



New Weekly Column Explores Innovation in the Public Sector

CAP Launches 'Innovation for the Public Good'

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We see innovation in action every day in our lives. Hybrid cars, smartphones, search engines, and ingenious medical devices have transformed all our lives through innovation. And innovation is not just technological—Starbucks has transformed the experience of drinking coffee and Home Depot did the same for home improvement.

But it's hard to find equivalent innovations in the public sector. Where are the transformative ideas that have changed the face of schooling, or the way governments help create jobs? Too often, public-sector institutions stick with doing things the way they always have, despite mounting need for innovation in government.

We urgently need better ways to tackle persistent underachievement in our schools and homelessness on our streets. And we must develop innovative solutions to developing issues such as clean energy needs and the expanding epidemic of obesity. The current fiscal situation makes our need for innovation more urgent than ever. Most federal agencies are facing cuts of 11 percent over the next decade.

Unfortunately, the public sector finds it hard to innovate. Few new ideas emerge and those that do often struggle for adequate funding in a world of fixed formulas and entrenched special interests. Even when innovative ideas are effective at addressing pressing social problems, few ever expand to scale; they generally remain isolated at the fringes.

What does innovation in the public sector actually mean? Who is doing it well? And what should agency leaders do to promote innovation? These are among the questions this series will endeavor to answer.

In the coming weeks we will explore why innovation is so hard in the public sector, especially when seeking to tackle social issues. We will identify the five key ingredients necessary for a strong system of innovation to emerge in the public sector. And

we will offer concrete examples of where each is being done well—here in the United States and internationally.

The series will conclude with practical advice for agency leaders who want to promote innovation, including a diagnostic tool to help agencies develop an effective action plan focused on their areas of greatest need.

We believe that innovation in government can transform the way that we tackle social issues and public needs, just as private-sector innovation has transformed so much about the way we live our lives. We believe that American schools can once again be among the best in the world, and that the richest country in the world can genuinely eradicate homelessness. America can lead the way in clean energy. It can ensure that obesity does not become the rich country's equivalent of malaria.

But all of these goals require an enormous boost in the public sector's innovative capacity. We look forward to exploring with you over the next several months how to effectively nurture innovation in the public sector.

This is the first installment of a new weekly column on government innovation produced by CAP's Doing What Works team in partnership with the Bellwether Education Partners and the Young Foundation, as part of the "Innovation for the Public Good" series, which is supported by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Next week's installment from "Innovation for the Public Good" will explore why innovation does not occur naturally in the public sector.

