

The Building Blocks of Innovation: Establishing a Culture of Creativity in Philadelphia City Government

Lindsey Keck, Ashley Del Bianco and Andrew Buss 03
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Summary

As cities face increased financial and structural challenges, government will require a new operating model so that it continues to provide useful services to constituents. To find new ways of innovating with technology, the City of Philadelphia named its first chief innovation officer in 2011 and shortly thereafter established an Innovation Management group within the Office of Innovation and Technology. This group's primary focus is public technology—finding new ways to make technology relevant and useful for the citizens of Philadelphia.

As cities face increased financial and structural challenges, government will require a new operating model so that it continues to provide useful services to constituents. Government must find ways to embrace

innovative approaches to urban challenges, and technology can play a key role.

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An important goal of the Innovation Management group is to foster a local innovation ecosystem that enables Philadelphia's city government to strategically manage its technology portfolio and creatively leverage both internal and external communities of expertise, resources and investment. This innovation ecosystem recognizes the value of technology solutions; however, the model doesn't rely solely on technology as the driving force or primary vehicle for change. In its current stage, the ecosystem model emphasizes an actual process for cultivating and deliberately pursuing opportunities in order to build efficiencies and effectiveness in government functionality. This means identifying opportunities and supporting ideas for innovation, fully developing those ideas, obtaining and applying resources and ensuring a sound implementation and evaluation plan.

The Innovation Management group refers to this process as "innovating with intent"—ensuring that resources are coordinated and that our public technology initiatives are

strategically driven. If we illustrate the idea of innovating with intent, we see three concentric circles that are closely aligned and coordinated and that are driven by strategy. This model involves three key concepts—the process for innovation (Innovation Governance), the physical space to innovate (Innovation Lab), and a skilled workforce that is trained and invited to deliberately innovate (Innovation Academy). All three elements are necessary to form a complete system and establish an innovation infrastructure (see Figure A).

