

TIPS

10 Tips to Embrace More Innovation in Your Charity

Making space for innovation in charities is especially challenging with a shortage of resources. But people working in charities are often trying to solve our biggest challenges and they need to embrace new approaches to drive impact. We spoke to Alisa Simon, Executive Vice President, E-mental Health Transformation and Chief Youth Officer at Kids Help Phone (KHP), for these tips.

1. Support Thinking Differently

Having a champion and a leader who supports thinking outside the box is crucial for innovation. The CEO doesn't need to be the innovator or doing the work, but has to make space for new ideas and for enabling the change-making work to happen. Encourage creative thinking and be open to new ideas, even if they don't fit within your current operating framework.

2. Pilot New Initiatives

Test new ideas on a small scale before implementing them across the board. This approach helps manage risk and validates the effectiveness of your strategies. It also allows an innovation to fail without too much downside.

3. Embrace Different Perspectives and Leverage Resistance

Different types of people are needed in teams, including visionary thinkers, compliance-focused individuals, and those focused on current operations. Each team

member brings unique strengths, and the natural tension can provide valuable insights and help refine your strategies. Use it to your advantage.

4. Change Mindsets

When people see new ideas working it can help alleviate fears. Celebrate successes, no matter how small, and use them to encourage a culture of innovation.

5. Schedule Time for Innovation

Block out time in your calendar solely for brainstorming and innovative thinking. This could be a regular whiteboard session where the only agenda item is "what's next?"

6. Prioritize Innovation

Prioritization and making space for innovation is important. Not all tasks are created equal. Be intentional with your time and energy, focusing on activities that drive change and foster innovation.

7. Delegate Some of the Day-to-Day

Part of doing innovation is thinking differently, and that requires leaders to get themselves out of the operations and delegate some of the work that they may have been doing simply out of habit.

The day-to-day work is so important to an organization. It is mission critical. You cannot just chase new innovations, but you have to find a balance between new and core work, which means, as a leader, trusting others to do some of the day-to-day work.

8. Hire Big Thinkers

Bring people into your organization who can think beyond their core job responsibilities. These individuals can offer fresh perspectives and stretch your team's thinking.



Alisa Simon

Executive Vice President,
E-mental Health
Transformation and Chief
Youth Officer

9. Use Open Office Hours to Reduce Meetings, Free-Up Time

If people book a meeting, chances are they will use the full time. Rather than scheduling a half-hour meeting for every discussion, offer regular office hours for open conversations where anyone can show up with questions or issues.

10. Make Training Relevant

Not everyone needs to know everything, and getting people excited about technology training, in particular, can be a challenge. The key to successful training is relevance. Choose someone on the team to learn new tools or processes and then have them train others within the context of the team's work to make it more meaningful.

Kids Help Phone

Kids Help Phone is Canada's only 24/7 e-mental health service offering free, confidential, multi-lingual support to young people.

Alisa Simon is Executive Vice President, E-mental Health Transformation and Chief Youth Officer at Kids Help Phone. She brings more than 30 years of leadership experience in health-care access and non-profit management.