Public Sector Innovation Training Course: Labs, Pilots and Scaling Government Services

1 – 5 March 2027
London

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Ref: 1352_54291 **Date:** 1 – 5 March 2027 **Location:** London **Fees:** 5160 GBP

Programme Summary

This public sector innovation training course runs for one week and prepares senior officials and heads of unit to build a delivery-ready innovation plan for a government service. Public bodies often run promising trials that never reach routine service. The programme addresses that gap through lab design, pilot evidence and scaling decisions, applied to cases from health, transport and social services. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this public sector innovation programme in international centres.

The Business Case

Public bodies are asked to improve services while budgets and staffing stay fixed. Innovation work helps only when it is directed at a named service problem, tested cheaply and then absorbed into normal operations. The programme gives leaders a way to choose, test and hand over innovation work so that effort is not lost between a lab and a service department.

- Time from idea to tested pilot: shortened by a clear screening and sponsorship routine.
- Share of pilots adopted into routine service: raised by evidence rules agreed before testing begins.
- Duplicated or abandoned initiatives: reduced by a shared portfolio view across units.

Principles and Evidence Base

- The OECD public sector innovation lifecycle: Session 1 uses it to locate where innovation stalls in your organisation.
- OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation work on innovation labs and units: Session 2 uses it to compare lab mandates and structures.
- The UNDP guide to growing government innovation labs: Session 3 applies its themes on sustaining a lab and its team.
- OECD Global Trends in Government Innovation: Session 4 uses its trend themes to test whether a pilot suits current public priorities.

Intended Participants

- Leaders accountable for improving a public service and its results.
- Managers who set up, fund or oversee an innovation lab, unit or accelerator.
- Programme owners who must move a successful pilot into routine delivery.
- Policy and strategy advisers who brief ministers or boards on reform options.
- Officials who sponsor partnerships with start-ups, universities and civil society.

The course suits ministries, municipal bodies, public agencies and state-owned service providers in health, education and transport.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to diagnose where innovation stalls across the public sector innovation lifecycle.
2. Participants will be able to construct a lab or unit mandate with decision rights and a sponsor.
3. Participants will be able to prioritise service problems and challenges for an accelerator cohort.
4. Participants will be able to design a pilot with a hypothesis, test measures and stop rules.
5. Participants will be able to evaluate pilot evidence and justify a scale, adapt or stop decision.
6. Participants will be able to build a handover plan covering budget, staffing and ownership.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Public Sector Innovation Landscape

Where does public sector innovation stall between idea and routine service?

- Innovation Lifecycle Mapping
- Service Problem Framing
- Innovation Types and Risk Appetite
- Barrier Diagnosis Matrix
- Global Trends Reading Exercise

Day 2: Labs and Units

How should a government innovation lab be mandated and placed in the organisation?

- Lab Mandate Canvas
- Placement and Reporting Options
- Team Roles and Skills Mix
- Sponsor and Decision Rights Chart
- Lab Case Comparison

Day 3: Accelerators and Partnerships

How are challenges, cohorts and partners chosen for a government innovation accelerator?

- Challenge Statement Design
- Cohort Selection Criteria
- Partner Terms and Procurement Routes
- Intellectual Property and Data Sharing Rules
- Portfolio Balance Review

Day 4: Pilots and Evidence

What evidence shows that a pilot is ready to scale?

- Pilot Hypothesis Template
- Test Measures and Baselines
- Stop Rules and Ethical Safeguards
- User Feedback Capture
- Scale, Adapt or Stop Decision Grid

Day 5: Scaling Government Services

How does a proven pilot become a funded, owned public service?

- Handover Plan Build
- Budget and Staffing Case
- Stakeholder Resistance Rehearsal
- Benefit Tracking Plan
- Innovation Plan Completion

Methodology

The principal method is case analysis combined with structured exercises. Each session starts with a short input, then participants work on a live service problem from their own organisation, test the approach with peers and revise it. Sectors vary across cases so that the methods are tested outside one service area.

- Suggested activity: compare two lab mandates and rewrite one for your organisation.
- Suggested activity: draft a pilot hypothesis and challenge it in a peer review round.
- Suggested activity: rehearse a funding conversation with a finance director.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes an innovation plan for one public service. It holds a problem statement, a lab or accelerator choice, a pilot design with stop rules, an evidence table and a handover plan with budget and ownership. Participants take it back to their organisation as a working paper for a sponsor or board.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the public sector innovation course suit managers new to innovation work?

Yes. The public sector innovation course assumes experience in public service delivery, not prior lab or start-up work. Terms are introduced as they are used, and cases suit managers and senior leaders.

Which models does the public sector innovation course rest on?

It rests on the OECD public sector innovation lifecycle, OECD Observatory work on innovation labs and units, and the UNDP guide to growing government innovation labs.

How is the public sector innovation plan used at work?

The plan serves as a working paper for a sponsor or board. It sets out the service problem, pilot design, evidence rules and handover steps, so a decision on funding or scale can be taken.

How does public sector innovation differ from a course on digital government?

Public sector innovation covers how labs, accelerators and pilots are organised and scaled across any service. A digital government course focuses on technology platforms and online delivery.