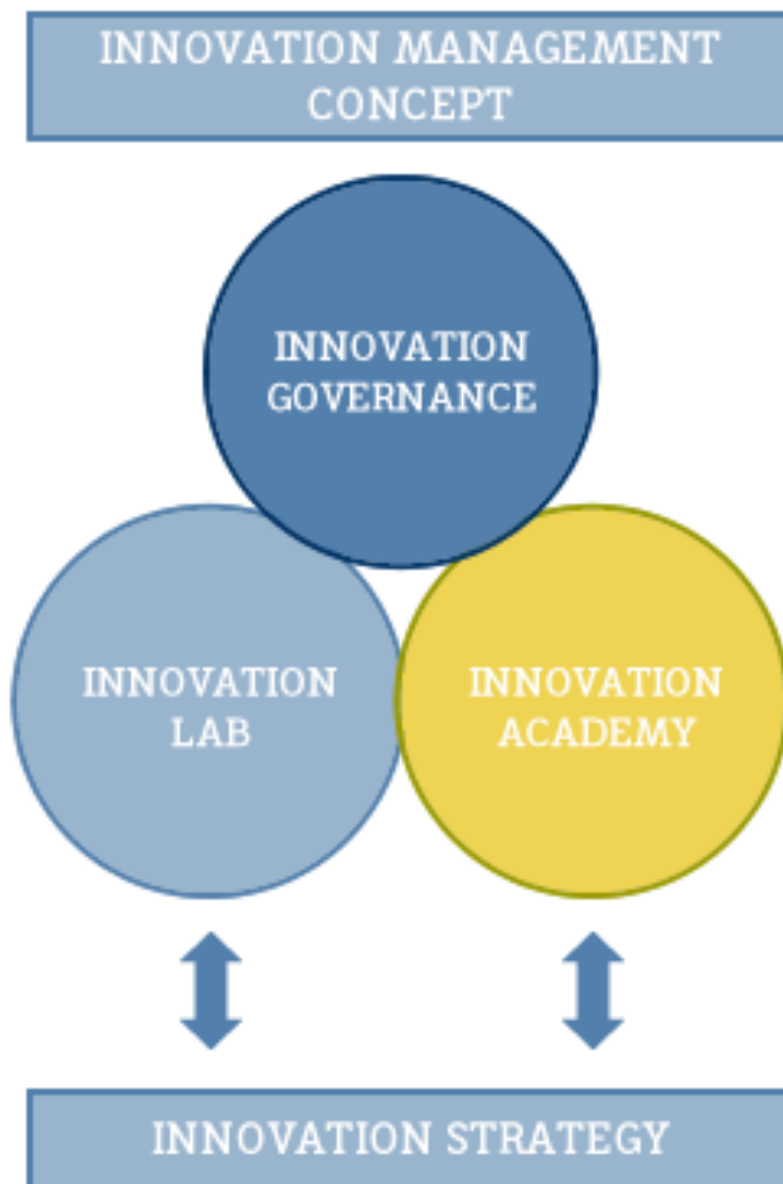


Figure A. Components of Innovation Infrastructure

This innovation management model is formally realized in a new innovation strategic plan, perhaps the first commissioned by a city government, designed to guide and govern many of our initiatives. Our innovation management group continues to develop and implement public technology initiatives and relies on a collaborative, stakeholder-building approach to accomplish its work. Because innovation-centric resources are traditionally scarce in city government, we rely largely on expertise and resources that lie outside of government. Our team has formed strong relationships with external stakeholders including community-based organizations, technology start-ups and other institutions such as universities that allow the city to assemble a critical mass around innovation and marshal the effort necessary to make real change.

Innovation Management representatives develop and implement public technology initiatives in four key areas: digital inclusion, open data and government transparency, civic application development and government efficiency. By linking our innovation work to form a system of interconnected parts rather than a series of stand-alone initiatives, we can more effectively govern technology innovation across the city and align valuable resources with our innovation strategy. And by formalizing the innovation management function within the city's technology office, we have developed a successful framework through which initiatives are strategically

managed as well as encouraged to interact and complement one another.

COORDINATED SUCCESS

This coordinated approach to public technology innovation has yielded a number of recent accomplishments. The KEYSLOT program, a collaborative, citywide network of technology-enabled community centers in Philadelphia's resource-challenged neighborhoods, began to roll out in 2011 and has now reached full operational capacity (www.phillykeyspots.org). KEYSLOT has begun to close some of the significant gaps in technology access and adoption that exist in many of Philadelphia's neighborhoods. Closely linked to this initiative is PhillyRising—a similarly collaborative, community-based program run by the Managing Director's Office. Based on the work of KEYSLOT and PhillyRising, the chief innovation officer, Adel Ebeid, won a Champion of Change award from the White House in 2012. Both programs recast government not as the sole source of expertise and resources but rather as an entity capable of convening, facilitating and promoting community engagement and civic collaboration.

In the area of open data and government transparency, our chief data officer has enabled the release of close to 50 high value data sets, some of which were never before available to the public such as crime data and assessed

property value information. One data set and its associated mapping application that displays major crimes by neighborhood was selected by The Atlantic magazine as a top ten municipal data set for 2012 (Badger, 2013). Additionally, Philadelphia is the only large city in the country with an official open data repository managed in collaboration with outside stakeholders (www.opendataphilly.org). This effort again allows city government to play a convening or hosting role. We are establishing a process to expose data and thus creating an opportunity to use data in innovative ways.

Other successes involve civic application development. Now part of the Innovation Management team, our director of civic technology was responsible for the development of a 311 mobile application (www.phila.gov/311/mobileapp.html) that empowers residents to report service requests with their smart phones—an application that has now yielded over 11,000 service requests and been translated into 16 languages. Other successes in civic application development include the development of a mobile-friendly property assessment calculator that allows property owners to look up their property value assessments and calculate their new property tax. Linked closely to a major property reassessment initiative (known as the Actual Value Initiative [AVI]) in Philadelphia, this application has proven to be an invaluable tool for residents as they familiarize themselves with the new property assessment system.

The City is leveraging existing data, pushing out information about AVI and encouraging residents to utilize the 311 mobile applications, among others, through the network of KEYSLOT computer labs around the city. We have the opportunity to disseminate important information and empower residents through this coordinated effort.

