

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

The Pipeline for Innovators within the Church

17TH APRIL 2020



IN NUMBERS

	GOAL	ACTUAL
Elders	10	10
Young adults	300	140
Impact investors	5	5
Christian Social Innovation projects	10	10
Change makers in candidacy process	1/4	1/4

Learning from our partnership with The Change Makers Project

It was a great pleasure to partner with the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodists (BWC) and Wesley Theological Seminary (Wesley) in creation of The Change Makers Project, an 18-month initiative to “support young adults in hearing God’s call to innovative ministry through mentoring, missional immersions, entrepreneurial community engagement, and vocational conversations.”

One of the key reasons why BWC and Wesley decided to start this program was the recognition of the need to intentionally move ‘upstream’ in order to develop the pipeline for a new kind of leader. Both institutions acknowledge that the future requires a different kind of leader to the past – one that can create different types of communities and generate new economic models to sustain these communities.

We were engaged to co-design the learning arc of The Change Makers Project as well as provide specific tools and learning experiences.

The original intent of the project was to recruit 30 young adult participants, from a variety of backgrounds including churched, de-churched and un-churched. The hope was that these would come from both inside and outside the existing networks of the Conference and the Seminary.

Following an initial training phase, each participant would receive a grant as seed funding for the idea they generated during the project.

THE LEARNING JOURNEY

RootedGood¹ directors contributed to the learning journey of The Change Makers Project by helping to design the process across the 5'E's and delivering specific tools, curriculum and experience as part of the process.



ENTICE

Taste & See Days were used in different parts of the conference to try to cast a bigger net and entice young adults to choose to participate in 1 of 4 pathways.



ENTER

For those that were selected to be part of the CMP the first thing they did was attend a learning lab.



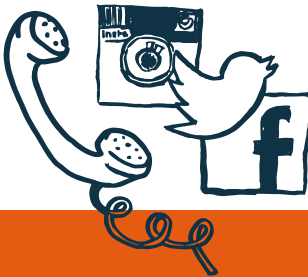
ENGAGE

Upon exiting the learning lab young adults were paired up into cohorts. They were to meet regularly and work through the Jumpstart Materials. Then in May they attended Make Good in Baltimore.



EXIT

The Pitch and Pledge event was the culminating event, it along with coaching calls provided the off-ramp to the course.



EXTEND

Coaching continued post the Pitch & Pledge event the plan. However, the original plan was that the cohorts would form a community/ network of young adults that would stay connected to one another.



MISSION POSSIBLE

Mission Possible was used to help spark imagination as well as to get people excited about the different pathways available to young adults.

LONDON LEARNING LAB:

The London Learning Lab provides an immersion experience in one of the most diverse and post-modern/post-Christian cities in the west. It attempts to reveal the opportunities for spirituality in the emerging cultural landscape.

The Learning Lab takes participants on a journey of comparison between new and old, US and UK, spiritual and secular, homogeneity and diversity. Together we explore what is needed for a new imagination for community led social innovation and begin to consider what is needed to make dreams a resilient reality.

SAN ANTONIO LEARNING LAB:

The SA, TX Learning Lab provides an immersion experience in the first majority minority city in America. It attempts to reveal the opportunities for spirituality in the emerging cultural landscape. Like the London lab, it takes participants on a journey of comparison between new and old, spiritual and secular, homogeneity and diversity.

Together we explore what is needed for a new imagination for community led social innovation and begin to consider what is needed to make dreams a resilient reality.

JUMPSTART

An intense 4 part curriculum that helps people understand their founding story, their social capital, work up their idea and resource model with the goal of experimenting before Make Good.

COACHING

before Make Good, coaching calls were available to help people enter Make Good with confidence

MAKE GOOD

a week long accelerator that helps people go from idea to ready to launch.

PITCH & PLEDGE

An alternative to the “shark tank” model, Pitch and Pledge is the culminating event of the Make Good course.

Participants present their idea to audience members who come ready to pledge various resources like funds, in-kind support, and relational connections. Participants will leave the pitch and pledge with valuable resources to help them succeed.

