The New Government Appointee Guidebook

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TECH TALENT PROJECT

ABOUT THE BEECK CENTER FOR SOCIAL IMPACT + INNOVATION

The Beeck Center is an experiential hub at Georgetown University that trains students and incubates scalable, leading edge ideas for social change. We believe impact at scale requires the courage to think and behave differently. Our work centers on investing in outcomes for individuals and society. We equip future global leaders with the mindset to promote outcome-driven solutions, using the tools of finance and data + digital. We convene actors across the public, private, and civic sectors to advance new tools, frameworks, and approaches necessary to achieve these outcomes.

ABOUT THE TECH TALENT PROJECT

The Tech Talent Project is a nonprofit, nonpartisan initiative focused on increasing the federal government's ability to recruit modern technical leaders to achieve critical human, economic, and policy outcomes. Having these leaders in the right roles means the government can effectively leverage modern technology to develop policy, support and regulate emerging technologies, and ultimately improve education, reduce poverty, protect the environment, expand access to healthcare, and provide critical benefits to the poor, the unemployed, people with disabilities, and senior citizens.

ABOUT THIS GUIDEBOOK

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About the Authors

Dr. Nichole Carelock is a civic technology strategist, and director of special projects at Tech Talent Project, a nonprofit organization, currently working to ensure the federal government is equipped with the right tech policy, people and practices to succeed. Her expertise spans from human centered cloud transition for the Department of Health and Human Services, to service design for multiple federal systems with millions of users.

Kyla Fullenwider is a Fellow at the Beeck Center and teaches at Georgetown's School of Foreign Service. Prior to Georgetown, she was the in-resident Entrepreneurship Fellow at the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School. She previously served as the first Chief Innovation Officer of the U.S. Census Bureau, the principal agency of the U.S. Statistical System and part of the Department of Commerce.

Executive Summary

Innovation in government is about uncovering new ways to positively transform the lives of citizens as well as new approaches in engaging them as partners in shaping our government. It not only involves transitioning legacy structures, but modes of thinking; embracing new technologies *and ideas.* In this guidebook we offer opportunities to better understand the challenges government appointees may face and new approaches in addressing them.

Through research and curriculum materials, the guide offers practical steps for successfully stewarding innovation and in turn improving the lives of all Americans. In Part 1—Creating the Conditions for Change—we show how government innovation hubs have dealt with the cross-cutting factors that impact innovation. These efforts include, among other things, managing bureaucratic barriers, harnessing the power of citizens' ideas, building open, transparent and trust-based systems, enabling an internal culture that supports innovation, and forging unlikely partnerships.

In Part 2—Tech Competencies—we look at how federal leaders can ensure their agencies have the key technical competencies needed to deliver on critical missions. Alongside the report, we've created a set of competency cards based on **Tech Talent for a 21st Century Government**—a guide for bringing technology and innovation talent into government. Using the cards, teams can quickly sort and identify key examples of each tech competency at work in the federal government—and hopefully discover some of their own.

This guidebook is designed for practical and immediate use. It can be used to help create discussion around the different types of public sector innovation and explain approaches and methodologies of innovation done right via use cases. It also provides a synthesis of key drivers of success for innovation in government via the competency cards and competency use case glossary. Taken as a whole, the guidebook serves as a practical step-by-step path you can use on day one to promote and sustain innovation and continuous improvement in your agency.

Section I:
Creating the Conditions for Change

In his 1962 book "Diffusions of Innovations" author Everett Rogers defines an innovation simply as "anything perceived as new by its audience." In fact, his research started with a study on the uptake of a new corn seed among farmers in rural Iowa. His now classic adoption curve shows how innovations are adopted across a population and how the uptake of anything new is—at the end of day—something that can only happen if people choose to adopt the change.

Adopting change is at the heart of what the stories in this section are about. Starting with the work at the U.S. Census Bureau's Open Innovation Labs where the Lab team came to understand the very real innovation fatigue career staff felt after many years (and sometimes decades) of "transformation efforts" and the critical importance of bringing people—and the institution—along with you. We look at both external-facing initiatives that asked the public to engage with the federal government in new ways and internal-facing initiatives that asked career staff to approach their work in new ways. And we explore how creating long term change, by necessity, means institutionalizing it.

