aim to achieve collaborative partnership while operating within budgetary constraints and formal accountability frameworks, it is essential to name and carry out the intentions described above and support them with approaches such as those used in the SFI Program.

Figure 8 below provides the MEL partner’s summary review of the state of partnerships on the SFI Program as seen through the partnership continuum,45 a tool that is used internally at DFAT and within the iXc, in partnership-building guidance materials. While the design, execution and adaptation of activities have been highly collaborative, the framework for implementation—with contracts for services or grants provided against milestones, and with governance where all parties are accountable to DFAT—has been recognisably transactional. Overall, the partnering approach can be viewed as more collaborative than transactional.

45. This figure was adapted by DFAT from a concept developed by the Partnership Brokers Association, 2019 ©.
3. **SFI Operational Partnership setup and design demonstrated hallmarks of collaborative relationships.**

The SFI Program in its setup and design stage demonstrated the following hallmarks of collaborative relationships:

- The SFI’s Program’s focus on identifying and attracting organisations that had shared objectives and mission alignment with SFI Program goals underpin collaborative partnerships.

- The flexible, purpose-built procurement created opportunities for learning. Combined with the adaptive management approach DFAT took to implementation, flexible procurement gave DFAT both the data to draw upon and the opportunity to refine the scope, type of organisation, selection criteria and even procurement method from one component to the next.

- Procurement through the IRF and through DFAT’s first-ever co-creation attracted organisations comfortable with ambiguity and adaptation. Once contracted, these organisations formed partnerships with other subcontractors which also held shared objectives and mission alignment.
5.5 Recommendations for Future Programs

The insights from the partnering experience of the operational partners on the SFI Program, with some contextualisation to goals and geography, can be applied to other programs implemented by DFAT and bi-laterals.

While recognising that not all programmatic contexts can invest the time required for deep collaboration, there are trade-offs made in the choice of approach, and consequent use of time. More traditional approaches invest time managing large contractors and contracts, compliance, reporting and accountability; and while risk may feel better managed, the potential for learning is reduced by this arms-length approach. The choice of approach - more traditional contracting, or more collaborative- will ultimately reflect what the donor/funding body is seeking from the investment.

Below are recommendations that frame the insights as considerations for future programs. In keeping with the structure of this investigative study, they are presented along the partnership measurement dimensions.

5.5.1 Setup, Design and Daily Operations

Ensure collaborative setup approaches, which establish the principles upon which partners intend to work, by

- **Planning, Designing, and Carrying Out Flexible Procurement:** Identify procurement mechanisms that can be flexible enough to deliberately involve partners who are likely to implement the program in its design. Where mechanisms do not exist, pursue alternatives, such as working with procurement staff to pilot and test new aspects of existing mechanisms, developing new mechanisms, or establishing a co-design or co-implementation arrangements with other entities, such as foundations or other donors, which have more flexibility. Incorporate a balanced approach to risk to support partnering - balancing the level of risk being taken with the trust placed in partners to deliver, and with the size of organisations involved.

- **Optimising Implementation and Governance Arrangements:** To further solidify collaborative setup, design, and daily operations, donors could extend design mechanisms, such as memoranda of understanding or Guiding Principles documents, to guide power sharing and joint decision making. These mechanisms could also facilitate contributions from partners both within contracts that are as flexible as possible or incentivise contributions and/or participation beyond contracted terms. One way to accomplish this is to use budgets flexibly, anticipating the unexpected and enable provisioning of resources to needs as they emerge. For example, donors could reserve a portion of funding for collaboratively planned activities that respond to changes on the ground.

- **Starting with Clearly Defined and Articulated Intentions:** When working in collaborative relationships, being clear about the intention to do so and overtly exploring interests and contributions of all partners offers the potential for improved program effectiveness, relevance, and unexpected added value. Framing program implementation relationships as partnerships can inspire and encourage participants to consider a diverse range of contributions, such as in-kind resources or networks, which they can bring forward as contributions. In more restrictive environments, such offerings and connections may be viewed narrowly as out of scope or a potential conflict of interest.

- **Ensuring High-Value, Collaborative Partnerships Requires Multiple Steps.** Identify partners for the shared value they can bring, beyond the contacted scope of work. Then, once identified and through flexible procurement processes, engage them in the program. As all partners are engaged, put processes in place to periodically and jointly discuss how the shared value can be realised, and capture this in a work plan. Then, over the course of implementation, results should be reviewed to ensure that shared interests and deep alignment have been maintained.
5.5.2 Collaborative Mindsets and Skills

Build upon effective Setup, Design, and Daily Operations to provide a scaffolding for collaboration by

- **Be Clear About What It Means To Call Each Other ‘partner’**: Exploring meanings attached to such a ubiquitous label, which can mean many different things to different people, helps create clear expectations amongst partners for their unique relationship. Partners should discuss this up front, co-creating objectives and mutual expectations of each other.

- **Agreeing Upon Metrics To Jointly Monitor And Evaluate The Partnership**: To discover what is working well, what can be strengthened, and what should be eliminated, partners should agree on metrics for the partnership itself. These can be drawn from the Partnership Measurement Framework in this investigative study. For example, addressing elements of process, behaviours or mindsets, results and unexpected value. Once agreed, partners should make time to periodically undertake reflective processes to gather information on and track progress against these indicators. Knowing how the partnership itself is faring enables timely resolution of issues or adaptation in approach.

- **Investing In Relationship Building And Collaborative Tools And Processes**: Partners should invest in relationships by taking a genuine interest in each other and creating collaborative processes and rhythms, for example, by combining face-to-face and virtual connections; and establishing clear systems and processes such as intentional meeting management. A sound baseline level of trust will facilitate resolution of difficulties encountered from unexpected challenges or unforeseen events, such as a change in the enabling environment. Putting in place collaborative processes will reinforce relationships throughout implementation.

- **Using Specialist Partnership Facilitators/Brokers At Critical Formation And Review Stages**: Partnership brokers bring attention and specialist collaborative skills to partnering processes and relationship factors to create the enabling conditions for genuine exchange, support, courage and creativity; essential for innovation or experimental partnerships. The presence of these skills throughout the relationship will foster reflection, trust, mutual benefit, responsibility and strengthened outcomes.

- **Developing Collaborative Mindsets including a deliberate focus on diversity, openness, equity and respect for unique contributions and perspectives, and practicing the subtle behaviours that foster belonging and safety**: Creating ‘safe’ contexts to experiment—for example, using design methods and tools in co-design teams, or through opportunities to attempt short-term, low-risk activities—will support learning and enable program adaptation.
5.5.3 Added Value

Added Value Comes From Openness And Courage: When working in a complex context and especially when taking a catalytic role on a development challenge where results, change and consequences are not easily predictable, collaborative partnerships create the potential for stronger results and added value.

Harnessing the shared interest and resources of aligned actors creates the conditions for a multiplication effect from the investment. Holding an open mind, a stance of curiosity, deep listening and keen attention to the potential of others to reveal new ideas, opportunities, connections and innovations is essential to realising added value.
6.0
Case Study on Capacity Development Partnerships to Strengthen an Entrepreneurship Ecosystem
“In my opinion, the genuine collaborative approach makes all the difference. There is so much openness and trust between us and our program partners that we had the freedom to work on challenges with the appreciation of our context and the effort to understand our local experience deeper.”

– SE Asia Cohort Partner

6.1 About the SFI Capacity Development Partnerships

Capacity development relationships were the focal point of Frontier Incubators. The program aimed to strengthen Accelerators and Incubators across the Asia-Pacific region by creating access to experienced leaders and avenues for individual learning, mentoring, team and organisational capacity building, peer learning and opportunistic collaboration. The capacity development partnerships were created between a competitively selected set of Incubators from across Asia-Pacific (Cohort Partners) with established Incubators and Accelerators (Program Partners) from across the world. The Cohort Partners were selected from the respondents to a call for emerging incubators and accelerators focused on social impact in Asia-Pacific, which were interested in receiving assistance to address challenges in investor relations, business model sustainability and/or building networks/partnerships. The Cohort Partners ranged from co-working hubs and education-based accelerator platforms to private-sector organisations and gender-specific business incubators. The Program Partners were mature incubators and impact venture accelerators with valuable skills and experience and a willingness to assist with the development of other organisations. The selection process for the Program Partners incorporated many principles previously described in Case Study of SFI’s Operational Partners – ie, they were mission aligned, collaborative and adaptable, interested in building the entrepreneurship ecosystem, and (mostly) recognised the potential value for their own organisation from contributing to the program.

