

Beyond the *Aha!* Moment: 6 Ways to Make Transformation Stick

Innovation isn't just a light bulb turning on — that *a-ha!* moment when everything changes. Most of the time it's a lot less dramatic, and a whole lot more work. It's the small tweaks, technology enhancements and process changes that are actually truly transformative.

In a recent GovLoop virtual event titled [Your Innovation How-to: Get Real About Transformation](#), experts from government and industry described their strategies for driving meaningful organizational transformation.

1. Standardize Your Processes

Government can be fragmented, said Jacqueline Ponti-Lazaruk, Chief Innovation Officer for the Rural Development Innovation Center at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. When her agency went to overhaul guaranteed lending programs, “each program was grown and nurtured in a different part of the mission area,” she said.

For transformation to take place, everyone needed to be rowing in the same direction.

“We literally said, ‘If we started from scratch, what would we do?’” she said. “We ended up with one regulation, one set of policies ... one document that was virtual, that carried from the time you began to review an application, all the way to the time when a loan committee voted and one of the administrators gave authority to execute the loan out in the field.”

2. Take a Step Back

To get away from ineffective, rigid processes — “one way sharing of information, one way of delivering the services” — agencies need to think in broad terms, said Angy Peterson, Vice President for the Granicus Experience Group.

Innovation starts with “a holistic overhaul of how services are delivered, how information is delivered, how departments work together, how information is collected,” she said.

“There's a lot of data within digital communications that can help program offices better understand the people they're serving,” she said. Focusing on the holistic flow of information offers “a path to really connecting communications with experience,” she said.

3. Build Trust

People are naturally change-averse: For the most part, they want to do things the way they have always done them. So to drive meaningful transformation, you need to build trust.

“The people leading the transformation effort have to be a trusted entity, and have to be perceived as knowledgeable enough to connect the dots on what needs to be changed — even if they're not coming in as an expert, they're not from that specific program area,” Peterson said.

In the effort to earn trust, “a perceived lack of value is often the biggest hurdle,” she said. If people “don't necessarily believe that it's going to amount to anything, that contributes a lot to the emotion and the energy that people will put into a transformation project.”

Thus, leaders can win trust by demonstrating the tangible day-to-day benefits of a proposed transformation effort.

4. Scrutinize Your Bureaucracy

Federal agencies often get mired in unnecessarily complex processes. As you revisit processes, look for processes that have outlived their purpose.

"I'm a big believer in eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy as you go," Ponti-Lazaruk said.

In USDA, "there were five paper copies of every document," she said. As part of the streamlining effort, she looked to get rid of redundant memos and certification forms, paper processes that added bulk without generating value.

"I'd say to them, 'Why aren't we just taking one digital copy and sticking it in a virtual file?'" she said. In the modernized version, "you can put everything on a screen and they're certifying and they're signing that electronic application," she said.

5. Get People Working Together

It's hard to advance innovation when you're looking at culture, strategy and technology as separate buckets. True transformation requires all these pieces to come together, and that starts with bringing the people together, Peterson said.

"Being able to bring as many people along as possible in that process ... is really critical," she said. "Stop and let people share about what has or hasn't worked, where there are pain points, where they're not. That is a way to help people create a shared sense of understanding, a shared sense of what's possible."

That big tent should encompass the widest range of stakeholders. "We're always trying to make sure that we're thinking of it not just from a public-facing impact perspective, but also making sure that the staff are bought in, and that their day to day is considered in whatever kind of process we're creating," she said.

6. Automate Where Possible

USDA's Rural Development Innovation Center has three main components: data analytics and evaluation, strategic engagement and regulations management. That's a lot of moving parts. To drive effective change, the agency has looked to automation technologies as a way to drive efficiency and free up talent.

People used to worry that automation would cost them their jobs. Today the script has flipped, Ponti-Lazaruk said.

"Now that we have fewer staff through budget reduction, people are looking for things that will help them take some of those other functions off their plate, so they can concentrate on the more detailed work," she said.



[For more insights, watch the on-demand version of the full event.](#)