The phrase "if you build it they will come" has long haunted product designers and political leaders alike. Who hasn't launched a new feature or created a new program that fell flat? At the Millennium Challenge Corporation where a program not achieving its full agenda can mean fewer humans across the world can access clean drinking water or U.S. taxpayers dollars are less effective than intended, they know all too well that just because you build it, doesn't mean they will come. The Social and Behavioral Change team at MCC dubbed this the "the field of dreams fallacy" and built an entire unit around refuting this notion. They also applied their expertise in engaging their colleagues as they stood up their new team, knowing that before they made their case to the world they needed to start inside the building.

We also feature a series of quick tips—in the form of a checklist—on creating culture change from learnings at the Health and Human Services in the Office of the Surgeon General. Culture change may come in the form of something as banal as updating a performance review or as unlikely as a meeting over ping pong but it is nonetheless as critical as a technological or design innovation itself. You will see how the Surgeon General and his team found ways to both work within the bounds of the institution but to also leave it better than they found it.

What these stories have in common is not the products they created, the websites they rolled out, or the security features they launched but rather an empathic understanding of what it takes to do the hard work of institutional change. Fear of change is real. And yet, what these stories demonstrate is that people and the institution are central to any new effort's likelihood to succeed. In other words, you can't make change without the people, and you can't sustain change without the institution.

Starting Up at the U.S. Census Bureau: Building the Census Open Innovation Labs

FEDERAL AGENCY

U.S. Census Bureau,
The Department of Commerce

DATE RANGE

2016–Present

A 225 YEAR-OLD STARTUP

When Jeff Meisel joined the U.S. Census Bureau in 2014 it was clear from the start that things would be different from what he expected. A newly minted Presidential Innovation Fellow, he waited in the Indian Treaty Room alongside other fellows for a "meet and greet" with representatives from what would be their home agency for the next year. As he scanned the room he was surprised to see the agency's most senior executive there. He notes, "What immediately struck me was how welcoming and supportive the [Census Bureau] was in onboarding me from the highest levels of leadership. I only realized later how important having sponsorship at that level was."

Census Bureau Director John Thompson showed up that day in person to meet what was then billed as their "entrepreneur-in-residence". Thompson, who had served in career positions at the Bureau as well as a political appointee under both Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump, had approved the funding to support bringing Jeff and the PIF program to the Bureau. He prioritized and invested in blue sky projects—the kind that might reimagine what the 2030 census would look like long before the 2020 census had taken place.

About the Census Bureau

The Census Bureau sits within the U.S. Department of Commerce and, importantly, is mandated by Article I of the Constitution. The once-a-decade count has been conducted without disruption every decade since our nation's founding. It is our country's largest non-wartime effort and, among other things, involves hiring over 500,000 workers and spending about $12 billion dollars in very short order. The Census is used to determine how over $1.5 trillion in federal funding is distributed annually and how many congressional seats each state will get. It is the nation's denominator, critical data infrastructure for our country. But the decennial Census is just one of the many things the Bureau does. It produces hundreds of data products, collects much of the data used for determining GDP, and collects and processes data for most federal agencies including the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Health and Human Services (HHS) among many others.

Jeff's tenure as a PIF eventually led to a position as the agency's first Chief Marketing Officer where he evangelized the value and importance of census data, built digital first communications capabilities, and expanded the talent pool. "There was a recognition at some point that in order to accelerate our timeline and to get there faster—the quickest way would be to bring in world-class experts and folks from outside of government."

That next hire was Presidential Innovation Fellow Kyla Fullenwider, who became the agency's first Chief Innovation Officer. Fullenwider built a team that was made up of both career staffers and others who had never served in government. "I felt it was critical to have both a diversity of experience and perspectives on this team to do the kind of work that was both impactful and sustainable over the long term. I didn't want our work to be a flash in the pan, but rather something that built upon the existing culture and infrastructure. I knew that would be critical for any change to stick."

