An important step in the development of a strategy for social innovation is becoming familiar with innovative initiatives that already exist out in the field. One reason to do this is that there may be opportunities to wisely partner somehow with interesting initiatives that are already launched, or these may have lessons that will be important to the ideas that you're developing. There may be some element of another innovation that would be important for you to incorporate into your work.

This exercise will teach you how to create an innovation inventory as both a creative thinking tool and an important resource for you to refer to as you continue to design your change strategy.

First, think about what's currently going on in the problem domain that you're working in and identify a few—let's say three to five—initiatives that seem innovative to you, because they're tackling the problem in new ways and achieving promising impact.

If you're not familiar enough with the domain to know some examples, then it would be a good idea to do a bit of quick research. Start by asking some experienced practitioners and doing some web searches.

Once you have a list of three to five interesting examples, go through the same process we just did with the Barefoot College example. Take an initiatives apart to find what its combination of elements are.

Is part of it a program? A product? a platform? Are there important principles involved? What about other elements?

Once you've deconstructed your example, try to identify what element or elements are actually key to the impact it's achieving. What's driving the impact? What's at the heart of this innovation?

Then reflect upon whether these impact drivers might be applicable to the idea that you're developing. Ask yourself if there's some aspect of what's already happening in these examples that could be incorporated to enhance the idea that you're working on.

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