

Re-Innovating Government: Still the City of Firsts

Rich Negrin 01 November 2013

Philadelphia has always been a city of firsts. From the first public library to the first university, From the first hospital to the first fire department, Philadelphia has been a hub of innovation since its birth. Few would argue with the premise that Benjamin Franklin was one of most innovative thinkers of his time and that his great city was a center of innovation. The trouble is that this designation is often viewed as a thing of the past—that Philadelphia was a great innovative city, that Philadelphia created but no longer creates.

I am surrounded by thriving innovators in our city who disagree. They cite Philadelphia's vibrant tech community, creative educational institutions, leading-edge hospitals, burgeoning start-ups, imaginative cultural attractions and great social innovators as proof of a resurgent and innovative Philadelphia. I agree with this view even if it is slightly aspirational.

We may not be where we need to be but we are on our way. Like in the past, government must play a crucial role as facilitator, convener and yes even catalyst for innovation. In Philadelphia, we are, quite simply, re-innovating government. In keeping with our heritage as a

city of firsts, under the administration of Mayor Michael A. Nutter, Philadelphia has its first ever chief innovation officer, Adel Ebeid; its first chief customer service officer, Rosetta Carrington Lue; its first chief data officer, Mark Headd; and its first director of civic technology, Tim Wisniewski. And with recent efforts across the city around innovation such as Philly KEYSPOts, New Urban Mechanics and the Bloomberg Challenge, you can rest assured that Ben Franklin would be proud that innovation is alive and well in Philadelphia. Re-innovating government is not just about firsts. It is also about changing the way we do business. How can we enhance protections for our most vulnerable populations? What efficiencies can be created to save taxpayer dollars? Who do we collaborate with to increase public safety? What steps do we take to be the greenest city in America? We find the answers to these questions within the Department of Human Services with its Improving Outcomes for Children initiative, at a GunStat meeting, at a community clean-up organized by PhillyRising and through the metrics developed (and being achieved) by GreenWorks.

Innovation in government requires not just a relentless commitment to creativity and continuous improvement but a fierce resolve to see it through. Today's leaders must demonstrate the courage for risk taking, transparency and authenticity to have honest conversations. Today's leadership requires the humble confidence to listen and collaborate and the adaptive style to ensure innovation.

These types of innovations would cause Ben to raise a glass to the fact that his city of firsts lives on...