

# INNOVATION IN GOVERNMENT



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

IDEO

Repair and reform the financial system. Reduce mortality of mothers and children under five, saving millions of lives, avert millions of unintended pregnancies, prevent millions of new HIV infections, and eliminate some neglected tropical diseases. Train over 120,000 Americans for green jobs by June 2012. Prevent terrorist movement at land ports of entry through enhanced screening while expediting the flow of legitimate travel. Assist rural communities to increase prosperity so they are self-sustaining, re-populating and economically thriving. Increase the capacity to provide temporary housing to disaster survivors by 200 percent. Improve the quality, access, and value of mental health care provided to veterans. Increase agents and prosecutors in order to reduce incidents of violent crime in high crime areas by 2012. Ensure that America will again have the best-educated, most competitive workforce in the world with the highest proportion of college graduates of any country. Ensure

#### AGENCY HIGH PRIORITY PERFORMANCE GOALS

our national forests and private working lands enhance our water resources and are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change. Broaden availability and accessibility of health insurance coverage. Improve the country's ability to measure and control green house gas emissions. Facilitate transparent, participatory, and accountable governance in 23 priority emerging and consolidating democracies. Reduce the nation's risk of flooding that damages property and places individuals at risk of injury or loss of life. Help America promote agricultural production and biotechnology exports as America works to increase food security. Ensure that all of America's children have access to safe, nutritious and balanced meals. Ensure environmentally and economically resilient oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes communities, with healthy and productive ecosystems. Improve global controls to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and enable the secure, peaceful use of nuclear energy. Double renewable energy generating capacity by 2012. Build and deploy an automated GI Bill benefits system to speed tuition and housing payments for all eligible veterans by December 2010. Make significant progress towards securing the most vulnerable nuclear materials worldwide within four years. Maintain the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile and dismantle excess nuclear weapons to meet national nuclear security requirements. Reduce Cold War legacy environmental footprint by 40 percent. Increase the number of low-income children receiving federal support for access to high quality early care and education settings. Improve global controls to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and enable the secure, peaceful use of nuclear energy. Improve hiring manager satisfaction with applicant quality, improve applicant satisfaction and reduce the time it takes to hire. By the end of 2011, increase access to primary health care. Improve security screening of transportation passengers, baggage, and employees while expediting the movement

The Partnership for Public Service and IDEO spoke with innovators across the public, private and nonprofit sectors to:

- Understand the unique opportunities for and barriers to government innovation;
- Identify best practices for promoting a culture of innovation in government; and
- Outline an approach to creating a more innovative government.

In partnering together, the Partnership for Public Service and IDEO have used our unique mix of public-sector knowledge and expertise in the field of innovation to develop a framework that federal leaders can deploy to create an environment where innovation thrives.



## Why is innovation in government necessary?

Whenever our country faces a “mission impossible,” the American public looks to our government to solve the problem. Whether it’s a financial collapse, terrorist attack, oil spill or a crumbling education system, we expect our government to find solutions and deliver results. We also expect our government to reliably perform “day-to-day” tasks such as delivering the mail, screening airline passengers and fulfilling Social Security payments, effectively and efficiently, crisis or no crisis.

**Expectations of our government are on the rise at a time when budgets and timelines are shrinking, leaving many of our public servants struggling to deliver results.**

To satisfy these pressures, many federal leaders are embracing innovation tools, including crowd-sourcing, competitions and prizes, as ways of unleashing employee creativity. The move is long overdue and greatly needed.

Online idea submission programs, like the President’s SAVE Award or the Transportation Security Administration’s IdeaFactory, are one type of solution designed to fill the gap. Our government, however, still lacks an environment of grassroots innovation where new ideas can emerge at any time and in any context. A contest like the SAVE Award shouldn’t be needed to discover that the Department of Homeland Security needs to shift its payroll from paper to electronic files.

Federal leaders need an even greater focus on equipping and empowering their people to innovate 24/7. **Innovation is not simply a one-time project or a new online tool. It is a learned process that requires a shift in thinking, a disciplined approach and strong leadership.**

# INNOVATION \i-nə-ˈvā-shən\

*n.* The process of improving, adapting or developing a product, system or service to deliver better results and create value for people.

The word “innovation” sets daunting expectations that one must invent the next must-have gadget, discover a cure for cancer or send a person to Mars. The bar seems impossibly high. The reality, however, is that innovation happens every day, driven by both large and small ideas.

At its core, innovation is about solving problems for people. It’s about delivering on your agency’s mission—more effectively and more efficiently. It’s about having a positive impact in the world. It’s about building the government that the times demand and the American people deserve.