The small unit, initially funded by and housed in the Economic Directorate within the Bureau, was focused on efforts aimed at the future of the Census with an eye toward 2030. However, early on it became clear more pressing needs would have to be addressed following the Presidential election in 2016. Namely, the segments of the population the Bureau deemed "hard to count"—many of whom are from immigrant households—were already expressing fear of how the government might use their data. Engaging these populations to participate in the 2020 Census, while showing the value of the treasure trove of data the Bureau held, and (eventually) expanding the work beyond the small startup team became the mandates of what was now called The Census Open Innovation Labs (COIL).

FROM LAUNCH TO DESIGN:
IMPLEMENTING A PEOPLE CENTERED MANDATE

As the team coalesced in 2016, one of their first endeavors was to make sense of a massive amount of documentation and program reviews from 2010. After conducting an initial environmental scan and literature review from 2010 a few things became clear. First, an enormous amount of money was spent on marketing the 2010 census and a program that gave small grants to local communities to get out the count (GOTC) locally was particularly effective. However, the funding that supported that effort came from 2010 stimulus funding that would not be available for 2020. Next, it became clear that public private partnerships were essential to GOTC efforts, particularly in hard-to-count communities. And while millions of dollars were invested in the Census Bureau's partnership program and there were over 250,000 documented partners, there was little data or metrics on which partnerships were actually effective in increasing response rates. Finally, the sheer magnitude of nonprofits, schools, churches, and businesses that engaged in the 2010 census meant that there was clearly interest in supporting GOTC efforts.

To try to make sense of these initial insights COIL teamed up with the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) and conducted a **randomized control trial** to assess the impact of national partnerships on the response rates of another household survey the Bureau conducted. In an effort to improve response rates and minimize door knocks the OES team made changes to the standard letter sent to respondents using behavioral insights and implementing a new design.

At the end of the study, the results were clear: the designed changes created no measurable impact on response rates and in some instances there was a slight negative impact. And while the results did not point to a positive impact on partnerships with national brands, they did provide further insight into the importance of trusted messengers in reaching the hardest to count populations. The team used these and other behavioral design insights to create an evidence-based, human-centered **downloadable toolkit** for trusted messengers and local communities. While small grants would not be made available to local communities this time around, these resources would provide communities and trusted messengers with tools to more effectively get out the count.

One of hundreds of Census Solution Workshops that took place across the country. *Photo Credit: Census Open Innovation Labs*

The team doubled down on the co-design process in and with local communities through the **Census Solution Workshop**. The workshop format was built off a design thinking framework but with an important distinction: those designing the solutions were also the intended audience. The COIL team initially hosted early pilots with an eye toward scalability and eventually put forth a train-the-trainer model that allowed thousands of communities and organizations to host them locally. This approach allowed the Bureau to go to where the people they wanted to reach were, create local buy in, and generate creative, community-based messaging in ways the federal government simply could not. "The basic business need was that we needed to get people talking about the Census. We also know that people needed to feel it impacted their community and so we deviated from the way we traditionally partnered with organizations [so that] people could create the messages that would resonate with their own communities," notes Lorena Molina-Irizarry, COIL's Operations Director.
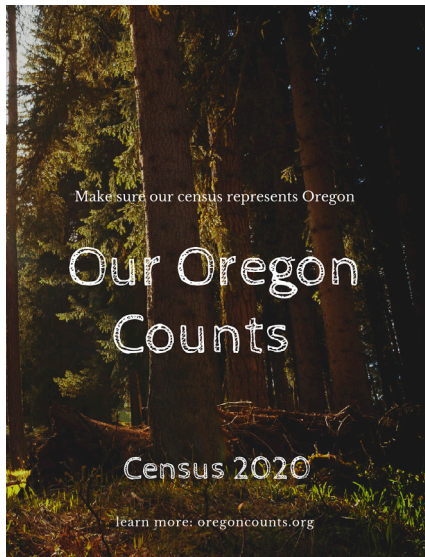
Image Credits: Census Open Innovation Labs

Building on those early successes, COIL expanded its team and its reach. As 2020 neared the team hired 14 new staff members including designers, developers, and digital strategists and launched a new program. Creatives for the Count, led by Mara Abrams and Molina-Irizarry, focused on engaging filmmakers, designers, and developers across the country to "open source" content creation. This program was meant to provide an opportunity for the creative community to create the kinds of idiosyncratic memes, gifs, and other shareable media that the Census Bureau could not and would not make. Hundreds of "create-a-thons" across the country and online resulted in so much content that the Bureau partnered with Rock the Vote to create a **repository to host it all**.