The capacity development partnerships were formed in either one-to-one or many-to-one arrangements, where either one Program Partner or a small group of Program Partners supported each Cohort Partner. A face-to-face matching process catalysed self-organising, self-selection and partnership formation between the partners and allowed matches to be more customised to Cohort Partner needs. Cohort Partners did not receive direct grants, but were provided a range of in-kind support through these partnerships. (See The Frontier Incubators Interim Review for additional information on the Frontier Incubators component.)

These matches are represented on the following diagram:
FIGURE 9:
SFI Capacity Development Partnerships

KEY:
- Program Partners
- Incubators with 1 Program Partner
- Incubators with 2 Program Partners
- Incubators with 3 Program Partners
- Incubators with No Program Partners
The following analysis explores the findings from the intentional partnering approach taken to form the Capacity Development Partnerships, within the Frontier Incubators component of the SFI Program. The evidence emerged from the Partnership Learning Loop Survey and is presented across the dimensions of the Partnership Measurement Framework\(^\text{46}\) (see Figure 10).

**Setup, design and daily operations which addressed:**
- Setup and design
- Effective management
- Communication
- Decision making
- Sound leadership

**Collaborative mindsets and skills which addressed:**
- Diversity
- Equity
- Genuine Interest and Support
- Openness and Transparency
- Partner Engagement

**Added value arising from partnerships and networks which addressed:**
- Added value for entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurship ecosystem
- Added value for organisations
- Partnership Synergy
- Types of added value
- Collaborative spirit of the network (Networks only)

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\(^{46}\) As adapted from the Partnership Learning Loop Analysis Framework, explained further on pg 23.
6.2
Findings Across the Partnership Measurement Dimensions

6.2.1 Dimension 1: Setup, Design and Daily Operations of Capacity Development Partnerships

The findings reveal four main ideas:

1. **Learning flourished for both partners as a direct result of the intentional formation of equitable, nontraditional partnerships.**

   This was achieved through:

   - **Selection:** Ensuring clarity and transparency in the selection and setup of the two groups—Cohort Partners and Program Partners; finding the right partners; and making clear why everyone was involved and their contributions;

   - **Roles and Relationships:** Structuring the relationships, overtly, as partnerships, calling each group ‘partner’; establishing clear roles; and introducing concepts of power and equity in the first face-to-face meeting of all partners;

   - **Partnership Facilitation:** Offering transparency in the flow of information; and facilitating an equitable and participatory method for matching Cohort Partners and Program partners that was self-organising, self-selecting (voluntary), value-driven and based on agreement between the partners; and

   - **Co-creation of Content:** Creating the opportunity for those receiving the support to be active in shaping what they received and how—reflecting the needs, interests, priorities and resources of all parties—solidified the sense of ownership; requiring Cohort Partners and Program Partners to co-design the proposals for the support program to foster mutual benefit and responsibility; and promoting creation of a partnering agreement between Cohort and Program partners.

2. **A powerful first face-to-face connection** between Cohort Partners and Program Partners contributed to modeling and actively creating a collaborative culture and establishing the expectations of partnership, whereby

   - Process was carefully designed (partnership facilitation);
   - Principles of equity and power were introduced;
   - Knowledge and experiences were explored; and
   - Relationships were developed.

   A strong peer group culture emerged from the November 2018 Design Workshop in Singapore, which is described in depth in the Frontier Incubators Interim Review, and featured as a culture-forming highlight for many Partners. The convening design and facilitation capability of the implementing team was fundamental to this success, as was the resourcing for such an intensive face-to-face experience.

“As a first time engagement there was a spirit of co-production and experimentation, which contributed to checking in with each other about what the outcomes and approach of the engagement needed to be. If it were repeated, keeping this balance and openness would be a great feature of the program.”

– EU/UK Program partner

“(there was a) partner mindset (rather than a) hierarchy mindset.”

– North American Program partner
3. **Process facilitation / partnership brokering was essential to the experience and value for partners.**

This was evidenced through the selection of partners, when creating connections and establishing the network culture, throughout matching, and regular check-ins during the capacity development phase. The intentional processes to create clarity in roles, processes and decision making established a foundation of trust for collaboration throughout the program.

4. **A combination of face-to-face and virtual connection was important, along with clarity in systems, tools and processes to promote effective collaboration.**

Systems and expectations were set and communicated clearly at the outset of the partnerships, while adapting and improving over time while partnerships were in the support phase. Implementing Consortium maintained active and responsive connection to all partners, addressing questions, gaps, and conflicts quickly as they arose, to ensure the partnerships would continuously develop and sustain. Partners valued the opportunity for a face-to-face visit within the capacity development partnerships.

“Early trust building and contact. Frequent verbal contact (calls / video) also built clearer understanding between partners and quicker decision making. Time on the ground together was also the most productive and recommended early in the engagement.”

– EU/UK Program Partner

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**SURVEY RESULTS**

**Setup, Design and Daily Operations**

This chart shows the average scores across the full set of respondents, for the indicators for Setup, Design and Daily Operations (ie. setup, leadership, management, decision making and communication).

*The scores are consistently high (avg 6/7) for all indicators from all respondents, indicating high satisfaction with the processes of setup, design and daily operations of capacity-building partnerships.*

The data was disaggregated by role for Cohort Partners and Program Partners, however, the two group scores were not significantly different, so are presented here in a combined average score of 6.024 out of 7 (SD: 1.14). When disaggregated by region, however, partners from the South Asian region experienced the setup and design slightly less favourably than all other regions (Avg: 5.31).
6.2.2 Dimension 2: Collaborative Mindsets and Skills of Capacity Development Partnerships

Collaborative mindsets and skills were recognised amongst participants (Cohort and Program Partners and the partnership facilitators/Consortium partners) as the modelling and active creation of a collaborative culture, and are indicators under this dimension of the Partnerships Measurement Framework.

- **Diversity:** Incorporation of diverse partners and flexibility to design two Incubator cohorts to accommodate different needs and readiness.
- **Equity:** Creation of processes for self-directed learning and participatory decision making.
- **Genuine Interest and Support:** Provision of contextualised support program, culture of adding value, sharing resources and expanding impact together.
- **Openness and Transparency:** Adherence to principles of seeking input, responding quickly, adjusting course, adapting support program.
- **Partner Engagement:** Continuous conversation between matched partners, and amongst larger network and the continual presence of the iXc as an active partner in all network activity.

Furthermore, respondents identified a deliberate focus on power and gender dynamics, equity, respect for each unique actor and their context, capability and challenges underpinned the sense of ownership in the learning relationship, and the unfolding adaptability in what partners did together. Partners here experienced equity in the following tangible ways:

- Being able to openly voice their insights without judgement,
- Being able to ask burning questions and share concerns, and working together to find solutions,
- By receiving active listening,
- Valuing each others work explicitly,
- Seeking to understand new contexts,
- Collectively agreeing on what is needed, wanted, and will be provided in terms of support,
- Flexibility to changing needs,
- Making space for feedback,
- Respecting differences in opinions, inviting everyone to share their thoughts and experiences,
- Incorporating space for different operating models, not expecting uniformity, and
- Bringing a partner mindset versus a hierarchy mindset.

“They listen to us and what our needs are, and sometimes they help to coach us through certain things (e.g. business model) and sometimes they will see a gap that they can provide direct technical advice on, and share tools and resources with us, which is hugely beneficial.”

- SE Asia Cohort Partner
Additionally, collaborative mindsets pervaded the nature of the delivery of the capacity development support: The learning and support was strength and opportunity focused rather than deficit-based, meeting Cohort Partners at their point of growth and challenge. Partners were able to adapt the focus of support along the way to ensure it was customised and demand driven. This demonstrated genuine interest and support in the needs of the Cohort Partners and flexibility in approaches.

“It was equal all the way. While being in that partnership, the sense of ownership was always retained by us (the Cohort partners). Though they were heavily advising us, that does not mean that we sensed any lack of balance while working together. On the other hand, the partners were curious to know about our ecosystem as well, stemming from their objective of consulting us better.”

– S. Asia Cohort Partner

**SURVEY RESULTS**

**Collaborative Mindset and Skills**

This chart shows the average scores across the full set of respondents, disaggregated into the indicators for Collaborative Mindsets and Skills.

*The scores are consistently high (avg 6/7) for all indicators from all respondents, indicating partners perceived high levels of these collaborative mindsets and skills in their partnerships.*

The data was disaggregated by role for Cohort Partners and Program Partners, however, the two group scores were not significantly different, so are presented here in a combined average scores. Both Cohort and Program Partners rated the majority of indicators a 6 out of 7 (SD: 0.99). Only Partner engagement scored 5.6 out of 7.

Respondents from South Asia and Australia/New Zealand regions generally gave lower scores than other regions (an average of 5.67 compared with 6.1), with North Americans giving the highest scores (6.7). This may reflect cultural expectations and patterns of collaboration.

