

Questionnaire to test business models

Methodological notes supporting the PDCA toolbox – Test of business models

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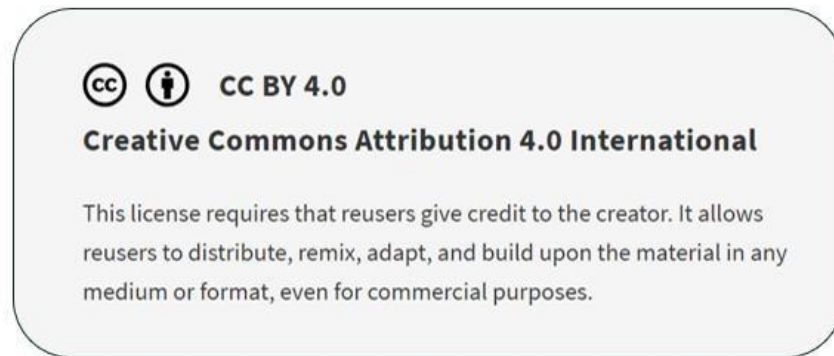
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Methodological note: Test of business models

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Introduction

This document describes the methodology to be followed to test and evaluate business models developed for bio-waste-to-soil-improver solutions. It is intended for cities or organisations wishing to replicate this activity as part of the BIN2BEAN PDCA replication approach, applying it to their own solutions and business models. The full set of results produced in BIN2BEAN (individual scores, qualitative feedback, and the business models themselves) is confidential and not publicly shared; only the methodological approach and the evaluation questionnaire template are made available here.

Scope

The activity assesses the business model(s) developed for each solution under consideration, once these have been captured in a Sustainable Business Model Canvas, through a structured evaluation questionnaire covering three complementary dimensions: technical, operational and economic feasibility; social impact; and environmental impact. The objective is to gather the feedback from sectoral experts (e.g. investors, technical experts, representatives of financial department of a city, etc) to further refine the business model. Where more than one business model is drafted for the same solution, the resulting scores also support the selection of the most market-ready and feasible option among them, ahead of the Business Plan phase.

Methodology

The core methodological tool of this activity is the evaluation questionnaire in *Annex 1*, designed to translate a qualitative assessment of a business model into comparable scores.

Experts/reviewers

Reviewers should be recruited, ideally combining economic experts and investors with local entrepreneurs and other relevant stakeholders, so that the criteria can be shaped around different perspectives. Recruitment is typically the most time-consuming step and should start as early as possible, ideally in parallel with the final stages of the Business Model Canvas phase. Each business model should be presented to experts in a clear, accessible format; because business models may include aggregate, preliminary financial data, testers may be required to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement before accessing the material, which should be planned for in advance as it can extend the recruitment phase.

Analytical framework

Each business model should be scored by experts against a set of criteria organised in three complementary macro-categories:

1. Technical, Operational and Economic Feasibility: covers the maturity of the initiative, its reliance on proven versus untested approaches, the presence of operational bottlenecks, the clarity and completeness of the cost model, exposure to cost overruns, the clarity of the revenue/value generation mechanism, and the feasibility and long-term sustainability of implementation.

This dimension provides the evidence needed to assess whether a model can realistically be operationalised in the local context.

2. Social Impact: covers the clarity and relevance of the social need addressed, the identification of beneficiaries, the fairness of cost allocation among stakeholders, the timeframe for social benefits to materialise, the accessibility of the model, and the adequacy of the economic effort relative to the social value generated.

3. Environmental Impact: covers the environmental improvement compared to existing solutions, alignment with local environmental priorities, the risk of rebound effects or unintended negative impacts, and the appropriateness of environmental benefits relative to economic cost.

Scoring

Each item should be scored individually on a 1-5 scale (1 = lowest, 5 = highest); scores should be aggregated separately within each macro-category to enable comparison across business models, without collapsing feasibility, social and environmental dimensions into a single indicator. Qualitative comments can be collected at the end of each macro-category to complement the scores. The three macro-categories are meant to inform each other iteratively: feasibility findings help frame the realism of the social and environmental ambitions, while social and environmental scores help identify whether feasibility is being pursued at the expense of impact, or vice versa. Once collected, results should be analysed and discussed with relevant stakeholders and used to rank the business models by overall market readiness and to identify the specific aspects to revise before the Business Plan phase. It is recommended to document the process and its outcomes in a short testing report.

Key limitations

Scores rely on the individual judgement of experts, so results can vary depending on the profile and background of the sample recruited. A balanced panel is therefore key to mitigate this.

Recruiting a sufficient number of qualified experts is typically the most time-consuming step of the activity and should be initiated as early as possible, ideally in parallel with the final stages of the Business Model Canvas phase, to avoid delaying the overall timeline.

The resulting evaluation is preliminary and largely qualitative in nature: it provides a structured comparison to support model selection, not a substitute for a full feasibility study or Business Plan, which are addressed in later stages of the PDCA process.

Annex 1 – Evaluation questionnaire template

Instructions: each expert should first be asked to provide basic profile information (organisation, role, area of technical expertise) so that responses can be contextualised.

For each business model under evaluation, ask each expert to score every criterion below on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), following the guiding questions provided. Criteria are organised in three macro-categories, scored and aggregated separately. Optional qualitative comments can be collected at the end of each macro-category. Complete one questionnaire per expert and per business model under assessment.