COACHING

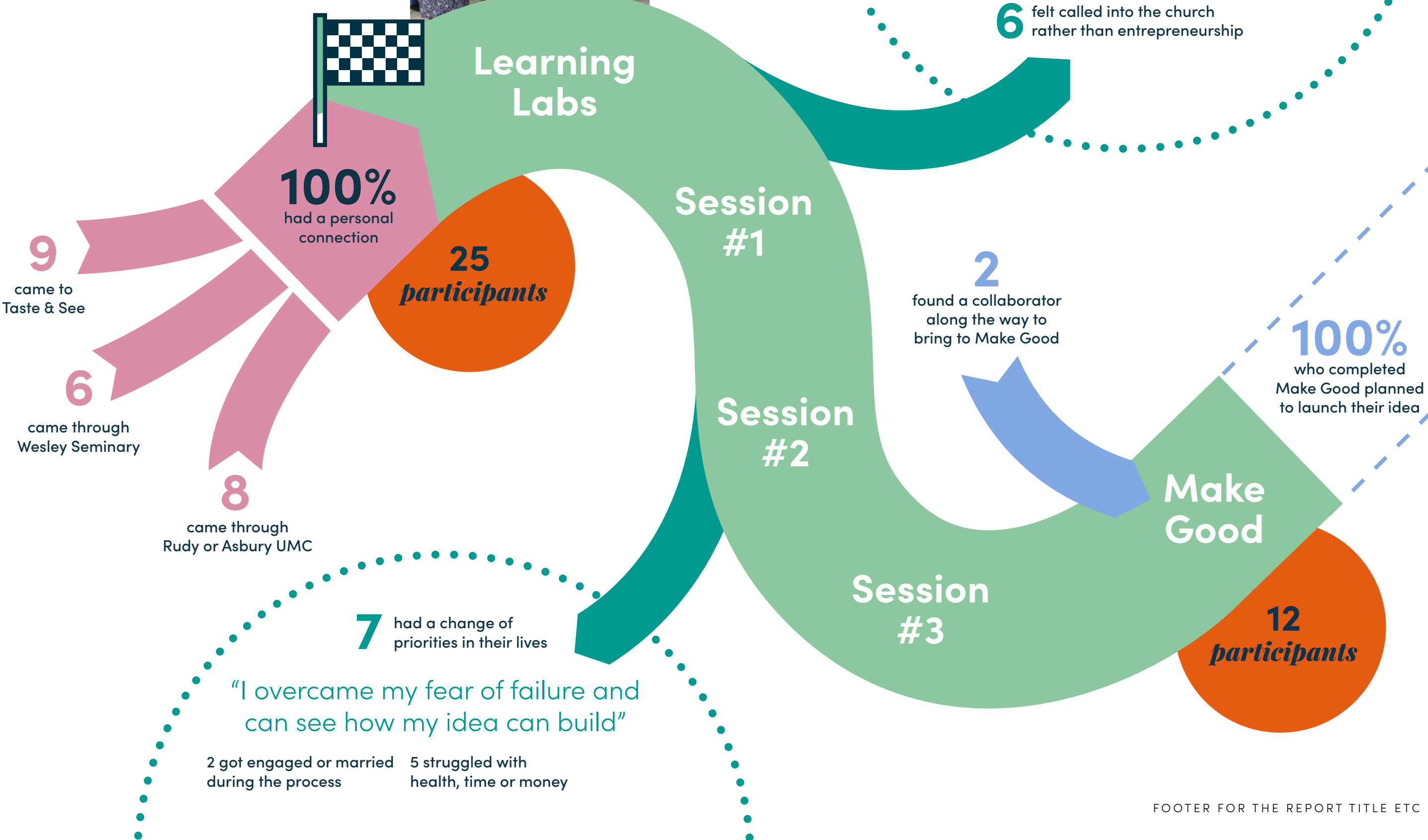
Coaching Calls were provided

- Participants were platformed at the BWC conference and the Conference began exploring other ways to stay engaged with these young adults

- After the learning labs and because the cohorts were struggling to form, some day trips to practitioners in the Baltimore/DC area were planned.

¹This project was originally contracted with Matryoshka Haus. During the course of the work, Matryoshka Haus went through an organizational restructure, launching RootedGood to house its U.S. based work.

PARTICIPATION



REFLECTION AND LEARNING

No copy-cat ideas!