As the 2020 Census was underway, the team furthered its open source ethos when it launched a prize competition through Challenge.gov. By the end of the program the Census Bureau had received hundreds of video submissions in 12 languages that focused on some of the hardest to count populations across the country including tribal, rural, and urban regions. Leveraging the existing open innovation policy infrastructure was critical to the success of the program. "So much of how the government interacts with the public often involves oversight and regulation. Having the appropriate authority [through the America Competes Act] and Challenge. gov made it so much easier to interact with the people we were trying to reach," Lorena notes.

Showing the Value of Government Data: The Opportunity Project

A series of informal conversations in early 2015 between staffers at the White House Domestic Policy Council (DPC), the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) about the troves of data agencies were releasing as part of the broader open data efforts being championed by the Obama Administration would lead to one of the longest lasting open data programs in the federal government of the last decade: The Opportunity Project. Earlier that year, HUD released a series of neighborhood level datasets that provided insight into local economic opportunities. By 2016, a number of collaborative projects between the White House and federal agencies—including the **College Scorecard** and **Hack the Pay Gap**—were creating new ways of engaging the public by making government data more accessible and usable.

The Opportunity Project (as it would come to be known) built off this early momentum and in the spring of 2016 enlisted twelve tech teams—including LinkedIn, Airbnb, Fitbit, and Zillow—for a six week sprint that did x. By the end of the year Drew Zachary,the project's lead,knew the initiative was rare in its ability to create meaningful outcomes with the private sector and in its appeal across the political spectrum. Everyone seemed to like it. But likeability wasn't going to be enough to survive the chaotic Presidential transition of 2016. Resilience and adaptability would also be critical if the program was going to make it. "The only chance for this program to survive was for there to be continuity—and that meant me staying on," Drew notes. U.S. Chief Data Scientist DJ Patil asked the Department of Commerce to take the program on and it would eventually find its home at the Census Bureau.

Once at the Census Bureau it became clear that simultaneously innovating on and institutionalizing the initiative would prove to be more than just finding a budget and departmental home. It also meant building and maintaining a culture of experimentation in an agency known for its centuries-old bureaucracy. "I've been obsessive about maintaining the culture ... of experimenting, adapting, and letting people pilot things with us," Drew says.

It was ultimately this attention to the unconventional details—showing not just telling, laser sharp focus on culture, and transparent metrics—that has allowed the program to have such staying power. To date, the project has worked on 40 problem statements, with 25 federal agencies and departments, using over 295 data sets, and alongside 1500 participants who've built 135 products ranging from interactive games and mapping solutions to AI. One metric the team is particularly proud of: many of the volunteer tech teams return for future sprints.

MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

After months building public facing programs and initiatives the COIL team found itself in an ironic predicament. At the heart of all their work was an unwavering commitment to centering people and prioritizing user needs—sometimes at the expense of policy or process. This approach within the Bureau, however, was complicated by an equally unwavering commitment to a strict survey methodology process that characterized the culture there. Furthermore, the decennial Census with its massive scale, operated with a rigid hierarchy that could make receiving and integrating feedback challenging and in some cases impossible. These long-standing cultural norms made it difficult for the team to initially break through and there was a kind of agency "immune system" response that occurred in those early months that made it hard for this novel unit to be fully absorbed and integrated.

Challenges notwithstanding, team members who had been at the agency the longest provided critical insights that allowed for important course corrections.

- Resistance to new initiatives was at least in part a kind of innovation fatigue from years of "transformation efforts." In other words, initial skepticism toward new ways of doing things was in some ways par for the course and it was up to the new team to accommodate those concerns.

- Performance reviews matter. While there was senior leadership buy-in for the new approaches COIL was bringing to the agency, most managers and front line workers did not have, for example, user research and feedback as part of their training or integrated in any meaningful way into their performance reviews. Without that it was just one more thing the 8th floor (management) was asking staffers to take on with no perceived benefit.

