

Examples of Agile Governance

This document contains ten examples from around the world of governments applying the four agile principles (“Outcomes Over Results”, “Responding to Change Over Following a Plan”, “Participation Over Control”, and “Self-Organization Over Centralization”) to improve public services and public policy decisions. While each of these examples is listed under only one of the agile principles, it should be noted that each demonstrates elements from several or all of the four agile principles.

Outcomes Over Rules

“Governance should favor outcomes over rules-based compliance.”

Boston – Citywide Analytics

About: The Citywide Analytics Team is focused on using data and analytics to provide better services to the City of Boston. According to their [2015 Year in Review](#), the team has engaged in projects that have helped firefighters visualize building hazards before heading into a fire, teamed up with the Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics to create a snow removal monitoring app for the public, and created a data visualization tool (CityScore—detailed below) for the Mayor to better track the government’s performance of city services.

Project Example:

[CityScore](#): This app uses an algorithm to convey data categories from all over Boston, such as crime trends, graffiti removal stats, and EMS response times, as an easy to read single digit number.

- **Action:** The CityWide Analytics Team aggregates and displays metrics from departments across the city in an easy understand format.
- **Results:** The app was launched in January 2016. The Mayor’s Office claims that the score shown by CityScore will “allow the Mayor and his administration to **constantly evaluate** how well the City is doing and ensure that quality services are delivered to those who call Boston home.”

Danish Government – MindLab

About: The longest running government innovation lab, [MindLab](#) is a part of the Ministry of Business and Growth, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Employment, and the Odense Municipality. It also collaborates with the Ministry of Economic Affairs. The lab utilizes citizen and business input to create solutions to societal challenges.

Project Example:

[Improving Industry Codes to Improve Efficiency](#): MindLab, with the Danish Business Authority, realized that industry code classifications, required to record a business’ economic impact, were not intuitive and cumbersome, causing business owners to spend hours of their time determining which codes their different business activities fell under.

- **Action:** MindLab used qualitative methods and design measures to research users’ experience with the industry code classifications, consider governmental employees’ use of the codes, and develop an electronic industry code website. This website was **prototyped, tested, and improved based on stakeholders’ feedback**.
- **Results:** The project resulted in an intuitive website that used everyday language and examples to effectively assist business owners and authorities categorize economic data. According to a business case developed for the project, the new website was projected to **save companies and authorities DKK 24 million (\$4.2 million)** between 2011 and 2015. These gains are equivalent to **the investment delivering a full return 21 times**.

The project above is further detailed in [this report](#) about social innovation.

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US Federal Government – Lab @ OPM

About: The Lab@OPM is an innovative design team and practice space housed in OPM. The team focuses on solving complex problems within and across federal agencies by utilizing human-centered design principles. The lab also provides training sessions to federal staff to spread design centered thinking throughout the federal workforce. Their past projects include revamping the [USAJobs.gov website](https://www.usajobs.gov) and helping USDA improve the [National School Lunch Program](#) (below).

Project Example:

Improving Access to School Lunch: In an effort to make it easier for families to access the USDA's National School Lunch Program, which provides healthy low-cost or free meals to children from low-income families, the Lab@OPM worked with USDA officials to research the program requirements, better understand the needs of program users, and create an application process that reduces error and simplifies access to the program.

- **Action:** USDA and the Lab@OPM engaged in a year-long process of interviewing school officials and user families, reviewing regulations and policy guidance documents, **learning best practices** in application design, and **prototyping with parents** (the program's end users).
- **Results:** The agencies' efforts resulted in a **streamlined and simplified application** that should reduce human error in filling out the application. This application will play a key role in helping USDA reach its goal of reducing improper payments for the program from **15.8% (\$1.9 billion)** in 2015 to no more than **10% by school year 2019-2020**.

Responding to Change over Following Plan

“Governments should employ flexible action plans that can adapt to change”

Mexico City – Laboratorio Para La Ciudad (Lab for the City)

About: Created in 2013, Mexico City’s [Lab for the City](#) is the first innovation lab of its kind in Latin America. The lab was created as an office for civic innovation within the city government and has been tasked by the Mayor Miguel Ángel Mancera to create innovative, modern solutions to the challenges facing Mexico City’s 22 million residents. Working with a team of 20 people with diverse backgrounds in fields such as design, tech, economics, urban planning, architecture, and more, Gabriella Gomez-Mont (a former TED fellow and the lab’s director. Forbes Interview: onforb.es/1QQbhQJ) helps lead projects that improve the daily lives of Mexico City’s residents. Notably, the lab focuses on implementing private sector design and has **received guidance from Boston’s Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics**.

**Note: Because much of the lab’s website is in Spanish, I had to rely on media reports for details on the lab’s projects. I’ve linked to relevant articles below.*

Project Example:

[Improving Taxi Services](#): The reputation of Mexico City’s 100,000+ legitimate, registered taxi cabs was being tarnished by the actions of nearly 20,000 private taxi drivers who have been linked to heightened incidents of theft and violence against their passengers. This reputation has led to residents avoiding taxis altogether, contributing to heightened traffic and exacerbating city congestion.

- **Action:** [Code for Mexico City](#), a project created by the lab with help from Code For All, designed an app to help passengers avoid the risk of using illegitimate taxis. The app, Traxi, allows potential passengers to take a photo of the cab’s license plate. The photo is cross-referenced with government records to **check its legitimacy** and provide information to the user including whether the driver has been fined or if the car has passed its emissions tests. It also includes a **panic button** in case the passenger gets in trouble and allows the user to see **past riders’ experience** with the particular cabby.
- **Results:** The app seeks to **rebuild public trust** in taxi services and allows citizens to gain valuable information about their potential transportation. Doing so would save Mexico City residents time and money, as a study has found that 30% of the city’s congestion is caused by motorists seeking a place to park.