Philadelphia also recently completed a two-year engagement with Code for America, a national nonprofit that works with cities to develop technology-based solutions to urban challenges and provides a digital toolbox to share across cities. This engagement yielded Textizen, a mobile application that relies on text messaging to allow residents a quick method for expressing opinions about a topic (www.textizen.com). Textizen was successfully used by Philadelphia's City Planning Commission during the creation of the City's comprehensive plan to learn what residents wanted in their city and neighborhood.

Another benefit of the Innovation Management group's coordinated approach to public technology includes better service coordination across city departments and programs. The Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service recently won a Bloomberg Cities of Service grant focused on developing a volunteer cohort capable of supporting city programs, including our existing KEYSLOT program. In this case, our success at creating and promoting our existing public technology infrastructure allowed the City to leverage the work of our

Innovation Management team in other departments.

Finally, we recently hosted a Philly Tech Week event that illustrated how we can link two traditionally distinct technology communities—the developer community and the digital inclusion community. We brought members from these communities together at a KEYSLOT location managed by Drexel University to preview existing and future civic applications and share ideas about how to make sure civic application development is informed not just by developers with the latest technology choices but also by community members who often face challenges in accessing and using the latest technology tools. We will continue to refine and develop this event model to ensure that both community-based organizations and the technology development community can access and share helpful information that will inform their technology choices.

Looking Forward

As the Innovation Management group refines and unveils an innovation governance framework and ideation process for developing and testing new ideas, parallel efforts include two strategic initiatives for 2013–14 driven by our director of innovation management. These initiatives focus on establishing a culture of innovation in city government and collaborating with the business, nonprofit and higher education sectors to make Philadelphia a model for urban municipal innovation.

These two efforts complete the other two of the three concentric circles—Innovation Lab and Innovation Academy (see Figure A).

The Academy of Municipal Innovation involves a collaborative effort among the City's Managing Director's Office, OIT and Philadelphia University. The academy will provide city employees with a formal opportunity to learn the tenets of innovation and give participants the opportunity to marry day-to-day, in-the-workplace innovation that is primarily tactical in nature with formal training on innovation principles and strategy. Initially, the academy will offer a pilot course at Philadelphia University in the spring of 2014 on the principles of innovation. Course topics would include elements of Philadelphia University's award-winning innovation curriculum adapted for municipal settings and issues (<http://www.philau.edu/strategicinitiatives/>).

To complement the Innovation Academy and provide both the space and environment for innovation, the City is establishing the Innovation Lab, a co-working and collaborative space intended for city government employees across city departments. Modeled on the flexible, resource-efficient co-working spaces that have arisen for private sector entrepreneurs (Kohrman, 2013), the city is designing a centralized, dedicated, multifunctional space that is purposefully built to encourage communication and the exchange of ideas in an informal setting. The lab is also intended to provide

technology-enabled meeting and collaboration resources for programmed events.

In parallel with the development of our human and physical innovation infrastructure, we are also establishing a process infrastructure for innovation. The Innovation Management group is working closely with the city's grants office and the Fund for Philadelphia to develop an ideation process for collectively generating innovative ideas within municipal government and with the broader community. Ideas will be assessed, prioritized and ranked but also matched with appropriate resources and partners for implementation.

To generate the ideas, the Innovation Management group will actively engage and expand its relationships with city agencies, community partners, residents and the technology sector. The prioritization process will be systematic; intentional engagement will incorporate community interests, considering administration policy goals and city departments' objectives and capacities. Those same stakeholders will also be involved in identifying resources, whether through partnerships, private funding or competitive applications. By continuously employing this ideation process, the Innovation Management group will constantly have a fresh set of ideas to consider as well as a strategy for deploying those innovations that will have true impact on residents. By establishing this deliberate infrastructure around innovation, government has the opportunity to provide

constituent services in new and improved ways.

References

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Retrieved from <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/neighborhoods/2013/02/5-ways-visualizing-crime-philadelphia/4641/>