## **Innovation in government can come in three forms:**

1. **Improving something you already do to deepen your agency’s impact on people’s lives**  
For example, you might simplify a core business process, redesign your customer service systems or make information and programs more accessible to citizens through online services.
2. **Adapting a tried and true idea to a new context**  
As part of a system with tremendous breadth and scale, you are uniquely positioned to borrow great ideas or catalyze the adoption of proven ideas government-wide.
3. **Developing something entirely new to achieve your agency’s goals**  
This may be a new service, process, policy or tool—the possibilities are endless.

➤ **IMPROVE SOMETHING YOU ALREADY DO**

The Social Security Administration has found it difficult to serve Americans living in remote and poor regions of the country, particularly on Indian reservations in the West where disabled and elderly citizens often have failed to take advantage of benefits that they desperately need.

SSA employees Shane Kelley and Eva Ristow have helped bridge this gap, linking difficult-to-serve communities to Social Security claims officials hundreds of miles away through an Internet-based, two-way video conferencing system. Social Security beneficiaries in these areas can now go to designated local libraries, public health clinics or other facilities close to home and get service “on demand” via the two-way video connection. Thanks to this added accessibility, SSA has increased the number of benefit applications by nearly 80 percent among Native Americans at many of the reservations.

➤ **ADAPT A TRIED AND TRUE IDEA TO A NEW CONTEXT**

William van der Schalie and his team at an Army research laboratory have developed a unique and innovative way to detect chemical contamination of drinking water supplies and keep millions of Americans safe in large metropolitan areas including San Francisco, New York City and Washington.

To fight this serious public health threat, they have joined forces with an uncommon ally: fish. In a process that combines both science and the wonders of nature, the researchers are using bluegill as indicators of water toxicity levels. Originally developed for use by the military, the system has been commercialized and is now being used to protect some large city water supplies from dangerous pollutants and the possibility of foul play.

➤ **DEVELOP SOMETHING ENTIRELY NEW**

In the midst of major disasters, first responders’ ability to rescue survivors and save lives can be severely impeded if communications systems are disrupted or destroyed.

To solve this problem, two FCC employees, Joseph Casey and Paul Coburn, developed a new method to detect whether communications systems are still operable immediately following a disaster, enabling emergency responders to rapidly deploy back-up communications and restore normal operations. The unique system, known as Project Roll Call, so far has been used in two hurricanes, two tropical storms and was available for use in the event of a disaster or terrorist attack during the Vancouver Olympics. The system also was deployed to Haiti to assist in the earthquake response and recovery efforts.

# The unique barriers to innovation in government



## Why is innovation in government so difficult?


Government boasts a long list of great achievements. We have the Department of Defense to thank for the Internet. We have NASA to thank for cell phones. We have the Department of Energy and the National Institutes of Health to thank for the Human Genome Project.

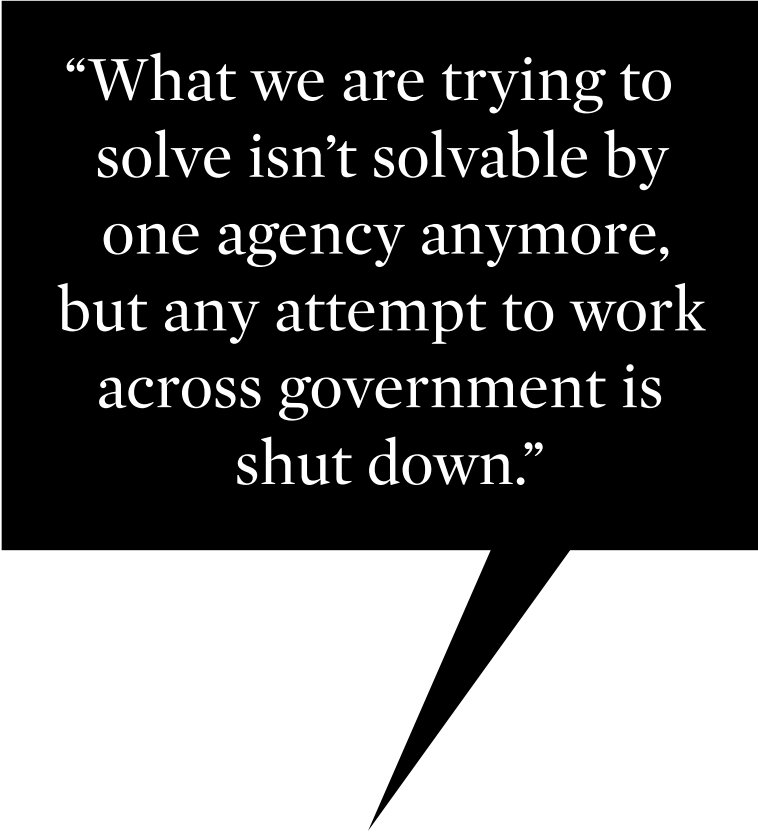
Even with a solid record of innovation in government, the unfortunate reality is that our government employees too often succeed in spite of—not because of—their agencies' policies and procedures. Government systems and structures are fundamentally different than those of the private sector. Namely, **our government is designed to perform reliably, not to adapt to changing circumstances.**