‘They (the Program Partners) genuinely care about our organisation and want us to succeed. They listen to us and what our needs are’

SE Asia Cohort Partner
### 6.2.3 Dimension 3: Added Value of the Capacity Development Partnerships

This was one of the key strengths of the capacity development partnerships: SFI partners offer evidence of added value at each of the levels in the table below.

#### TABLE 4:
Examples of Added Value from Capacity Development Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Added value for entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurship ecosystem</th>
<th>Added value for the partner organisations</th>
<th>Partnership synergy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cohort partners benefitting from Skills and capacity building:</strong> “We were given new templates to work with, which allowed us to view our impact and business models from a new perspective.” -SE Asia Cohort Partner</td>
<td><strong>Supporting robust, mutually beneficial capacity development arrangements that led to</strong></td>
<td><strong>Both sides valuing working together beyond the SFI Program:</strong> <strong>New opportunities to work together:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning, knowledge and expertise:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Learning about new content, approaches, facilitation styles, how different situations are dealt with. Exploring new projects together and ways to improve collective impact.” -EU/UK Program Partner</td>
<td>• Effectiveness in Cohort Partner interventions: “We revised our theory of change with a regenerative approach and lens … and integrated it into our strategy. We are actively writing proposals and reaching out for partnerships for our new approach.” -S.Asia Cohort Partner</td>
<td>• “We are developing a new program concept on supporting small-scale women entrepreneurs and the insights and technical expertise from our mentor (Program partner) has helped us in defining our approach.” -SE Asia Cohort Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “We can get access to the whole Funding Training program (for Startup) provided by [our Partner]... It’s a great source of knowledge and expertise that we have ever got access to.” - SE Asia Cohort Partner</td>
<td></td>
<td>• “I feel there is significant untapped (as yet) potential … to work with the Cohort Partners to support Social Entrepreneurs in their eco-systems. We have already submitted a joint proposal with one of our partners.” -A/NZ Program Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possibility to upscale activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Network of valuable connections:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Engaging with the Cohort Partner in Indonesia enhanced our understanding and connections to the ecosystem, improving the chances of scaling our long term work.” -EU/UK Program Partner</td>
<td></td>
<td>• “We were introduced to other key members from Partner’s team to support us. From valuable networks, new opportunities to work with Partners beyond Frontier Incubators are open to us.” - SE Asia Cohort Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “We were able to form our scaling strategy which comes in perfect timing since we are expanding our bootcamp operations and activities... in other cities. Also we were able to leverage the network to advocate our credentials when expanding.” -SE Asia Cohort Partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SURVEY RESULTS

Added Value of the Capacity Development Partnerships

The results indicate a high level of added value was realised from the partnerships.

This chart shows the average scores across the full set of respondents, for the indicators for Added Value. One indicator (Added Value of the Network) is not used for the Capacity Development partnerships. Types of Value is presented on the next page.

The data was disaggregated by role for Cohort Partners and Program Partners but was not significantly different so is presented here as average scores of 6.1 out of 7 on all KPIs (SD: 0.94).

“Our program partners helped us to re-evaluate our business model, and importantly our value proposition. They also helped us to identify areas we need to strengthen, and answered a lot of our questions that we were very uncertain about - e.g. systems that we need to have in place in order to scale.”

– SE Asia Cohort Partner
The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing **Added value for entrepreneurs and the entrepreneur ecosystem** was 6.2 out of 7.

The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing **benefits to their own organisation** was 6 out of 7.

The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing **Partnership Synergy** was 6.0 out of 7.

Although both Cohort and Program Partners indicated a similar level of added value (6.4 and 6.1), the **type of added value for different partners varied considerably**. This chart displays weighted averages disaggregated by role. Cohort Partners indicated a higher level and a greater variety of added value than Program Partners.

‘**Learning, knowledge and expertise**’ scored the highest with a weighted average of 88.1%, followed by ‘**Network of valuable relations**’ with a score of 73.6%.

‘**Increased Advocacy Power**’ scored the lowest with a weighted average of 20.5%, followed by ‘**Financial or in-kind benefits**’ with a score of 30.3%
Cohort Partners indicated that their top three types of value were:

- learning, knowledge and expertise (wgt avg: 94.4%)
- skills and capacity building (wgt avg: 83.5%)
- Network of valuable relations (wgt avg: 68.1%)

Program Partners, on the other hand, indicated that their top three types of value were:

- Network of valuable relations (wgt avg: 89.4%)
- New opportunities (wgt avg: 71.7%)
- Learning, knowledge and expertise (wgt avg: 68.8%)
Capacity Development partnerships can achieve more than the specified capacity development when undertaken in a context of an equitable relationship. This may mean greater than expected results, unexpected additional outcomes, deeper and broader development, greater satisfaction, and mutual benefit.

These findings suggest that a focus on equity and partnership in capacity development programs is well worth considering—where strong, trust-based relationships enable partners to co-design the support and respond to changing needs—as an avenue to stronger results and positive unexpected benefits.

There are considerable resource commitments needed to take such a partnership approach on a global or regional program, for example, for face-to-face convenings and active facilitation of virtual connection and collaboration between partners. The question of additional value becomes important to justify such investments.

As well as those aspects of value described above, specific results demonstrated by Cohort Partners show further value realised from the approach:

- 100% Cohort Partners recognised increased knowledge, increased networking ability and being matched with the right partner
- 90% acknowledged they received support in the right areas
- 20% of Incubators reported increased performance in the reporting period while the program was still active, which was earlier than anticipated.

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**FIGURE 12:**

Cohort Partners’ Added Value

- **100%** Increased Knowledge
- **100%** Increased Networking Ability
- **100%** Matched with the Right Partners
- **90%** Support in the Right Areas
6.4 Recommendations for Future Programs

Based on the partnering experience of the capacity development partners on the SFI Program, some concrete recommendations that are applicable to other programs that incorporate capacity development, are presented here along the partnership measurement dimensions.

Setup, Design and Daily Operations:

- **Building Equitable Relationships:** Fostering equitable relationships and incorporating a demand-driven approach to capacity development support is a prerequisite for delivering added value to all involved. This is especially true when working at ecosystem level with the private sector but likely to hold true for capacity development programs in other aid and development contexts.

- **Optimising Implementation and Governance Arrangements:** Addressing power dynamics overtly and creating mechanisms for co-design and joint decision making to achieve maximum learning by both providers and recipients of capacity development assistance intentionally gives agency to the support recipient.

- **Ensuring Face-to-Face Support:** Where possible, when conducting regional or global programs, invest in face-to-face experiences to build partnerships, and design carefully the remote experiences of collaboration. When working remotely, retain a relationship focus alongside a task focus, attempting to foster the same dynamics that a face-to-face experience would build, such as equity, hearing all voices, leveraging diverse contributions, sharing leadership, accommodating different thinking / learning / communication styles, and having clear decision making processes.

- **Actively Facilitating Partnership Formation:** Incorporate partnership facilitation from someone suitably skilled and trained to add the partnership lens to all processes and to foster an intentional culture of collaboration. This facilitation is crucial at project planning and startup but also necessary at the midpoint to ensure that relationships are on track or can be course corrected. Ideally, this person would have a role throughout implementation.

Collaborative Mindsets and Skills:

- **Agreeing on Metrics to Jointly Monitor and Evaluate the Partnership:** Set this intention and select a framework for monitoring at the outset or early in the partnership. Make measurement participatory and learning/adaptation-focused. Use relevant partnership evaluation expertise, frameworks and tools. Create opportunities for partners to learn about each other, to discover the richness in the diversity and build respect for each other’s unique characteristics and skills.

- **Investing in Relationship Building and Collaborative Tools and Processes:** Create carefully the collaborative infrastructure for the partnerships—tools, platforms, skills and behaviours, roles, rhythms and patterns of engagement. Deliberate construction and scaffolding result in deeper connections and faster and better surfacing of synergies that can be leveraged. Recognising how powerfully equity in partnerships contributes to building respect and delivering innovation and value, it can be valuable to have an open conversation about what demonstrates equity to each partner and what does not feel equitable. Do this at the outset and at defined, periodic reflection points throughout the partnership. This will support partners in committing to and operationalising the systems, behaviours and decision processes their partners will experience as equitable. Donors/funders modelling collaborative behaviour (regardless of role or position), with clear and observable intention to address power dynamics, sets clear expectations and creates the space for a collaborative culture to emerge.