One of the most pleasing aspects of the project was the originality of the ideas presented at the ‘pitch and pledge’ event at the end of Make Good. We have found the ‘copy-cat’ problem to be a constant challenge in training social innovators. This is where people see or experience an innovative project and then simply copy that project in their own context. Of course, there is nothing wrong per se with this but for training focused on a new imagination, it can be disheartening. The Change Makers Project excelled at the originality of the participants ideas.



SOME EXAMPLES OF THE FINAL PITCHES ARE:

Will B. Better Bodies
<https://bit.ly/pitch-betterbodies>

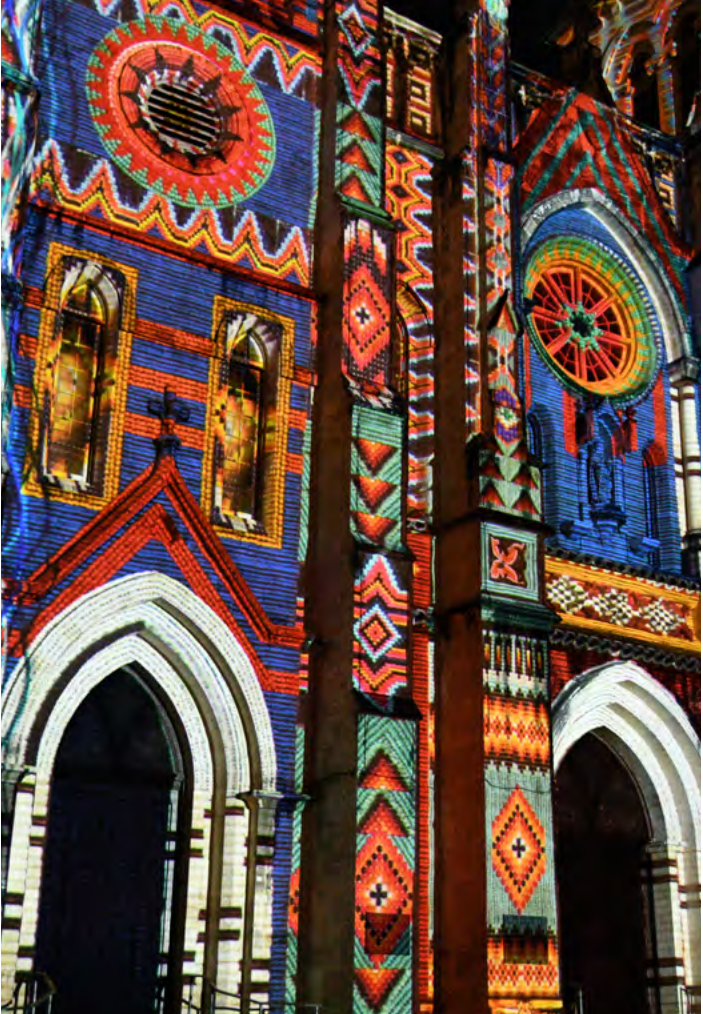
Coops Soup
<https://bit.ly/Pitch-CoopsSoup>

Katie O’Hern Hamilton
<https://bit.ly/XXXXXXXXXX>



Vocational Discernment happened along the journey

Vocational discernment not social entrepreneurship was the goal for the BWC. And while the majority of young adults did not make it through the course, discernment happened at various points through the process. Some students exited the program early, but always because they were discerning either that risks were too high to start something new or that they were called to different places or types of work. Several participants discerned the existing church was in need of a new/expanded imagination and felt they could serve better in those contexts.



The low completion rate needs unpacking

As the participation infographic shows, there was a significant number of participants who began the Change Makers program but did not end up attending Make Good, the culmination of the training. While discernment was happening, there were often other mitigating factors participants were dealing with. There were some common themes among the reasons given for dropping out of the program:

- Health and stress reasons
- Financial reasons (including but not limited to student debt)
- Family reasons

Reaching outside of networks is challenging

An excellent intent of the project was to reach beyond the boundaries of existing networks and to bring together a fresh and diverse cohort of participants. Despite the efforts, the free training offered and the promise of a grant at the end of the project, everyone that participated, with one exception, had some existing form of connection to the host institutions. On the one hand, we probably shouldn’t be surprised to find that those interested in training in innovation don’t see church-located training as attractive. It does pose other questions as well:

- How much demand is there among young adults for training and support in innovation and entrepreneurship?
- For institutions with declining participation among young adults, what pathways need to be created to reach those who could benefit from support?
- Where there is demand, what barriers are there facing young adults in pursuing this path?