- Push back from management was in fact a reluctance to manage what they did not understand. "If you don't know the work, you can't manage the work and so you are reluctant to implement the work—people feel vulnerable when they don't understand or know that they will be successful in managing it," one staffer shared.

- There were in fact a number of "early adopters" within the agency that had both institutional knowledge and understood the importance of new approaches. They would be critical in integrating the human and public centered approach the COIL team was championing.

These early insights led to perhaps the most important insight of all: people-centered also means the people with whom you work. They recalibrated and focused on a strategy to win hearts-and-minds of their colleagues in an effort to more actively engage and court others outside the core team. Team members began presenting at almost every meeting they were invited to attend and sought out opportunities to present in the farthest corners of the bureaucracy. While initially resistant to what at times felt like a diversion of limited resources, these meetings became crucial for helping career staffers see how the work COIL was doing could directly benefit their own. In other words, the team made it relevant. The internal marketing also helped identify the early adopters who could be internal champions for the work and provide the institutional knowledge essential to pushing new initiatives through. Invitations were then extended to anyone interested in seeing for themselves how a co-design workshop could add value to their work. This show and tell approach provided opportunities for staffers to get to know the work and the team in a non-threatening way—and on their own terms.

In spite of the increased visibility of COIL internally, there many managers did not understand how agile and human-centered design methods worked. And they were often the critical linchpins in agency-wide adoptions. To address this, COIL developed a "User-Centered Methods" training and certificate program for managers. The training was based off of the course curriculum Chief Innovation Officer Kyla Fullenwider had taught at Johns Hopkins University, but was right-sized to work with a manager's schedule and existing obligations. Importantly, the month-long program also provided learning credits. While not exhaustive by any means, the program provided a shared vocabulary and created a space for managers to ask questions they might otherwise feel uncomfortable asking in the context of a meeting. At a minimum, it reduced hostility and decreased the innovation fatigue that was hamstringing so many efforts. And in some cases, it changed the way people worked.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 The Census Open Innovation Labs identified a problem but did not go directly to identifying solutions, instead they began to research the outputs, challenges and benefits of public-private partnerships. How did this extra step affect their insights and their eventual solution? How might jumping to solutions actually slow down innovation?

2 Supporting and training managers and attaching value to new learning is an important way to gain momentum "from the middle." What are some other methods one could use to invite change in new places?

3 When building new technologies, it's easy to focus on one type of user. Working in the government, COIL began to see the value of gaining insights from internal users as well. How do we think about the end users and system implementers when we're building new systems? Why or why not?

4 Many of the techniques used throughout this section point to catalyzing change by fostering technological inclusion:

A. How do you personally ensure that the technology you are building is inclusive and addresses a broad range of user needs and constraints?

B. How do you personally ensure that the technology you are building is ethical? Who can you reach out to help you determine that?

C. Are there ways to build a questioning framework into your process?

Countering the Field of Dreams Fallacy: Launching the Social & Behavior Change Team at the Millennium Challenge Corporation

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FEDERAL AGENCY

The Millennium
Challenge Corporation

DATE RANGE

2015–Present

AN EVIDENCE-BASED ETHOS

Development and foreign aid in the United States have long been fraught with accusations of waste and lack of transparency. It was in this context that President George W. Bush called for a new kind of development in 2002, one with more accountability and transparency. By 2004, there was bi-partisan support from Congress for the founding of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) whose mandate would be to "reduce poverty through economic growth." The new agency would carry out its mission by focusing on good governance, country ownership and implementation, measurable results, and a commitment to transparency. The primary means of engaging countries would be through a compact process that requires selected countries to develop their own priorities and implementation plans for both poverty reduction and economic growth.

Importantly, this work would also be supported by a rigorous **monitoring and evaluation** (M&E) process and ethos to track and evaluate the impact of MCC programs and investments. It was this focus on a rigorous M&E process that initially placed quantitative data at the forefront of how MCC tracked the efficacy of its work. The attention to an evidence base and measurable outcomes was itself an innovation at the time of the agency's founding.

