

# Sandpits: Innovation Hothouse

## The Need

The Research Council for Physical and Engineering Sciences (EPSRC) wanted to launch research projects which would extend and challenge current thinking about identity issues in on line communities. This was to be delivered as a Sandpit titled "Who Do You Think You Are"

The big questions to address were

- How do we establish confidence in the identity of the person we are dealing with and how do we maintain that confidence over time.
- How do we create ways of ensuring trust in on line environments without restricting personal freedom?
- What does identity mean in the relationship between individuals and electronic persona or devices that we interact with?

The Research Council wanted participants to work in an immersed environment to focus on the issues in a diverse and creative manner.

<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/calls/2010/wdytya/Pages/discussiondocument.aspx>

## The Event

The event was organised as two 3 day residential sessions with 5 days between the two sections. It was attended by over 35 academics, stakeholders from the UK and US government and key players in this area.

The main objectives were to:

- Challenge and stretch existing knowledge on the topic
- Explore different perspectives and viewpoints on the topic, encouraged by the diversity of the participants in terms of specialist knowledge and nationality.
- Generate new lines of enquiry for future research in this area which would be of value to the various stakeholders represented.
- Generate project proposals for funding from the research council which would be decided on the final day of the event.

## The Results

What we provided was a well-run structured process to enable the participants to make connections, understand and map the territory and from this create inspiring and valuable project plans. The process ensured that new boundaries were researched with the ideas generated; the research proposals were risky, innovative and inspiring.

A number of projects were funded as a result of this event and some of the funding was in the form of joint funding between the US and UK research programmes. Some teams were collaborations of academics based throughout the UK and the US.

WDYTYA Sandpit

[www.centreforfacilitation.co.uk](http://www.centreforfacilitation.co.uk)



## What is a Sandpit?

Sandpits were first developed by the Engineering and Physical Research Council (EPSRC). The idea was to create a dynamic approach to the development of concepts for innovative projects.

The Sandpit process is intense and generally is planned as a 5 day event. Typically the event will involve a wide range of participants who have not previously met or worked with each other before. By the end of the immersion period this group of individuals form into project teams and generate proposals for ground breaking research.

More details on the sandpit process can be found at the EPSRC website: <http://bit.ly/LfKtnE>



## Comments

The atmosphere created supported individuals to feel safe to share their ideas and build on new ideas in a constructive manner. It was in the words of one of our participants "the best facilitated event I have attended"

*"Looking back this sandpit was a very enjoyable experience and a clear professional highlight of the last year"*

*"The experience was extremely positive. The process you managed so that we moved from wide creative circles to very concrete detailed research proposals was innovative and inspiring. It led to a positive funding outcome and other opportunities too"*

*"I think that the sand pit approach is crucial to helping EPSRC invest in really creative thinking; since the normal responsive mode is unlikely to fund such bids (don't have track records or credibility in the traditional sense as often entirely new and risky directions.)"*

## Summary of our Process for Innovation