There is little evidence to suggest that participants dropped out because of the quality or relevance of the program. While this is a small sample size, it might be reflective of wider trends. Outside of full-time employment in a job where there are health insurance benefits, the barriers to entrepreneurship for young adults are significant, particularly for those from low income contexts. The absence of a safety-net means that participation alone in a program like this carries significant risk.

In addition, student debt is a greater and greater barrier for young adults. The old models for vocational discernment into church roles had an economic model, while that is breaking down it often still has some security and known pathway. Entrepreneurship on the other hand demands more risks, and in this case it was more risk than most participants could bear.

A few of the original assumptions and reflections from the program leaders: Christie Latona and Beth Ludlum

ORIGINAL ASSUMPTION

Immersive experiences are needed to expand imagination

Imagination is caught rather than taught and requires experience of live projects and encounter with the people and stories behind those projects

One-to-one mentoring is an important way of equipping young adults

This is a key part of vocational discernment and should be of value to both the mentor and the mentee. In this context, mentors are older and with experience of innovation.

The cohorts could be self-facilitated and the participants will quickly perceive their value

Participants were placed in cohorts, which serve as learning communities where very diverse groups of young adults would interact, develop relationships and help each other. By being self-facilitated, there would be authentic peer-led learning.

This program will help expand people's imagination about a 'call' to ministry, outside of the traditional parameters.

Whilst Changemakers was not explicitly referred to as a vocational discernment program, an original assumption was that Changemakers would achieve this, and in doing so, reignite the notion of 'priesthood of all believers' for the contemporary context, particularly that a call to ministry needs to be defined more broadly that serving a congregation as a pastor or elder.

REFLECTION AND LEARNING

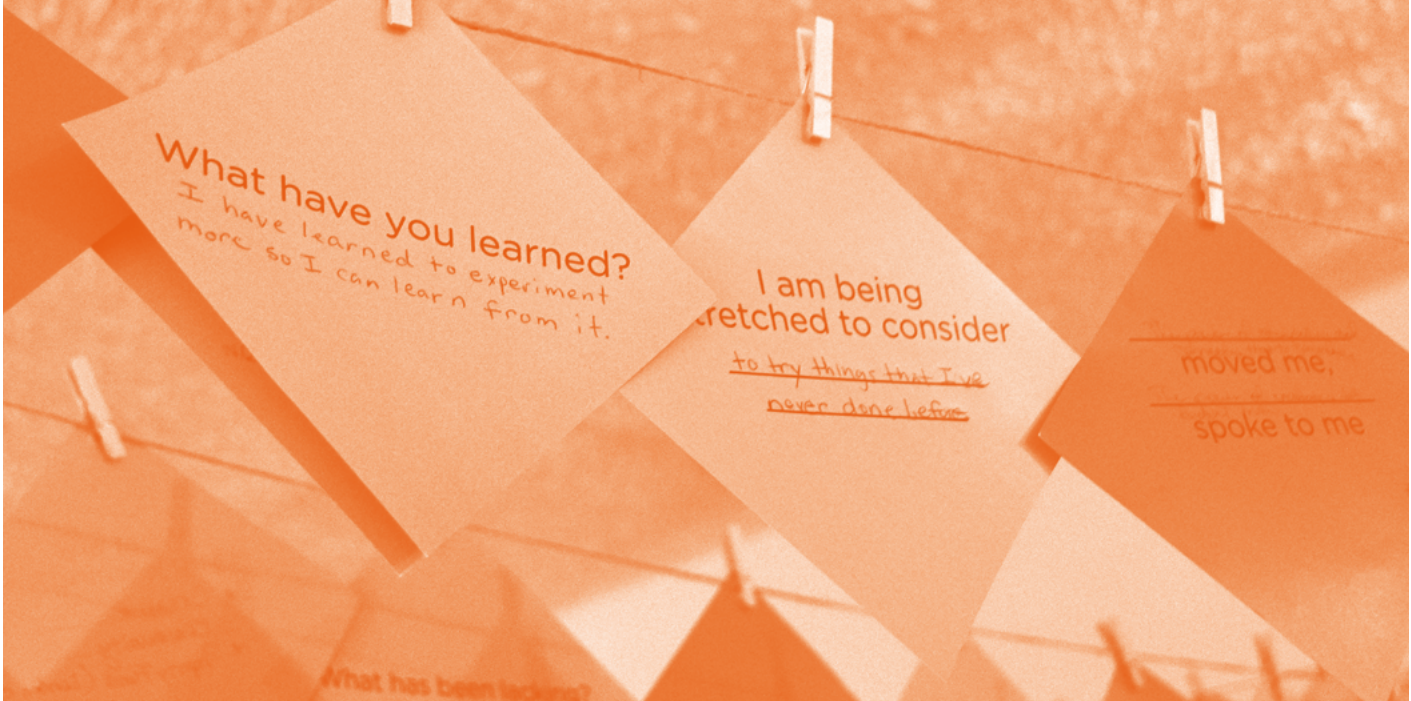
This assumption proved to be true as the 'Learning Labs' in London and San Antonio, as well as interaction with Heber Brown all served to increase the imagination of the participants.