In addition, the overwhelming amount of oversight from our government's major institutions—Congressional committees, the Government Accountability Office, Inspectors General—plus, unrelenting scrutiny from the media and watch groups, tends to result in agencies being highly defensive and cautious. They are, therefore, missing opportunities to improve performance.

As a result, many employees are unused to taking risks, trying new things and creatively approaching problem-solving. Ultimately, we are left with a government that is hindered at a time when agency performance goals demand nothing less than extraordinary measures.

We have spoken with federal employees across government—political appointees and career officials, senior leaders and front-line employees, headquarters and field—and discovered four key barriers to innovation that federal leaders must overcome.

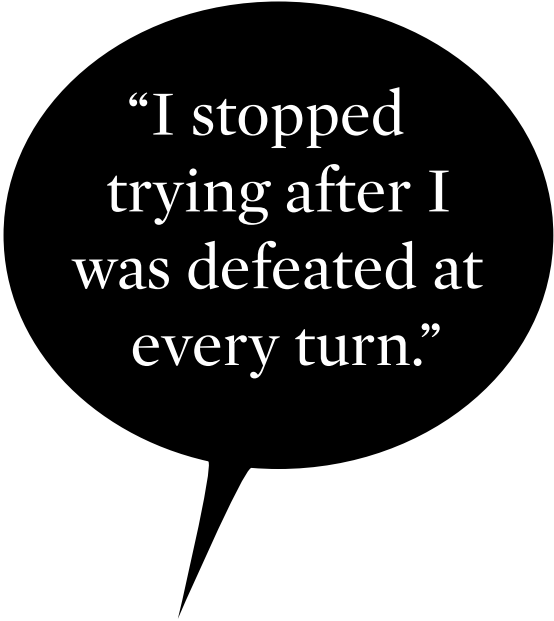
Here's what they said 



“What we are trying to solve isn’t solvable by one agency anymore, but any attempt to work across government is shut down.”

## **Politics and miscommunication disrupt efforts to promote collaboration and innovation**


Gaps in communication and understanding are widespread due to the size and complexity of our government. These gaps prevent employees from collaborating to solve shared challenges and prohibit new ideas from spreading. The short-term nature of political leadership, in particular, leaves many lurching from one priority to another, unable to sustain new initiatives from idea to implementation.



“I stopped trying after I was defeated at every turn.”

## **Government employees have no defined process for introducing and exploring new ideas**

The few employees who are willing to take risks are left to their own devices. Unlike in the private and nonprofit sectors, the path for innovation has not yet been pioneered and there are no roadmaps to lead the way. The avenues for proposing new ways of doing business are unclear to most employees. There are also very few programs to help navigate the bureaucracy, avoid pitfalls and implement ideas.



“We have a new idea  
for delivering services,  
but money flows to  
what’s ‘familiar.’”

**Without effective measures of success,  
government can’t justify an R&D budget**

In the private sector, a profit and loss statement can serve as a straightforward measure of a company’s accomplishments and a justification for its research and development spending. Our federal agencies have a more difficult task—measuring the impact of government programs on a safer country, a cleaner environment or a stronger economy. Without information about the impact of current programs and the potential of new programs, it is difficult for agencies to justify investments in exploring new ways of delivering on their missions.



“I want to  
be innovative,  
but not so innovative  
that anyone will pay  
attention.”

## **Government rewards the status quo**

Generally, government leaders are ill-prepared to manage innovative employees, and many government systems are designed to promote the status quo. Rewards most often go to those who meet or exceed “safe” expectations—not those who establish entirely new levels of expectations based on their ingenuity. As a result, federal employees often find it better to stick to the standard operating procedures than to stick their necks out and try something new.

# Overcoming the barriers to innovation in government

## Who is responsible for innovation in government?

**You are.** As a leader and public servant, you have the responsibility to continuously improve on the way services are delivered to the American people.