MCC spent its first decade effectively getting its feet on the ground—starting and completing the first generation of compacts. But by 2015, the agency was ready to begin thinking about how to innovate and improve on its work. MCC's M&E process in that first generation of compacts surfaced roadblocks that were affecting the impact of the agency's work including one that the agency could act on: breaking down internal silos. The M&E process also showed that while MCC investments were successful with building quality infrastructure, the investments did not adequately account for human behavior, and therefore did not fully achieve anticipated results.

THE FIELD OF DREAMS FALLACY

When Alison Montgomery arrived at MCC in 2015 as part of the AAAS Fellows program she was part of a new wave of efforts focused on breaking down silos within the agency. An anthropologist by training, she was initially brought in as a qualitative methods advisor to ensure the agency could collect robust qualitative data. Fellows were detailed to two departments within the agency, spending half their time with one and half with the other. The division of labor was intentional: by placing fellows in two departments they could act as connectors and collaborators across departments.

By 2017, Alison had teamed up with her direct supervisor, an agency veteran and fellow social scientist, to expand on the work she started as a fellow. The career staffer had been making the case for years that MCC made too many assumptions about human behavior. Specifically, just because they built an electrical grid or new road doesn't necessarily mean local people will use it. Alisonhe called this the "field of dreams fallacy". She argued that qualitative research could be rigorous and valid, and was well-suited for triangulation with quantitative data to better understand human behavior. About five years after first discussing the value Social and Behavior Change (SBC), the agency funded the workstream and the SBC Team was born.

That fall, Alison and her supervisor assembled a team, hired SBC contractors, and socialized SBC within MCC, focusing on how integrating an understanding of human behavior—inside MCC and with external beneficiaries—could improve their colleagues' existing work. They set about creating an employee survey to get a sense of existing views and how staffers perceived human behavior impacting their work. They also wanted to identify potential early adopters and what they liked about the SBC approach as well as understanding the concerns of naysayers.

The Social Behavioral Change team launch at MCC. *Photo Credit: Alison Montgomery*

"SBC is a process involving individuals, communities, or societies that enables them to adopt and sustain positive behaviors. It does so by identifying the various factors that influence people's behavior and addressing these through interventions most likely to be effective."

LAUNCHING FOR LONGEVITY

Following the soft launch, Alison and her boss hosted a launch event and kickoff week to help answer the question that had repeatedly come up: Addressing social and behavioural change is great in theory but how are you actually going to do it? To further engage colleagues in the work and provide opportunities to meet the team, they hosted a series of presentations and brown bags, and shared explanatory materials. And to translate theory into practice, program leads from the first two collaborating teams presented on the impact of their work together. Practical examples were critical to show what collaborating with the SBC team could do and also helped mitigate any fears and risk aversion that may have prevented teams from engaging with the social and behavioral change group That is, these early adopter country teams made it "ok" for others to follow suit. To date, the team continues to build their case internally by marking country team milestones with agency-wide events.

The internal marketing efforts have had real benefits for the SBC Team including ongoing engagements with six additional country teams. Their team has continued to build on initial efforts, cutting across internal silos by engaging more fellows, staff, political appointees, and compact development teams in their work. They now have onboarding tools for new staff that include modules on the Social Behavior Change team model, methods, and integration into Compact investments. They are currently working on including SBC training as part of all new compacts. This sometimes requires capacity building on the part of the SBC team but they see that as integral to the work they do. "In order for this work to be successful at MCC, our colleagues need to understand how integrating social and behavior change into their work is not just another bureaucratic hurdle, but rather is a way to ensure that their designs—engineering, education, utility reform, etc.—have the impact that they desire. This means building knowledge on both the basics of SBC and how our team can work in tandem with them."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 If you build it, they will come. Why does this idea persist so often when working with technology? How can designing with a focus on humans, aka Human-Centered Design, counter this thinking?

2 Tech at the table: When it became time to build a team, why was it important to include people who understood how to implement technology as well as high-level strategists?

3 Creating sustainable and long-lasting social and behavioral change in the beneficiaries of a service? Goes hand in hand with breaking down organizational silos. What benefits can you see to creating these?