There were some challenges with the mentoring part of the program and some of the mentor-mentee relationships were not as fruitful as anticipated. Despite expectations that this would work well, there were quite a few issues. An emerging hypothesis is that a 'cloud of witnesses' approach - with many potential voices rather than one - would be more effective. This would put less pressure on one relationships and also expose the young adult to a plurality of experiences and wisdom.

One of the key reflections from the program is that learning communities require more nurturing and curating. There was a sense from participants that these were considered to be 'just another thing we have to do' with the value of the cohorts hard to perceive.

In light of some of the challenges of the cohorts developing strong relational bonds, one enduring question is when do levels of difference between participants contribute to learning and when could they create barriers to learning? The assumption at the beginning was that the greater the diversity of the cohort - socio-economic, race, personality, gender, experience, professional training - the greater the potential learning for all with more variety in the kinds and locations of projects. A certain level of diversity is crucial - learning to see from another's perspective is essential. However, are there limits related to learning communities?

Whilst not all the participants ended up staying for the duration of the program, one of most positive outcomes was the level of vocational discernment experienced by nearly all the participants. For some, this did look like a renewed call to serve congregations as a pastor (with a renewed imagination about what that means), for others it meant exploring outside the boundaries of traditional ministry, particularly through entrepreneurship. On reflection, making this more explicit might have helped different aspects of the program.



An opportunity: Institutions as fiscal sponsors? Denominations as incubators?

An idea that was generated in the evaluation and reflection of the program was that there is an opportunity for the denomination to provide a type of safety-net that de-risks the initial stages of an entrepreneurs training and start-up phase. One way to do this is to become a fiscal sponsor. A model like this could include:

- Entrepreneurs/innovators as employees - with the provision of health insurance
- Institution provides 'back-office' support to the start-up, helping with bookkeeping, accounting, HR, legal help and so on.
- Providing entrepreneurs the ability to raise grant funding and increase donations through the institutions 501(c)3 status.
- Increased support and advice after the training phase because the institution has a 'stake' in the start-up and a level of proximity.
- The institution charges fees to the start-up to potentially recoup costs if the enterprise is successful and/or a percentage of grants and donations (as is standard with a fiscal sponsor).

One of our questions we would like to explore is what is a healthy amount of risk for entrepreneurs, and to what extent is that different for entrepreneurs from different backgrounds and social location? To entirely remove risk seems counter-intuitive but too much risk creates too many barriers

THE BENEFITS FOR THE ENTREPRENEUR:

- A start-up becomes that little bit easier.
- The increased likelihood of pivoting or a second idea if the first idea fails as a result of de-risking the first idea. Evidence suggests that second-time entrepreneurs are much more successful than first-time entrepreneurs.
- Priority can be given to under-represented and low-income entrepreneurs/innovators, thereby increasing the diversity of both leaders and ideas.

THE BENEFITS TO THE INSTITUTION

- Decreasing the barriers to innovation should create a stronger pipeline of new leaders and new ideas.
- Increased connection with young change-makers.
- A culture of innovation that could impact other areas of the institutions work.
- By supporting numerous start-ups, the institution pools the risk of failure. Though social enterprise rarely has the returns associated with tech start-ups, the logic of pooling risk remains.