Added Value:

- **Planning for Unexpected Added Value:** Ensure that all programmes that include partnerships capture examples not only of added value achieved but also of perceptions by partners of added value unrealised. Expect unexpected benefits, and make room for them through deeply collaborative, co-designed programs, built on equity between partners. Reserve implementation time, potential for adaptation on activities, increased level of effort and additional budget to facilitate realising added value once the new potential has been identified.
7.0

Case Study on Peer Networks as Ecosystem Catalysts
Peer networks underpinned the implementation of all three Scaling Frontier Innovation Program components—Frontier Innovators, Frontier Incubators, and Frontier Brokers—in recognition that network connections bring value in themselves (i.e., members experience value from the connections); being networked increases the ability to apply and benefit from capability assistance; networks create potential for shared action, influence, and scale⁴⁸; and networks are a key aspect of systems-change.⁴⁹

This case study reviews the networks formed during the Frontier Incubators and Frontier Brokers components and explores the extra value network members experienced as a result of these networks, which were different in their degree of intentionality as well as in their design, implementation, and resourcing.

DFAT and SFI partners learned from the Frontier Innovators component that network-centric approaches need to be intentional and resourced. This lesson was implemented in Frontier Incubators, where network building was more intentional and integrated into the Implementing Consortium role. DFAT funded time spent by the Implementing Consortium to form and facilitate a peer learning network. In the Frontier Brokers component network building was even more explicit and intentional. DFAT designated a Network Convener and awarded funds to support time and other direct costs to implement activities and support network activities, such as face-to-face and virtual convenings and the development of knowledge products.

This case study investigates most deeply the learning from the Frontier Brokers Network and reviews the results of the explicit investment in the Network.

The Frontier Incubators Network included all the Cohort Partners⁵⁰, all the Program Partners, the Implementing Consortium (SecondMuse, Conveners.org, ygap), Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Partner team of Moonshot Global and Living Collaborations. The Incubators program aimed to strengthen incubators and accelerators across the Asia-Pacific region by creating access to experienced leaders and avenues for individual learning, mentoring, team, and organisational capacity building, peer learning and opportunistic collaboration. The network-centric program design for Frontier Incubators featured an intentionally formed, actively curated network, which applied a cohort-based peer learning approach, which is described in the Case Study on Capacity Development Partnerships (see page 53). Mechanisms of face-to-face convenings, virtual thematic learning sessions, online discussions, and ask/offer exchanges via the Slack platform

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⁵⁰. See page 16 for SFI Partnership Classification.
led to the weaving of new connections throughout the implementation phase. The implementing consortium took an active role as network hosts, conveners, and activators. DFAT has participated as a contributing member rather than as a top-down presence or an active curator, which are roles often played in networks created with donor support. This unique and non-traditional mode of engagement has been deeply collaborative.

Note: connections exist between all network members, but were not displayed on the map for ease of reading.
The **Frontier Brokers Network** included all members of the organisations engaged to design and implement four impact investing projects, specifically Athena Global Alliance; Brightlight Impact Advisory with Investing for Good, University of Melbourne, and SecondMuse; Good Return with Palladium Impact Capital; and Impact Investment Exchange. The Frontier Brokers Network exists because DFAT invested in supporting networking amongst the participating intermediaries, in response to demand generated by those organisations during the original co-creation workshop. The Frontier Brokers Network was designed to create added value for all Brokers and for DFAT in “having a place to share the learning as they implement their respective experiments, to share connections and to share deals and greater potential to engage and influence the Asia-Pacific ecosystem by establishing a network rather than implementing through one to one grant contracts with DFAT.” (Stephanie Kimber, iXc, DFAT).

In addition to implementing their own Frontier Brokers project, Good Return also plays the role of Network Convener. DFAT are members of the network, and the MEL team supports Good Return in their Network Convener role by collaborating on planning and implementation of activities and adding a learning dimension to the work. The Brokers Network aims to contribute to building and strengthening existing ecosystems by encouraging collaboration and cooperation, not only among the projects, but also with other ecosystem players in the Asia-Pacific region.

Good Return led the Brokers through a co-design process and convened the network in a mix of face-to-face, virtual gatherings, and collective activities that supported the goals of shared learning, collaboration and engaging the wider ecosystem. Good Return and the MEL Partner have collaborated closely on the learning agenda and developmental evaluation and adaptive management processes and on the co-design and co-facilitation of network convenings.
The following analysis explores the findings from the intentional network formation within the Frontier Incubators and Frontier Brokers components of the SFI Program. The evidence emerged from two separate Partnership Learning Loop Surveys (for each component) and is presented across the dimensions of the Partnership Measurement Framework. For the Frontier Brokers Network, the Framework was adapted to include additional indicators to investigate network connectivity and network outcomes (see Figure 15). Key informant interviews, other programmatic data collection, and participant–observer perspectives from the MEL Partner also inform the findings. The Incubators’ survey investigated only the Added Value dimension, whereas the Brokers’ survey included the full set of dimensions. This contrast reflects the varied setup processes of the two networks. For Incubators, the network was a core (non-voluntary) element of the Cohort experience, convened and led by the Implementing Consortium; whereas for Brokers, the additional dimensions were included to measure the specific DFAT investment in set up and design and processes and infrastructure supporting the daily operations of the network.

“Frontier Brokers is innovative...one of the ways it is innovative is that the Network Convenor is playing a learning function across the Brokers. This is not something that is seen. We’re looking at how we can get that sharing experience. It’s an interesting process for us to watch the Network Convenor role unfold on Frontier Brokers.”

– Kristy Graham, Director, Private Finance for Development, DFAT

51. As adapted from the Partnership Learning Loop Analysis Framework, explained further on pg 23.
Setup, design and daily operations which addressed:

- Setup
- Design
- Effective Management
- Communication
- Decision Making and Leadership
- Learning and Innovation (new for Brokers)

Collaborative mindsets and skills which addressed:

- Diversity
- Equity
- Openness and Transparency
- Network Engagement (new for Brokers)

Added value arising from networks which addressed (or network value):

- Added Value for Entrepreneurs and the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem
- Added Value for Organisations
- Types of Network Value
- Collaborative Spirit
- Network Connectivity (new for Brokers)
- Network Outcomes (new for Brokers)
7.2 Findings Across the Network Measurement Dimensions

7.2.1 Dimension 1: Setup, design, and daily operations

This dimension observes processes associated with the design and establishment of a network as well as the systems and processes (infrastructure) that enable connecting, learning, and collaborating. The expectation is that each of these processes contributes to strong and effective networks. Further, this dimension addresses the actual setup and design (participation in design, objectives, roles, convening, systems and structures, activities); effective management and leadership (that empowers all network members, addresses power, mobilises resources, supports collaboration, feedback, learning and decision making); communication and clarity; and participation in decision making. For the Brokers Network, learning and innovation were added to reflect the network’s stated objectives.

Indicator 1: Setup

For two intentional networks, a substantial investment early in the setup phase in face-to-face convening has paid dividends for both networks in creating the collaborative spirit of the networks, establishing expectations and cultural norms.

The collaborative design and facilitation of a face-to-face convening were fundamental to the successful launch of both networks.

This was seen in the Capacity and Partnership Building Workshop for Incubators as described in the Case Study on Capacity Development Partnerships (pg 54):

The Frontier Brokers teams first met at a Network Design Workshop in Singapore in June 2019. This collaborative event, which was co-designed and co-facilitated by Good Return and the MELPartner and convened the four Frontier Brokers’ consortia and DFAT, achieved the following:

- Principles of co-design, co-ownership, openness, and innovation were established;
- Shared goals and priorities for collective action were articulated;
- The dual role of Good Return as Network Convener and peer intermediary was demonstrated; and
- Equity was addressed overtly to ensure access and participation for all, despite the great variance in size, nature, and resource capacity of the intermediaries.

The convening was well received among participants, receiving an average score of 90 percent on questions related to setup and design of the network and similar scores related to feeling a sense of pride in this network and all members being taken seriously.

Additional features underpinning the successful setup phase were:

- The careful design and creative facilitation of the first encounter and co-design workshop process, which included a focus on environment, inclusion, and materials.
- A partnership between the Network Convener and the MEL Partner, which supported the learning in the network.
- The creation of space to explore and reflect upon the innovative brokering approaches, to develop a shared understanding of the work, and to understand the similarities and unique challenges and contexts faced by each team.
- The formation of relationships and a shared identity and narrative as ‘Frontier Brokers’.

On the Frontier Incubators component, the implementing Consortium secured funding for network development as a strategy for implementation. This helped to facilitate program delivery and nurture peer learning. On the Frontier Brokers component, a separate investment in network formation provided support that catalysed peers to form a network designed to facilitate learning, collaboration, and innovation.
“In-person convenings are an important part of the infrastructure. This was a lesson from Incubators, who were able to meet face to face at the beginning but not again. (Whereas with) Brokers (we were) able to do Design and also Year 1 convening paired with the AVPN external workshop. This was great for relationship building, it drew in new members, but also we could see the achievement of our own project goals through promotion at AVPN.”