A. TECHNICAL, OPERATIONAL AND ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY	
1) Level of maturity of the initiative	<i>Is the initiative at a clearly defined and appropriate stage of development, with a credible pathway from idea to full operational deployment and scaling? (1 = very early-stage and/or unclear development path; 5 = operational or pilot-tested with a clear and realistic scaling pathway)</i>
2) Reliance on proven versus untested approaches	<i>Does the initiative build on models/solutions already implemented or validated in comparable contexts, or does it rely mainly on radical/novel approaches? (1 = largely based on untested or novel approaches; 5 = largely based on proven and/or validated solutions)</i>
3) Reliance on proven versus untested approaches	<i>Does the initiative build on models/solutions already implemented or validated in comparable contexts, or does it rely mainly on radical/novel approaches? (1 = largely based on untested or novel approaches; 5 = largely based on proven and/or validated solutions)</i>
4) Presence of operational bottlenecks	<i>Does the initiative show critical operational bottlenecks not explicitly addressed in the business model, that could hinder implementation or scaling? (1 = multiple or severe bottlenecks identified; 5 = no significant bottlenecks, or bottlenecks already addressed)</i>
5) Clarity and completeness of the cost model	<i>Is the cost structure of the initiative clearly defined and comprehensive, with all major cost items appropriately detailed? (1 = major cost items missing or unclear; 5 = all major costs clearly identified and detailed)</i>
6) Exposure to cost overruns or unexpected costs	<i>How high is the risk of significant unforeseen costs undermining the model? (1 = high likelihood of unforeseen or poorly controlled costs; 5 = low risk, with cost drivers well understood and managed)</i>
7) Clarity of the revenue and/or value generation mechanism	<i>Is the mechanism through which economic value is generated clear and credible? Is it clear who pays, for what, and under which conditions? (most initiatives are intended to operate at break-even and should not be assessed on their ability to generate surplus revenue) (1 = unclear value or payment logic; 5 = very clear and credible value or payment logic)</i>

8) Feasibility of implementation in the short to medium term	<i>Can the model be realistically implemented within a short to medium time horizon (1-3 years)? (1 = implementation timeline unrealistic or highly uncertain; 5 = implementation timeline realistic and well supported)</i>
9) Long-term operational sustainability	<i>Does the initiative show potential for sustaining itself economically and operationally over the long term? (1 = highly dependent on temporary investments with no long-term sustainability plan; 5 = potential for strong long-term operational and economic sustainability)</i>
B. SOCIAL IMPACT	
10) Clarity of the social dimension being addressed	<i>Is the social need or challenge addressed by the initiative clearly defined and well-articulated? (1 = vague or poorly defined social dimension; 5 = clear and well-justified social need)</i>
11) Scale and relevance of the social problem	<i>Does the initiative address a social problem that is significant in scale and relevant to the local context and community? (1 = marginal or weakly relevant problem; 5 = highly relevant and clearly aligned with local priorities)</i>
12) Clarity in the identification of beneficiaries	<i>Are the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the initiative clearly identified and described? (1 = beneficiaries unclear or poorly defined; 5 = beneficiaries clearly identified and well characterised)</i>
13) Appropriateness of cost allocation among stakeholders	<i>Is the allocation of economic costs among stakeholders (e.g. public authorities, users, citizens) clearly defined, transparent and fair? (1 = cost allocation unclear, poorly justified, or places an unfair burden on specific stakeholders; 5 = cost allocation clear, transparent and perceived as fair)</i>
14) Time needed for social benefits to materialise	<i>Are social benefits expected to materialise within a reasonable and acceptable timeframe (1-3 years)? (1 = benefits only visible in the very long term or highly uncertain; 5 = benefits reasonably visible in the short to medium term)</i>
15) Accessibility of the model for target users	<i>Can the initiative be considered accessible to its intended users, without significant economic, social, cultural or practical barriers? (1 = significant barriers; 5 = high accessibility and inclusiveness)</i>
16) Adequacy of economic effort relative to social value generated	<i>Is the economic effort required (especially in break-even or loss-making models intended mostly for social value generation) justified by the estimated social value generated? (1 = economic effort not justified by social value; 5 = strong social value clearly justifying the economic effort)</i>
C. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT	

17) Environmental improvement compared to existing solutions	<i>Does the initiative represent a clear environmental improvement compared to existing practices or solutions already in use, if any? (1 = no clear improvement with respect to the current situation; 5 = significant and well-justified environmental improvement)</i>
18) Alignment with local environmental priorities	<i>Is the environmental impact of the initiative relevant and aligned with local environmental priorities? (1 = weak or no alignment; 5 = strong and explicit alignment with local priorities)</i>
19) Risk of rebound effects or unintended environmental impacts	<i>Is there a risk that scaling the model, or carrying it long-term, could generate rebound effects or unintended negative environmental consequences? (1 = high, explicit or unmitigated risks; 5 = low to no risks, and/or risks clearly identified and managed)</i>
20) Appropriateness of environmental benefits relative to economic cost	<i>Are the environmental benefits generated justified by the economic cost borne by citizens or public authorities? (1 = environmental benefits weak relative to cost; 5 = strong environmental benefits clearly justifying the cost)</i>