The barriers to innovation may not be new, but they are persistent and stand in direct opposition to achieving your agency's high-priority performance goals. Addressing these institutional roadblocks will require that your employees have the license to explore new ways of overcoming the enormous challenges confronting our country.

With your leadership, government must promote a culture of innovation and unlock the potential of the people next door, down the hall and on the front lines. Innovation must become rooted in your agency's culture. We heard a similar story in every agency: "the high-performing, creative employees all want to work in the same offices, and they know which offices to avoid."

Here's the good news: you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Leaders in the private and nonprofit sectors are doing tremendous work to prepare employees to apply an innovation process that produces results in virtually any field—everything from consumer products to social services.

Creating a culture of innovation in government will require a defined process for innovation, strong leadership principles and a commitment to building a government-wide infrastructure to support innovation.

Here's how 

## PROCESS

**COMMIT TO  
INNOVATION**

**DEFINE AGENCY  
HIGH-PRIORITY  
PERFORMANCE  
GOALS**

**IDENTIFY  
OPPORTUNITIES  
AND BRAINSTORM  
SOLUTIONS**

## PRINCIPLES

### **BUILD THE A TEAM**

Prioritize the people factor. Organize a team that's diverse in discipline, level and perspective. Gather stakeholders from within and beyond your agency to ensure shared ownership and robust solutions.

### **FOCUS ON CITIZENS**

Concentrate on the people you serve. Find out what they need and develop complete and thorough solutions that enrich their lives.

### **START WITH YES**

Optimism is the foundation of innovation. Build confidence and comfort in exploring what could be.

## NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE

### **PROVIDE FUNDING**

Create a venture capital fund for efforts that defy categorization within your current budget. Offer employees the resources to explore game-changing ideas.

### **CREATE A LAB FOR TESTING**

Establish a space where teams and training around implementing its ideas, the lab provides a low and collecting feedback from s

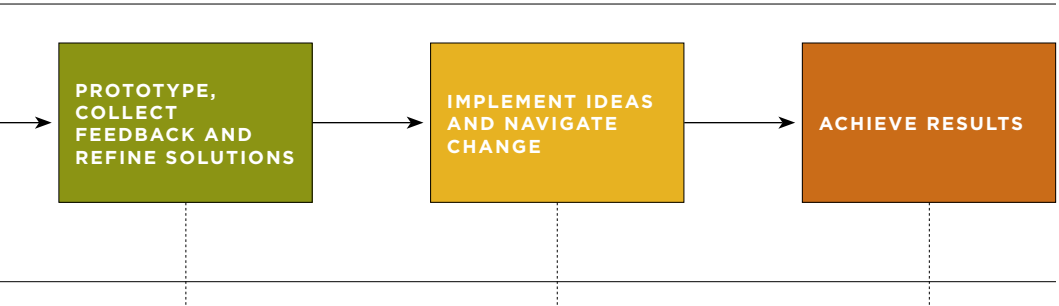
### **TRAIN YOUR EMPLOYEES ON INNOVATION**

Provide training on approaches to identifying, prototyping and implementing ideas. Focus on both the technical skills and the leadership skills required for innovation. When employees explore a new idea, connect them with a mentor who can provide leadership and guidance through the innovation process.

### **USE AN INNOVATION TOOLKIT**

Define the process for identifying, prototyping and implementing ideas, with both technical instructions (e.g., how to test ideas on a small scale) as well as tips for navigating change (e.g., how to communicate ideas and build support).





### **PROTOTYPE TO LEARN**

Create an environment where teams can experiment early in the development phase to learn faster and with less risk.

### **INVITE ITERATION**

Test prototypes with real people to get feedback, incorporate new ideas and iterate, not just to check the box but to continuously evolve the innovation and build support.

### **ASSESS YOUR IMPACT**

Determine whether an innovation is positively affecting your agency's goals and worthy of additional investments. Look for early adopters, their relative satisfaction and those building on your work.

### **IDEAS**

can access hands-on advice and support. As the team develops a low-risk environment for testing ideas, involve stakeholders.

### **IDENTIFY BARRIERS**

Create a task force to clear the path for innovation. When employees encounter barriers while introducing new ideas, the task force can help reframe, reduce or remove these obstacles.

### **COLLABORATE ONLINE**

Use technology to create a space, and supporting management structure internally, for employees to: provide advice to one another, volunteer to join initiatives they are passionate about and share stories.

### **ROTATE EMPLOYEES TO SPREAD IDEAS**

Build interdisciplinary teams and arrange for job swaps with key offices, organizations and people to increase the flow of ideas and information sharing. Set clear objectives for each exchange to help destigmatize being "on detail."