– Indigo Eliot-Phibs, Network Convenor

**SURVEY RESULTS**

Setup, Design and Daily Operations

This chart shows the average scores across the full set of respondents, for the indicators for Setup, Design and Daily Operations (ie. Setup, design, effective management, communication, leadership and decision making, learning and innovation).

The scores are consistently high (avg 6.3/7) for all Indicators from all respondents, indicating high satisfaction with the processes of setup, design and daily operations of the Brokers Network.
Indicator 2: Design

Clear and agreed purposes and objectives provide clarity for network members and guide the prioritisation and suitability of convening, structures, roles, and operating models.52

For Frontier Incubators, a Code of Conduct outlined expectations for network members and facilitators, addressing the shared vision, behavioural norms, feedback loops, and infrastructure. Cohort Partners and Program Partners each participated as equal members, connecting, learning, and sharing knowledge and experiences.

Following the Brokers Network Design Workshop, Good Return produced a Year 1 Activity Plan and Communications Plan and a Code of Conduct and established the mechanisms for ongoing engagement between Brokers. These included bi-monthly virtual meetings, a Slack channel, and a shared Google Drive. In addition, Brokers agreed to the following objectives and activity streams:

- **Collaboration:** to identify leverage points between the Brokers where the collective efforts of Brokers will be more impactful for achieving network aims of catalysing capital to social-impact SMEs in Asia-Pacific.

- **Shared learning:** to provide opportunities for insights and reflection which can be translated into lessons learnt for the ongoing internal improvement of the Frontier Brokers Network and disseminating learnings externally to stimulate growth and improvement of the wider impact investment ecosystem.

- **Engaging and influencing the ecosystem:** to advocate for gender lens investing and strengthen connections and opportunities in the impact investing ecosystem; increased cooperation within the ecosystem will assist with stimulating the flow of capital to social impact-focused, small and growing businesses in Asia-Pacific.

Success factors for this level of clarity and alignment with objectives appear to have been:

- The desire of all organisations to establish the network and seeing value in being a collective
- The openness of DFAT to incorporate co-design by and for the members
- The principles underpinning Good Return’s approach including openness to others’ ideas and valuing difference, co-design, equity for members, and prioritising value for all
- Extensive data collection from network members about their expectations, objectives, contributions, and preferences

“There is a genuine desire and motivation in this sector to collaborate. And there are different objectives for the organisations to collaborate.”

– Shane Nichols, Good Return

Brokers offered forward-looking suggestions to increase the diversity of engagement mechanisms between Brokers and collectively as a full network. These arose from the desire to deepen learning, strengthen connections, and increase joint action to the benefit of Brokers. Contributions offered by network members at the design stage have not yet been fully leveraged, such as offering specific expertise and skills, sharing tools, and playing roles such within the network.

The emphasis of Year 1 has been on activity planning and delivery rather than on developing long-term strategy and building an infrastructure within the network to sustain it beyond the life of SFI. Brokers offered suggestions for topics and areas of focus that may contribute to sustainability of the network, a goal that has been expressed by DFAT, Good Return, and the other Brokers. The suggestions included developing or strengthening:

- Shared purpose, value, benefits, outcomes
- Leadership, governance, hosting and convening
- Levels of passion, genuine interest, and participation
- Operating models, structures and infrastructures
- Models of self-organising (roles, rotations, voluntary, allocated staff time)
- Managing personnel transitions
- Sustainable models that attract funding
- Proactive collaboration that endure beyond DFAT-supported activities
- Learning processes
- External communications to amplify success

This list points out the need for the Network Convenor to shift to an emphasis on building capabilities, leveraging contributions, and expanding roles for other Brokers within the network. These echo the vision of success that a Good Return representative mentioned in their baseline interview held in August 2019:

“Building a track record of collaboration and creating a sustainable environment for this to continue amongst and beyond Brokers partners. To have taken the practice of openness forward, made new connections, and inspired new collaborations that take a systems view—if we can build the foundations for that, we’ll feel satisfied.”

– Network Convener
Indicators 3 and 4: Effective Management, Decision Making and Leadership

Flexible funds for a Network Convener role, built around milestones and with supportive, collaborative, and non-directive oversight (from the iXc) empowered both the Network Convener and network members to design the network around their own interests and ideas. This emphasis on co-design by network members and a facilitative leadership style increased connectedness and created an environment of trust, support, interest, and collaboration. These in turn created the potential for realising the hopes and ambitions of members.

Survey Responses: Effective Management, Decision Making and Leadership

![Circle charts showing survey responses](image)
“We have learned that relationship and trust building is an integral part of an engaged convenor. We notice a shift after convenings. (Our approach incorporates) the emphasis on co-creation of a network reflecting everyone’s ideas and interests; openness and opportunity for input into everything; focusing on the small steps that create a culture where people feel they have their opinion heard and can influence direction.”

– Network Convener

The Network Convener took guidance from the Incubators Consortium on their experience of convening the Incubators Network. They also practiced a deep commitment to collaboration and co-creation and a recognition of the importance of building personal relationships. They also created a Code of Conduct that outlined norms of behaviour.

The Convener role over the first year revolved around three areas of work to develop the network:

• Collaboration to design and facilitate the Design Workshop, analyse the information, and produce and circulate the Year 1 Activity Plan;

• Establishment of mechanisms for delivering on the network plan, specifically structured around bi-monthly update video calls, a Slack channel, and social media platforms to reach wider ecosystem; and

• Development of ideas for collaborative activities, which came either from the iXc (e.g. hosting an event at the AVPN South East Asia Summit), the Broker’s Convener (e.g., producing an animation about gender-lens investing), or other Brokers (e.g. creating a collaboration fund).

The collaborative initiatives have been valuable to create direct connections between Brokers (hubs) and to catalyse volunteering / resource contributions.

In response to feedback and reflection after Year 1, the Network Convener is working to evolve network mechanisms to deepen engagement and learning, create more diverse modes of connection between Brokers, and gain more visibility for the network. Examples of this evolution are shifting from providing updates on projects to identifying challenges and lessons and ask-offer opportunities and moving one-to-one email communication to one-to-many Slack channel discussions.

The slightly lower scores relating to understanding roles of others in the network could signal that, at this stage, network convening (and network weaving) functions are formally held by the Network Convener and not shared by others. Currently, most interactions follow a ‘hub-and-spoke’ pattern\(^{53}\) where interactions occur between one Broker consortia (a hub) with strong ties to the Network Convener (spoke); however, there are some signs of emergence of a ‘multi-hub’ network, where interactions occur between two different hubs with weak ties and as well as with the Convener. Weak ties in a network are important for innovation, as the vehicle to connect with diverse perspectives.

“The collaborative projects...added layers to the intentional relationships of brokers; and were successful to get different brokers working together.”

– Network Convener

**Indicator 5: Communication**

Having external communications facilitated through the Network Convener on behalf of all Frontier Brokers has added value to all; expanded reach, profile, visibility; and supported the network goal of ecosystem influence.

External communications is a strength of the Brokers Network with 95 percent of Brokers noting that their organisation is recognised in external communications, strengthening the sense of equity between large and small organisations in the network. This is a core function that Good Return envisaged contributing to in their role as Network Convener. They created the infrastructure for it by

- Developing a unifying brand and narrative for the Frontier Brokers Network;
- Developing individual Broker team pitches and ensuring that all members can tell the stories;
- Creating a LinkedIn profile and Medium blog for sharing regular content contributed to by all network members;
- Completing submissions to host conference sessions, e.g., AVPN, SOCAP; and
- Building a dedicated channel (a LinkedIn Group) through which to share all products and lessons from the experiments.

“As Network Convener, we envision that we will have a role to bring Brokers together for sharing learnings internally and promoting the experiments externally.”

— Network Convener.

Brokers believe the internal communications are supportive of engagement and collaboration amongst members; however, they see room for strengthening the exchange of ideas and information and sharing of challenges and lessons. Their ambitions in forming the network go beyond creating a promotional platform to include facilitating sharing expertise and connections for the success of their own projects, expanding their Asia Pacific connections, learning new methodologies, and avoiding repeating others’ mistakes. The Network Convener acknowledges challenges in finding the best channels and activating communication across the network and is committed to more experimentation.

Brokers Network members have expressed high levels of satisfaction with communications.

**FIGURE 18:**

Survey Responses: Communication

- **Agreed that the communication style in this network supports good collaboration:** 93%
- **Agreed that communication from and activities managed by the network convener increased my organisation’s level of engagement in the network:** 90%
- **Agreed that this network openly shares collaborative challenges and lessons learned with external stakeholders:** 81%
- **Agreed that Network members exchange ideas and information on a regular basis:** 83%

The Frontier Incubators Implementing Consortium also managed external communication for the Incubators Network, sharing the thematic content developed under the program and telling the story of the network through a Medium blog. These actions had a similar purpose to influence the ecosystem as those implemented by the Frontier Brokers Network.
Indicator 6: Learning and Innovation

Intermediaries are hungry for peer connections and spaces for reflection and learning and to use the knowledge for adaptation, innovation, and collective action.

