

# Improving the Local Landscape for Innovation - About the Series

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## Letter from the Editor

The Roy and Lila Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence and innovation in governance and public policy through research, education and public discussion. Three major programs support our mission:

- The Program on Democratic Governance researches those practices that resolve urgent social problems in developed and developing societies.
- The Innovations in Government Program recognizes and promotes creative and effective problem-solving by governments and citizens.
- The Rajawali Foundation Institute for Asia promotes research and training on Asia to disseminate best practices and improve public policy.

Our Occasional Papers Series highlights new research from the center that we hope will engage our readers and prompt an energetic exchange of ideas in the public policy

community. The work of our Innovations in Government Program has revealed that innovation is evolving in cities across the country from a value-based concept into a concrete goal with specific targets— similar to the way that governments have addressed values such as efficiency and transparency. Indeed, city leaders are increasingly designating “innovation” as an area of direct responsibility under city government. While some cities choose to focus on community and private partnerships to promote innovation, others are looking inward and rethinking policies to create more opportunities to test, develop and implement innovative ideas.

This paper is part of a miniseries that explores emerging strategies to strengthen the civic, institutional and political building blocks that are critical to developing novel solutions to public problems—what the authors call the “innovation landscape.” The miniseries builds on past research addressing social innovation and on *The Power of Social Innovation* (2010) by my colleague Stephen Goldsmith.

In the first paper, the authors introduce readers to the nature of the work by highlighting current efforts to drive innovation in Boston, Denver and New York City. They also orient the miniseries within the robust discourse on government innovation. In the second paper, the authors introduce a framework for driving local innovation, which includes a set of strategies and practices developed from the Ash Center’s recent work on social innovation, new

first-person accounts, in-depth interviews, practitioner surveys and relevant literature. The authors explore the roots and composition of the core strategies within their framework and provide evidence of its relevance and utility.

In the third and final paper of the miniseries, the authors focus on the implementation of their framework's strategies, primarily through the introduction of a unique assessment tool that includes key objectives and suggested indicators for each component of the framework. This final paper also includes a brief case study on New York City's Center for Economic Opportunity, an award-winning government innovation team, to demonstrate and test the validity of the assessment tool and framework. The paper addresses some likely challenges to implementation and concludes with an invitation to readers to help further refine the framework and to launch a conversation among cities that will help improve their local landscapes for innovation.

I am happy to present this miniseries to practitioners and fellow scholars alike. As the authors make clear, this project is not a definitive statement on the most effective innovation strategies but rather is intended to stimulate a much-needed, and what we think will be a welcomed, discussion on how to drive innovation in public problem solving. You may find all of the Ash Center's Occasional Papers online at [ash.harvard.edu](http://ash.harvard.edu).

Tony Saich, Series Editor and Director

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