

Introduction

Our world is moving at a lightning speed. And, it's no illusion: with technological advancements, a global economy, cultural shifts, and new generational perspectives, it's no wonder that emerging ideas, products, and policies seem to introduce daily disruptions. Commonly referred to as innovations, we witness, experience, and adopt these changes as consumers everyday. What's challenging, however, is the ability to embrace or even catalyze an innovation within our professional lives. Today, all stakeholders—from intern to chairman of the board—are prioritizing innovation.

Beyond the buzzword lies opportunity for disciplined creativity. We cannot simply say we want to innovate, we must understand why we should innovate, build a culture of innovation, fail forward and learn and grow from our attempts.

What is innovation?

Let's explore the four basic steps to innovation to guide you as you begin your journey.

1. Understand.

Listen with curiosity.

Understand the value you offer to audiences—and what can be added to improve service delivery.

Listen with empathy.

Walk in your audience's shoes without any assumptions or expectations—here is where you find the pleasant surprises!

Listen with intent.

Get started with your listening initiative and map out your mission, program by program.

2. Identify.

Assess the challenges.

You cannot manage what you cannot measure. So, developing a reliable tracking system of challenges is critical.

Prioritize the challenges.

Who are you inviting to the table to identify the challenges with the biggest return on innovation?



Be open minded in your selection.

Isolate the challenges.

Avoid “analysis paralysis.” Start small so you can gain some quick-wins and encourage your organization to support the initiative.

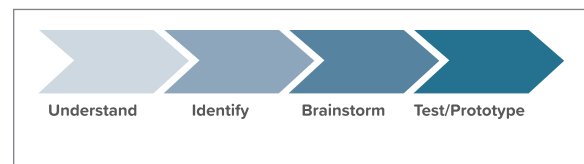
3. Brainstorm.

Brainstorm together.

When cross-functional and unlikely teammates are paired up to brainstorm solutions, they are more likely to find novel connections—creating more value for the organization.

Brainstorm bravely.

Set ground rules that encourage curious and open thinking. “Blue-sky” brainstorming allows your organization to truly explore the possibilities.



Innovation Process

Brainstorm nimbly.

Don't get stuck on the finer details, and don't wait. Funding cycles need not determine operation cycles.

4. Prototype/test.

Assess feasibility.

Ask yourself: Will your innovative idea work?

Identify the mechanics of who-what-where-when-how (i.e., do you have the needed funding or capacity to execute, etc).

Determine viability.

Ask yourself: Should we do this? Does it stand strong against the competition to add value and maximize impact?

Anticipate desirability.

Sometimes our audiences don't know what they want or what's possible (think: UBER), but we take a calculated risk with our innovations that pivots us within a future context.

Who is innovating?

Take a look below for inspiration and motivation!

Case study: Develop a technology-assisted home food delivery initiative.

Problem to solve: How to enable home-bound vulnerable older adults to leverage available community resources to access needed, nutritious supplemental foods.

To learn more, [click here](#).

Case study: Modernize the congregate meal program (a pop up cafe concept: Encore Cafe.

Problem to solve: How to address decreasing participation at traditional congregate meal sites.

To learn more, [click here](#).

Case study: Forge new healthcare linkages and expand services across a statewide network

Problem to solve: How to improve quality, increase efficiency, and reduce the epidemic of older adult malnutrition.

To learn more, [click here](#).

Read the extended brief to learn more.

<https://nutritionandaging.org/briefs/>

RESOURCES

Delivering on the Promise of Nonprofits, Harvard Business Review: <https://hbr.org/2008/12/delivering-on-the-promise-of-nonprofits>

Creating High Impact Nonprofits, Stanford Social Innovation Review: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/creating_high_impact_nonprofits#

Design Thinking for Innovation, Coursera [University of Virginia]: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/uva-darden-design-thinking-innovation>