While still high, the Brokers Network survey responses to the questions about learning and innovation are lower than the rest of the survey.

“It would be great to have some internal initiatives started that are of use for all Brokers, like finding an internal mechanism for sharing learnings in a more ongoing way.”

– Network Member, Aus/NZ

“These scores from network members suggest that more attention can be paid to supporting learning and shared initiatives.

Responses to open-ended questions reinforce this conclusion.

“Provide more opportunities to engage with other members on specific issues related to individual projects.”

– Network Member, Aus/NZ

“Come together more meaningfully on learning. Select something we all want to achieve, or that is common to many, and focus on learning.”

– Network Member, SE Asia

Figure 19:
Survey Responses: Learning and Innovation

83% Agreed that learnings are embedded in the ongoing work of the network

82% Agreed that space is created for learning experimental approaches

79% Agreed that Network members jointly pursue new opportunities

82% Agreed that the combined expertise of network members leads to new approaches and insights

87% Agreed that funding is allocated to facilitate innovation
The Frontier Brokers Network Convener set aside some network convening funds for other Brokers to use on joint projects. Despite its small size (AUD$20,000), the Collaboration Fund enabled the launch of a network-selected, cross-member project to create a podcast, a new platform to promote innovative finance, which is intended to leverage new players and foster wider collaboration beyond current members in the Brokers Network. The Network Convener also initiated a collaborative project to produce a gender-lens investing animation as an ecosystem education tool.

“The network incorporated multiple feedback loops and reflection processes, including convened learning sessions, surveys, and Results Reflections—all of which led to rich exchange, which was facilitated and supported by an integrated MEL Partner.

The MEL Partner, which applied developmental evaluation methodologies to gather continuous feedback and analyse data in real time throughout implementation, was integrated from the beginning into the activities of the Brokers Network. The Network Convener as a matter of course collaborated with the MEL Partner, aligning work plans and deliverables, discussing and planning ways to collaborate on activity implementation, jointly planning agendas for convenings, and sharing facilitation responsibilities. For the Frontier Brokers Network, the MEL Partner’s integration also enabled Good Return staff usually filling the Network Convenor role to contribute more fully in some activities as a participant rather than a facilitator.

Feedback loops and reflection points were key features in the Incubators Network. The MEL Partner also was integrated from the start primarily as an observer, gathering data and surfacing learning throughout implementation.

“We’re creating a storytelling platform that will increase awareness of SFI and GLI in Asia Pacific. It’s been very collaborative, with a sense of common purpose where people lead on different things and take ownership for their actions. It’s been a fun, creative outlet and something new we’re learning about… a freeing and egalitarian way of working together.”

– Network member, AU/NZ, podcast project contributor

“It’s a practical short video that illustrates the core of GLI... to make it easy for others to understand, and spark a discussion that will lead to other gender-focused actions. The experience was great… a good team of people and combination of skills.”

– Network member, EU/UK, GLI animation video project contributor
7.2.2 Dimension 2: Collaborative Mindsets and Skills

This dimension observes individual and collective behaviours, practices, and experiences known to foster trust and create the conditions for collaboration and innovation and looks for evidence of diversity, equity, openness and transparency, and the engagement or commitment of network members. Each of these behaviours are trust-building and foster safety to underpin learning and experimentation.

A strong culture of trust, built upon equity, diversity, and openness is reflected in network members’ experiences of respect, inclusion, and feelings of pride and enthusiasm for the network and lays the foundation for learning and innovation.

Frontier Brokers care strongly about the future of the network (92%), are enthused to be part of it (94%), intend to stay engaged in it (94%), and also see room to increase the open sharing between members, feedback and advice, and new opportunities (average 80%). An early demonstration of collaborative spirit is seen in the collaborative initiatives currently underway as outlined above.

Diversity amongst the organisations and their projects has limited competition within the group and contributed to open, transparent discussion and learning. However, it is noted, when coupled with the small number of network members, this can mean the learning is not relevant across projects.

“I’ve contributed because I’m passionate about gender and learning more about GLI, to contribute on behalf of my team, and in the good spirit of collaboration and learning in the network”

– Network Member EU/UK

“This was a chance to collaborate with high quality peers in the sector. It has been extremely positive...Good Return have done an excellent job of project managing. Everyone has had the chance to input and contribute and everyone has had something valuable to add and respectfully listened to different views. Consensus building has not been difficult.”

– Network Member, AU/NZ

SURVEY RESULTS
Collaborative Mindset and Skills

This chart shows the average scores across the full set of respondents, disaggregated into the indicators for Collaborative Mindsets and Skills (ie. Network engagement, openness and transparency, diversity and equity)

The scores are consistently high (avg 6.2/7) for all indicators from all respondents, indicating members perceived high levels of these collaborative mindsets and skills in the brokers network.
7.2.3
Dimension 3: Added Value from the Networks

The Added Value Dimension observes different types of value experienced by network members themselves (people and organisations), value experienced by actors in the ecosystem, the collaborative spirit of a network, connectivity and specific network outcomes.

This dimension asks whether network members’ interests and ambitions were met and whether participating in the network was worth the effort. Were there better results from collaborating, such as the emergence of new approaches or opportunity to leverage expertise? Did we achieve greater reach, impact and influence in the entrepreneurial ecosystem?

Members of both the Incubators Network and the Brokers Network have experienced a high degree of added value from the respective networks, despite the relatively short duration (approximately 12 months for each network) and were/are invested in the continuation of the networks.

The value is shown in these charts and described in subsequent sections for the set of indicators: Network Connectivity, Collaborative Spirit of the Network, Network Outcomes, Added Value to member organisations and ecosystem and the specific types of value.
SURVEY RESULTS

Brokers Network Added Value

The results indicate a high level of added value was realised from the brokers network. This chart shows the average scores across the full set of respondents, for the indicators for Added Value (ie. Added Value for Entrepreneurs and the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem, Added Value for Organisations, Collaborative Spirit, Network Connectivity and Network Outcomes).

The scores are consistently high (avg 6.1/7) for all indicators from all respondents.

- The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing Added value for entrepreneurs and the entrepreneur ecosystem was 5.8 out of 7.
- The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing benefits to their own organisation was 6.23 out of 7.
- The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing Network Connectivity was 6.4 out of 7.
- The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing Network Outcomes was 6.2 out of 7.
- The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing Collaborative mindsets was 6.1 out of 7.

Incubators Network Added Value

The results indicate a high level of value was realised from the Incubators Network. This chart shows the average scores across the full set of respondents, for the indicators for Network Value. (ie Added value for entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial ecosystem, Added value for their own organisation and Collaborative Spirit of the Network)

- The scores are consistently high (avg 6.3/7) for all indicators from all respondents.
- The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing collaborative spirit was 6.21 out of 7.
- The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing benefits to the ecosystem was 6.21 out of 7.
Network Connectivity: After one year of intentional network formation and facilitation the Frontier Brokers Network shows encouraging and increasing levels of connectivity, establishing a solid basis for a resilient network.

These two charts (while not addressing the identical question) show the shift in the level of connectivity from a very low baseline prior to the Brokers Network Design Workshop, through to the recent Year 1 Survey, with still room to improve.

Prior to the design workshop in Singapore, members were asked to rate the degree of connection they currently have with the other Brokers Network members. See the chart below, where the scale is 1=poor, 7=excellent.

**FIGURE 20:**
Pre-Design Workshop Survey (Brokers)

*“Please rate the degree of connection you currently have with the other Brokers Network members.”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>No. responses, N=16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 (6.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 (6.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14/16 people (or 87.5%) rated their connections less than 4/7
50% rated 2 or less (just above ‘poor’)

**FIGURE 21:**
Year 1 Network Survey (Brokers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>No. responses, N=14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Everyone who needs to be connected is
The network is becoming more connected
All the connections in the network are strong
These connections between the Frontier Brokers have been created and strengthened through two dynamic face-to-face convenings, structured bi-monthly calls and participation by some members on collaborative projects. This suggests that there is great potential to strengthen the level of connectivity even further by developing the interaction-enabling infrastructure of the network with an aim to increasing network value and network resilience. 54 Resilience arises from networks not being overly centralised and dependent on limited numbers of hubs holding most of the connections. More spread of connections builds redundancy, overlapping functions and knowledge, and enhanced ability to absorb shocks. 55

The following set of network design dimensions (Pugh and Prusak, 2013) 56 could be a useful guide:

| Strategic     | 1. Leaders shared theory of change |
|              | 2. Objectives / outcomes / purpose |
|              | 3. Role of expertise and experimental learning |
|              | 4. Inclusion and participation |
| Structural    | 5. Operating model |
|              | 6. Convening structures and infrastructures |
|              | 7. Facilitation and social norm development |
| Tactical      | 8. Measurement, feedback and incentives |

Collaborative Spirit of the Network which revealed genuine interest and support towards each other and demonstration of the accepted behavioural norms in both networks.