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A Checklist for Culture Change Design at the Office of the Surgeon General

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FEDERAL AGENCY

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, The Office of the Surgeon General

DATE RANGE

2014–2016

INTRODUCTION

As the first Chief Design Officer for the Office of the Surgeon General (OSG), Ann Kim's role was to bring a human-centered lens to the work of "the Nation's doctor." As a leading voice for public health, the Surgeon General informs not only policy but broader culture. It became quickly apparent to Ann that in order to enable this type of external impact, the team needed to shift their approach to the work. So much of OSG's public work happened behind the scenes, and their effectiveness was in large part a consequence of the culture that the Surgeon General's team created. Here are four lessons the team learned to help drive the culture change.

1 PRIORITIZE A SHARED SPACE

In an era of working from home it is easy to assume most things can be done remotely. But a shared space allows for informal connections, loose affiliations, and, most importantly, a kind of collaboration that reinforces the sense of team that is frankly hard to do over Zoom. And it can act as a hub of activity for people that might not otherwise meet. "When I arrived at HHS they already had a space, a kind of war room type space where everyone worked. The IDEA Lab was a hub that was both a place for innovative minds to gather as well as a symbol of the innovative work they were sparking across HHS," Kim notes.

2 KEEP AN OPEN-DOOR POLICY

The OSG office kept an open door policy—literally. In a world of closed doors and cubicles this kind of openness looked and felt different. It also meant that young staffers would "just appear" and offer to help. But this openness and ease of access extended beyond their office and into their leadership ethos. "The Surgeon General's philosophy was to treat everyone the same—whether the front office or a Secretary, whether uniform or nonuniform. Part of the reason why we were able to create networks so quickly was because someone junior was able to have face-time with the Surgeon General and others on the team. I recognize not everyone is going to be that leader but I think openness was key [to our success as a team]."

3 FIND YOUR INSTITUTIONAL COMPASSES

Creating a new program or initiative is often the easy part. Institutionalizing something, on the other hand, can consume the process and limited resources of a young team. In 2016, as the OSG leadership team began pushing forward initiatives like their Turn the Tide opioid campaign, it became clear that much of the work was going to be "getting it through the system." Ann estimates they spent as much of 70% of their overall effort, in the pre-launch of the campaign, navigating within and between agencies: "You are running through a maze that you can't see," she notes. But navigating the bureaucracy became much less a burden when Will—a young agency staffer—showed up and offered to help, much of it because he was inspired by the open and welcoming style of leadership of the Surgeon General. Will had started his career as an intern at HHS and had a fluency and knowledge of the agency that allowed him to find pathways for the work that Ann's team was trying to push through. While the initial work was creative, much of their effort involved the kinds of inter-agency collaboration that can stymie a new initiative.

3 GET OUTSIDE (AND BRING PEOPLE WITH YOU)

Ann brought her background as a designer to all of the work she led at the OSG. As the office of "the Nation's doctor," she felt it was critical for the OSG to reimagine how it interacted with the public. This started by designing new ways of engaging the people they were aiming to serve. OSG prioritized approaching engagement through human-centered design. For instance, as part of their opioid work they talked to healthcare providers, patients, and families to inform the outputs. And it wasn't just "the design team"—everyone was involved with the research, including the Surgeon General. That looked like spending time talking to Flint families in their living rooms or talking to patients in residence at an addiction treatment center. Getting outside and getting a sense of how things are on the ground—from the perspective of an individual, family, or community—creates a foundation for your work.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1   How would you create a shared and safe space in
your department to attract people like Will?

2   What are the challenges of cultivating a shared and
safe space in your agency or department? How do
you think you can mitigate those challenges?

3   If your team needed to create and push new initiative through
your agency or department, where would you start? Where
would you likely be stopped? How would you navigate
with or around that complexity in your organization?

4   The third point on the checklist talks about how principles of human-
centered design were brought to the table to create organizational
change—not just impact for a singular product. How would you
personally create a similar culture in your team or agency?

Surgeon General Vivek Murthy prioritized getting outside the building and meeting directly with people. *Photo Credit: Ann Kim*