

# Improving the Local Landscape for Innovation - Summary

Gigi Georges, Tim Glynn-Burke and Andrea McGrath 01  
November 2013

## Summary

*These papers were originally published by the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government as part of its Occasional Papers Series.*

<http://www.innovations.harvard.edu/showdoc.html?id=2849471>

Today's fiscal, social and technological context is making innovative governance increasingly important for city officials and the agencies and jurisdictions they lead. In response, cities are reframing innovation from a value-based concept to a concrete goal with specific targets in the same manner by which they have transformed their approaches to values such as efficiency and transparency.

Innovative cities are not simply creative. They set the stage for inventiveness and reform by committing attention, time and resources to rethinking local problems and rethinking the instruments (programs, policies, funds

and services) they currently deploy to address those problems. They also provide ample opportunity and support for creative improvements and promising new approaches to public problem solving. The rules and administrative procedures for public contracting are flexible and efficient enough for both new entrants and established providers to be competitive. Further, city leaders not only encourage well-informed risk taking from their employees—they also provide the support, training and resources their personnel need to become agents of change.

While this vision may seem an improbable one for government, cities across the country are working to strengthen the civic, institutional and political building blocks that are critical to developing new solutions to public problems—or what the authors call the local innovation landscape.

The first paper in this series, “Mechanics, Partners, and Clusters,” introduces readers to the nature of this work and presents three case studies exploring current efforts to drive innovation in Boston, Denver and New York City. The paper also orients the miniseries within the robust discourse on government innovation.

In the second paper, “Framework for an Innovative Jurisdiction,” the authors introduce a framework to help cities improve the local landscape for innovation. Developed and refined through interviews with dozens of

city officials, online forums, first-person accounts, practitioner surveys and fieldwork, the framework builds on previous research in public-sector innovation and establishes a set of three primary strategies:

1. Building the city's collective capacity for innovation to better solve challenging public problems
2. Rethinking policy to open the space for innovation, addressing administrative, structural and political hurdles
3. Developing a culture of innovation that intentionally seeks out, values, and expects creativity and change

The third paper, "Assessment and Implementation," focuses on implementation of the framework's strategies and introduces a unique assessment tool that includes objectives, key questions and sample indicators in support of the nine components of the framework. The assessment tool differs from traditional performance management systems in that it focuses on the structural conditions that encourage innovation. The authors further conduct a conceptual test of the framework and assessment tool using the nationally recognized Center for Economic Opportunity in New York City. The paper concludes by addressing some common considerations and challenges in the implementation of strategies to support and promote innovation.

The goal of this miniseries is not to offer a definitive statement on the most effective approach to public

innovation. Instead, the authors hope that the introduction of the framework for an innovative jurisdiction and the assessment tool will catalyze a conversation among cities about how to support and promote civic innovation.

Questions for further consideration include, Under what conditions are each of the framework strategies and components most realistic or achievable? In what ways, if any, does the tool help cities to think through their strategies and objectives and provide language or ideas that help communicate the value of the work? Does adoption of the assessment tool, in whole or in part, help contribute to the durability of their efforts to promote innovation? The authors invite city leaders and other readers to further refine the framework and assessment tool.

## **Table of Contents (Sample)**

- Summary
- About the Original Series
- Paper 1: Mechanics, Partners, and Clusters
- Paper 2: Framework for an Innovative Jurisdiction
- Paper 3: Assessment and Implementation
- Assessment Tool
- Select Resources