Network Outcomes: The Frontier Brokers Network members are confident that the network is progressing towards the outcomes framed in their Year 1 plan, and recognise shifts emerging from the gender focus.

When asked their perception of progress towards the network outcomes, they responded:

**CASE STUDY ON PEER NETWORKS AS ECOSYSTEM CATALYSTS**

**TABLE 5:** The Eight Design Dimension of Knowledge Networks

| **Strategic** | 1. Leaders shared theory of change |
|              | 2. Objectives / outcomes / purpose |
|              | 3. Role of expertise and experimental learning |
|              | 4. Inclusion and participation |
| **Structural** | 5. Operating model |
|              | 6. Convening structures and infrastructures |
|              | 7. Facilitation and social norm development |
| **Tactical** | 8. Measurement, feedback and incentives |

**For engaging and influencing the ecosystem

86%**

**For sharing learnings between network members

89%**

**For collaboration between network members

88%**

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While not a specific network objective, addressing gender and power within impact investing is central to the Frontier Brokers component of SFI. This specific focus has already catalysed change in the following ways:

**TABLE 6:**
Impacts of the Brokers Network on gender and power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shifts in how gender and power dynamics are addressed in each organisation</th>
<th>Benefits to women</th>
<th>Shifts in relationships between men and women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Changed compositions and dynamics of Brokers teams</td>
<td>• All organisations in the network are collectively promoting GLI</td>
<td>• Reviewing gender equality approaches within organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gender diversity has influenced decision making</td>
<td>• Different organisations mean we are able to demonstrate breadth/diversity of GLI approaches</td>
<td>• Ensure organisations makeup reflects the value of GLI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exposure to more women in a male-dominated field</td>
<td>• The variety of experiments means that various stages and barriers of growth for women-led or women-focused enterprise are addressed</td>
<td>• Using a gender lens in other aspects of work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"The significant representation of women in the network has shaped relationships between men and women in the network and the nature of decisions made."

"There is a collective sense of will towards (openly promoting) gender lens investing and... showcasing the breadth/diversity of GLI approaches to investors and social enterprises."

"We have been focused on the review of our gender equality approach and ensure we reflect the values reflected by the network."

"I feel more confident speaking about gender lens investing and how a different lens can have an impact on the lives and business of women."

"Finance is male dominated; I now know a LOT more women in this field... that I can call on."

Themes emerging from Brokers’ feedback, when asked about strengthening network outcomes for Year 2, revealed there is a deep appetite for learning and for collective innovation. Brokers are seeking:

1. Deeper exploration of the challenges being faced and the lessons being learned throughout implementation of each project, (e.g. impact investment risk management, scenario analysis)

2. More intentional creative learning facilitation processes, to share learning in more ongoing ways than the updates on calls

3. Enhanced collaborations/external initiatives around something of shared interest to all Brokers

4. More diversity of engagement and connection mechanisms, eg intra-broker, intra-network calls, one-to-one connections
Added Value to member organisations and ecosystem:
which is an area of strength for the both networks. **Brokers Network** members specifically report:

- Benefits of being involved outweigh their investment
- Organisational interests are being met
- Being part of the network has enabled them to reach more people
- Being better able to influence the entrepreneurial ecosystem as part of a network

The **Frontier Incubators Network** added value to the entrepreneurial ecosystem through the creation of the Best Practice Guide and GLIA Toolkit, neither of which were initially envisaged and both of which emerged from network connections, collaborative mindsets, and openness to innovation.57

“We are very excited about the added value created by the Best Practice Guide and the GLIA Toolkit. These resources are going to be a significant asset to our community of accelerators... to improve the effectiveness of their programs.”

– North American Consortium partner

“...the opportunity to create the world’s first gender toolkit for incubators and accelerators. The importance here is that this focus did not exist at the start of the FI program... So to be able to create this knowledge with key players in the ecosystem has been powerful.”

– SE Asia Cohort Partner

57. See page 45 for Spotlight on the new partnership formed to create the GLIA Toolkit.
More specifically, the networks generate the following types of value:

**FIGURE 23:** Incubators Network Added Value

### Incubators Added Value

**Network of valuable relations:**

“Having access to such a wide array of expertise in one network has been valuable for us in accessing knowledge, brainstorming new work, accessing in-country site visits”

– Aus/NZ Government Partner

**Possibility to upscale our organisation’s activities:**

“the whole Network has created a learning platform and community of practice for our work. My hope is that we continue to collaborate and learn from each other so we leapfrog our learning and further scale our impact.”

– SE Cohort Partner

**New opportunities:**

“All the work for and with the Frontier Incubators program since the first quarter of this year has directly influenced the strategy and direction our organization is looking to execute in the next year, which will directly impact the next 5-10 years of our work in the impact space in the Philippines.”

– SE Cohort Partner

**Financial or in-kind benefits:**

**Increased advocacy power:**

**Increased effectiveness of our interventions:**

**Gaining recognition and respect from others:**

**Building skills & capacity:**

**Learning, knowledge and expertise:**

**New opportunities:**

**Possibility to upscale our organisation’s activities:**
For Incubators: the type of added value differed considerably between different network roles. Understandably, the Consortium partners experienced the least value from the network, given it was not created or designed to produce value for them. For Program Partners, while primarily in a capacity building role, the network became a mechanism for their own learning, widened networks, profile, innovation and new opportunities.

**FIGURE 24:**
Types of Value from Incubators Network by Role

This chart displays weighted values of the types of network value for the Incubators Network members, disaggregated by role.

Although government actors completed the survey they were not included in this graph as the sample size was small and it cannot be concluded that their responses are representative.

Network of valuable relations scored the highest with a weighted average of 84.1%, followed by learning, knowledge, and expertise with a score of 79.3% and new opportunities with a score of 72.5%.

Financial or in-kind benefits scored the lowest with a weighted average of 18.2% followed by increased advocacy power with a score of 27.4%

Cohort partners indicated that the highest added value was network of valuable relations (wgt avg: 100.1%) followed by learning, knowledge, and expertise (wgt avg: 90.9%).

Program partners indicated that the highest added value was new opportunities (wgt avg: 85.3%) followed by learning, knowledge, and expertise (wgt avg: 82.2%).

Consortium members indicated that the highest added value was learning, knowledge and expertise (wgt avg: 57.4%) followed by new opportunities (wgt avg: 51.2%).
**Brokers Network Added Value**

**Network of valuable relations:**

“Our team are now more connected and better aware of the range of brokering activities taking place in the region, and having established personal relationships with other brokers we are better placed to collaborate, seek information and make referrals for new opportunities.”

– **Aus/NZ, Network Convenor**

“Learnings of alternative structuring approaches that have informed our other work. And a valuable new set of respected stakeholders in a market we are seeking to gain traction.”

– **EU/UK, Network Member**

**Learning, knowledge and expertise:**

“Relationships with all Brokers have increased my knowledge of impact and gender lens investing as well as the ecosystem”

– **Aus/NZ, Government**

**New opportunities:**

“The GLI workshop in Bali exposed us to investors, investees and supporters that we would not otherwise get.”

– **Aus/NZ, Network Member**

**FIGURE 25:**

**CASE STUDY ON PEER NETWORKS AS ECOSYSTEM CATALYSTS**

Network of valuable relations: **100%**

Learning, knowledge and expertise: **90%**

New opportunities: **80%**

Innovation: **75%**

Gaining recognition and respect from others: **70%**

Increased effectiveness of our interventions: **65%**

Increased Advocacy Power: **60%**

Possibility to upscale our organisation’s activities: **55%**

Financial or in-kind benefits: **50%**

Skills & Capacity Building: **45%**

On our project side, membership in the network solidified our partnership with an implementing partner...I believe we have learnt a lot from this partnership.”

– **Aus/NZ, Network Convenor**

“On our project side, membership in the network solidified our partnership with an implementing partner...I believe we have learnt a lot from this partnership.”