## What's next?

We've laid out a framework to ignite and sustain a culture of innovation in government. **This is just the start of what should be a long-term, collaborative effort.**

The shelves and hallways of federal agencies are lined with books, reports and pamphlets filled with good intentions. That's why the Partnership for Public Service and IDEO are committed to making this vision a reality.

Innovators test and refine their ideas to create proven models. Working together with you, we will have an opportunity to tackle some of our government's high-priority performance goals while developing a shared, government-wide infrastructure for innovation.



## APPROACH

Between December 2009 and July 2010, the Partnership for Public Service and IDEO examined the meaning of, and challenges to, innovation in government to identify a path forward for federal leaders. To address these challenges, we undertook three steps:

- 1. Understanding innovation in government.** We completed interviews, focus groups and brainstorms with more than 100 people representing over 45 organizations in the public, private and nonprofit sectors to: define innovation; uncover the barriers to innovation in government; identify the bright spots of innovation in government; and explore the applicability of private-sector best practices. We supplemented our interviews with an extensive literature review of publications like Fast Company, Fortune and Harvard Business Review.
- 2. Identifying opportunities for change and brainstorming solutions.** Synthesizing the rich data we collected in our first step, we identified over 20 opportunity areas for creating an environment for innovation in government. We turned these opportunity areas into questions. Of the 100 people we spoke with about innovation, we engaged a subset of more than 50 people—from all sectors—in brainstorming hundreds of potential solutions.
- 3. Prototyping, collecting feedback and refining solutions.** We re-engaged a sample of our federal innovators to collect feedback on potential solutions. Based on their input, we refined the potential solutions to ensure that each addressed a critical issue, contributed something new to the dialogue and had a chance of implementation within our federal government.

We would like to thank every one of the more than 100 people we spoke with for their time, intellect and optimism in contributing to the vision of a more innovative and effective federal government.

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The Partnership for Public Service is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works to revitalize our federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works.

IDEO helps organizations innovate through design. Independently ranked by global business leaders as one of the world's most innovative companies, IDEO uses design thinking to help clients navigate the speed, complexity and opportunity areas of today's world.

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Inside covers: Agency High Priority Performance Goals from Analytical Perspectives, Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal 2011.

of the traveling public. Improve the efficiency of the process to detain and remove illegal immigrants from the United States. Reduce the risk of accidents during aircraft departures and landings. Increase by 50 percent the number of eligible federal employees who telework. Assist three million homeowners who are at risk of losing their homes due to foreclosure. By the end of 2011, meet more of the growing need for affordable rental homes by serving 5.46 million families. Assist 16,000 homeless veterans each fiscal year to move out of homelessness into permanent housing. Enable the cost-effective energy retrofits of a total of 1.1 million housing units through 2011. Increase approved capacity for production of renewable energy resources on department-managed lands. Identify the areas and species' ranges in the U.S. that are most vulnerable to climate change, and begin implementing comprehensive climate change adaptation strategies in these areas. Increase the percentage of total counterterrorism investigations targeting top priority threats. By the end of 2011, every agency has established and begun to implement a plan for a comprehensive health and wellness program which will achieve a 75 percent participation rate. Reduce fatalities resulting from common causes by two percent in Occupational Safety and Health Administration-covered workplaces and by five percent in mining sites per year. By the end of 2011, improve worker rights and livelihoods for vulnerable populations in at least eight developing country trading partners. Help the Iraqi people continue to build a sovereign, stable, and self-reliant country as the United States transitions from military to civilian responsibility in Iraq. Strengthen disaster preparedness and response by improving operational capabilities and strengthening state, local and private citizen preparedness. Strengthen the civilian capacity of the department to conduct diplomacy and development activities in support of the nation's foreign policy goals. Reduce the rate of highway fatalities. Increase the nation's ability to develop high speed intercity passenger rail. Increase the number of paperless transactions with the public. Implement a 21st century paperless claims processing system by 2012 to ultimately reduce the average disability claims processing time to 125 days. Deploy a Veterans Relationship Management program to improve access for all veterans to the full range of VA services. Provide sustainable development, restoration, and protection of the nation's water resources. Ensure that environmental health and protection is delivered to our communities. Increase annually the percentage of higher education program student participants. Improve the education and training of an innovative science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce. Increase small business participation in federal government. Achieve an online filing rate of 50 percent for retirement applications. Improve the delivery of immigration services. Reduce the homeless veteran population to 59,000 by June 2012 on the way to eliminating veteran homelessness.



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