– **Aus/NZ, Network Convenor**
Insights from the SFI Program

1. **Networks create the potential to add diverse types of value (described above) to an innovation program and contribute to systems changes.**

As the findings have demonstrated, networks have been the vehicle by which SFI partners have experienced more value than the financial or specific in-kind contributions offered under SFI. While variable and unpredictable, the fact of realising unexpected value through curated networking is not surprising in contexts where diverse connections create opportunity, leverage diversity, and spark creativity. A collective identity enabled SFI to position within the entrepreneurial ecosystem enhanced the capacity to connect with a wider set of stakeholders and to speak from a position of scale and coherence amongst diverse actors potentially contributing to a network effect.58

2. **All networks require leadership. Regional networks, with geographically dispersed and remote members, also need active and ongoing management and facilitation.**

Both the Brokers and the Incubators networks illustrate the essential role of network leadership, management, and facilitation, which require support of infrastructure. The connections, interaction, and innovation leading to new value would not have been possible without dedicated roles, relevant expertise and skills, and frameworks to guide the setup, design, ongoing development, and growth—and ultimately lead to the success of these networks. These constitute network infrastructure.

3. **DFAT’s approach to network development on SFI changed over time as its thinking about networks and its modes of support to networks evolved.**

The iXc determined that through SFI they were seeking to catalyse ecosystem change, which is recognised as requiring collaboration and networks that foster connections between change-agents.59 Throughout SFI implementation, the iXc saw the benefits of networks being leveraged by the various partners selected for implementation.60 At the Brokers Co-creation Workshop, the desire for networks was reinforced, leading to a specific investment under the Brokers component. The Incubators Network was a capacity development mechanism, whereas the Brokers network involved the formation of an actual intentional network with a purpose of learning, innovation, and influence and was placed in the hands of the network members, with a convener-member with an assigned role to design and shape it. This created the potential to achieve network-specific outcomes (as described above) and network effect61 and a potential for sustainability of the network beyond the program.

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58. Defined as ‘when you add a new actor, it is valuable to all the other network actors’ by Purohit, S., 2020. Societal Platforms: Power Of Network Effects. [video] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkNDSd0xJDA&fbclid=IwAR0cWmkowysVsxmM2YeUQrE2YbxHLHbA0elnNUE2ZB4umf0DMW7Kh6FGao.


60. Throughout SFI, global networks have been activated to explore feasibility and design (Frontier Incubators); in recruitment and selection processes (Frontier Innovators and Incubators); to add value to program participants (Frontier Innovators, Frontier Incubators and Frontier Brokers); and to activate ties into the periphery of entrepreneurship networks for wider ecosystem/network effect from the catalytic investments (Frontier Innovators, Frontier Incubators and Frontier Brokers).

61. See Footnote 54.
4. **To be effective, network facilitation must combine strategic communications and learning in an integrated manner.**

The team that leads and manages the network should be composed of members with expertise in both communications and learning. Only then can it leverage member capability and contributions. In particular, if a learning function is included in the beginning, it can help propel members into action, help members dig deeper into the questions that they hope to answer with the support of learning and reflective processes, facilitate conversations around learning questions, and result in the development of knowledge products and other materials that benefit the network. Furthermore, feedback loops and reflection points are essential in a co-designed (self-managed/autonomous) network to respond to experience and needs, adapt approaches and structures, maintain relevance and value, strengthen the number and nature of network connections, and foster sustainability.62

5. **Lessons from the Frontier Incubators Network have been previously published in Frontier Incubators Interim Results and Learning**63

- Peer networks require an investment of time and resources and need to be carefully designed within a program and investment
- Infrastructure and processes for engagement are needed for peer learning
- Be aware of barriers to participation and design accordingly
- Consider incentives for participation within tactical level network design
- Consider models for sustainability beyond specific programs, including early participation in governance and network leadership

6. **Frontier Incubators and Frontier Brokers networks both face the challenge of how to sustain activities after the completion of the initially defined, time-limited programs.**

A sustainable network was not an objective of the Frontier Incubators component, but as the Cohort and Program Partners (and DFAT) experienced the added value of the network, the Implementing Consortium and network members both looked for ways to continue collaborating. Although the network itself was not sustained, network members remain linked through other networks, such as the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneur and The Incubation Network. The network effect also continues through numerous collaborative projects and relationships (e.g., joint work on angel investment by xchange and Villgro; Second Muse has included WISE in their work on The Incubation Network as ‘Entrepreneur Support Members’; and on COVID-19 response work implemented jointly by Second Muse, Conveners.org, and Spring, several Frontier Incubators participants are involved in a series of webinars called #BuildBackBetter.)

All stakeholders in the Brokers Network appear to see value for the ecosystem and themselves to sustain the network. The Brokers Network members and Network Convener have the opportunity to shape their future vision to suit their collective needs, for example, by designing the governance, theory of change, and operational and financial model of the network, and to survive beyond the period of DFAT support.

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Recommendations from the SFI Program

To ensure that a network is well-designed and fit-for-purpose, the MEL Partner recommends the following:

1. In order to achieve a network effect on programs, the design, and support, and implementation of networks must take into consideration all elements of a network. A Network’s purpose, focus, function, leadership, and duration should drive the construction of suitable structures, governance, and infrastructure to support it. Then, it is essential to assign clear roles, which are associated with leadership/governance, management, convening, facilitation, weaving and participation and spread across network members.

2. Emphasise network weaving (defined as connecting people strategically where there is possibility of mutual benefit, and serving as a catalyst for self-organized groups) recognising that ‘impact comes from catalysing connections between members, not from reaching members oneself’ through such behaviours and infrastructures as:
   - Creating platforms for connection,
   - Weaving connections / particularly closing triangles between people,
   - Promoting, practicing and supporting self-organisation,
   - Thinking about others needs and how to meet those needs,
   - Connecting needs and offers,
   - Leveraging excess capacity or underutilised assets,
   - Making ongoing generous offers, and
   - Thinking, learning and working ‘out loud’ with network members.

3. Measure network connectivity and network effects. It is essential for network leaders and managers to look for evidence of success or failure in network participation, as well as ways to incentivise members to join, participate, and engage. Employing credible metrics to gauge outcomes and establishing clear checkpoints during the monthly or quarterly schedule when network leaders and managers review performance data and implement improvements to plans. The Partnerships Measurement Framework introduced by the SFI MEL Partner can provide a useful starting point for network measurement.

4. DFAT should leverage the experience of network building on SFI as well as up-front research when considering future opportunities to generate additional value through dynamic networks. Network investments are long term and strategic and require commitment, clear goals, and deep understanding. Leveraging past experience, benchmarks, frameworks, and tools for good practice (such as network mapping) before launching a network will help position it for success.

5. In light of these recommendations, in Year 2 of implementation, the Brokers Network and Convener should consider the following options:
   - Invest in mechanisms to map, observe, and analyse interactions across the network (‘network mapping’ or ‘social network analysis’) to inform network design, facilitation and weaving to strengthen interaction;
   - Expand the conception of Network Convenor to incorporate ‘network weaving’, which emphasises weaving the connections and building the infrastructure for diverse connections, roles and contributions and ownership for the evolution of the network by the members;
   - Broaden the governance, operating model, and infrastructure with an eye on increasing connections between hubs/nodes (individual Brokers), and building

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68. According to Stepper, J. 2020, working out loud is a way to build relationships that help you achieve a goal, develop a skill, or explore a new topic. Instead of networking to get something, you invest in relationships by making contributions over time, including your work and experiences that you make visible.
ownership in the vision and sustainability of the network, thereby reducing the dependency upon the convener and increasing the likelihood of creation of structures that endure beyond the life of the Brokers program;

- Envisage a potential end goal for a vibrant and sustainable network where a core group is comprised by the groups who have developed strong ties (e.g., current Brokers), with a new set of members joining, first on the periphery and then in self-determined roles, resulting ultimately in connections that bridge between the original Brokers Network and other networks within the ecosystem, enabling leverage of these wider connections for the benefit of the core; and

- Explore scaling models of learning/knowledge networks that link local projects nationally and then regionally through learning networks and connections with other innovators as a pathway to accelerated impact and widespread transformation.

When designing future programming, DFAT should consider the following: As demonstrated through SFI, networks create the potential to add diverse types of value to innovation programming and expand the potential of the programming to contribute to systems change. On SFI networks have been the vehicle for delivering added value by creating the space for and reinforcing connections, sharing learning, and form a collective identity. This in turn enhanced the capacity of players in the entrepreneurial ecosystem to connect to one another and with a wider set of stakeholders and find opportunities to leverage diversity, spark creativity, and pursue shared objectives through collaboration. The results of these opportunities are on track to contribute to system change.

69. Krebs, V. and Holley, J., 2006, “The periphery allows us to reach ideas and information not currently prevalent in the network. The core allows us to act on those ideas and information. The periphery is the open, porous boundary of the network. It is where new members / ideas come and go. The periphery monitors the environment, while the core implements what is discovered and deemed useful.”


Partnering for Impact

Results and Insights from the Scaling Frontier Innovation Program