Participation Over Control

“Government should offer open and transparent collaboration with a wide range of citizens and interest groups.”

UK Government – Government Digital Services (Cabinet Office)

About: The [Government Digital Services](#) is a part of the Cabinet Office focused on bringing digital transformation to the UK Government. The office conducts a number of projects across agencies, focusing on user needs, [agile service delivery](#), and execution of projects a set of [design principles](#). Importantly, the office’s principles focus on constant improvement, iteration, and testing, including [A/B testing](#). The office is focused on projects such as [launching GOV.UK](#), an innovative platform for accessing government services, [redesigning benefits forms](#) to make them easier to understand, and adding thousands of names to the government’s list of organ donors (below).

Project Example:

One link—more than 350,000 Organ Donors: Noticing that people are more inclined to try out new things after successfully completing a transaction, the GDS began encouraging people to join the National Health Services (NHS) organ donation register after they’ve bought their tax disc via GOV.UK.

- **Action:** In partnership with the Cabinet Office Behavioral Insights Team, GSD developed eight different calls to action targeted to the million+ visitors to the tax disc “thank you” page. The **eight variants** appeared at random and the team worked with NHS to determine which was the most successful in attracting donor registrations.
- **Results:** Extrapolating over 12 months, **96,000 more people** will register with the optimized call to action compared with the original link, and in total over **350,000 people have registered** to donate via this one link.

US Government – OSTP’s Social and Behavioral Sciences Team

About: The Office of Science and Technology Policy’s (OSTP) Social and Behavioral Sciences Team (SBST) is a cross-agency team of experts focused on incorporating innovational technics from behavioral science and behavioral economics into Federal policies and programs. The group was founded in 2014 and codified by a White House Executive Order in September 2015. The group’s projects aim to achieve two broad goals: a) streamlining access to federal programs and b) improving government efficiency. The SBST’s [first Annual Report](#) details the group’s achievements over their first year of operation, 2015.

Project Example:

Promoting Retirement Security: Research has demonstrated that Servicemembers, who are not automatically enrolled in the TSP (the government’s employee retirement plan), were significantly less likely to save for retirement than civilian federal employees, who are automatically enrolled. In an effort to change this TSP, DOD, and the SBST teamed up to launch an email notification and information campaign aimed at non-enrolled Servicemembers.

- **Action:** SBST designed **eight email variants**, using behavioral insights. The team then sent 806,861 non-enrollees one of the eight versions of the email or no email at all, which was the prior practice.
- **Results:** The increase in enrollments due to emails, when compared to no email, translates into **4,930 additional TSP enrollments** and **\$1.3 million in additional savings** by Servicemembers in a single month.

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DOD has now committed to sending periodic emails at scale to Servicemembers about the benefits of participating in TSP.

Constitución, Chile – Elemental

About: In February 2010, an 8.8 magnitude earthquake hit Chile, followed soon after by a devastating tsunami. Leveling towns, these natural disasters killed more than 500 people. A quarter of these deaths occurred in the city of Constitución. Following the disasters, much of the town was leveled and left in desperate need of rebuilding. Realizing the scope and scale of the necessary rebuilding work, Andres Iacobelli, the recently appointed Minister of Housing, called in the Chilean social innovation and design firm Elemental, which he had helped to found in 2001.

Project:

Rebuilding [Constitución](#) (Link to Guardian Article): Elemental set to work creating a rebuilding plan through a process that united key industrial and governmental stakeholders while empowering citizenry to actively consider and decide on rebuilding options. To carry out their plan, the team created a Public-Private Partnership that formed an oversight board consisting of local government and industry representatives. The Chilean national government ceded all decision making authority for the rebuilding project to the oversight board. In addition, the team created a central public square that played host to public forums which elevated citizenry to the same level as governmental and industry officials.

- **Action:** Using their detailed research on local conditions and stakeholder input, the team used an **iterative design process** to create three proposals that were considered by the board and citizens. These proposals included: a) not rebuilding, b) building a tsunami barrier, and c) planting a forest to act as a “crash helmet” to absorb the impact of any future tsunamis.
- **Results:** While option c) was the most unconventional and would require the relocation of 100 families, it won the support of 94% of the town’s citizens in a local referendum. This was in part because of an economic impact study conducted by Elemental demonstrating its potential. This innovative option also aims to achieve several goals above and beyond rebuilding that can pay dividends for the citizens of Constitución: 1) Improving public infrastructure, 2) Manage floods, 3) Improve public space, and 4) Returning democratic access to the city’s waterfront.

The rebuilding project is also featured in [the report on social innovation](#) that details MindLab’s industry code project.

Boston – Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics

About: In effort to improve city services, the City of Boston, and Boston’s Mayor Martin Walsh, are taking a number of steps to integrate data, analytics, and technology into the government’s operations. [The Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics](#) (a city agency) in Boston was formed in 2010. It is a civic innovation group focused on four issue areas: Education, Engagement, the Streetscape (city design and structure), and Economic Development. The group has won plaudits for its most successful projects, which include [Discover BPS](#) (an app to let parents found out which schools their children are eligible for), [Citizens Connect](#) (an app that allows citizens to report potholes and city maintenance needs from their phones), and [Street Bump](#) (an app that collects data from citizens’ iPhones to identify potholes).

Notably, in “[City Accelerator: A Guide for Embedding Breakthrough Innovation in Local Government](#)”, Nigel Jacob, the Office of New Urban Mechanics’ co-founded, listed “Go Agile” as a core imperative of innovating in municipal governments.

Project Example:

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Citizens Connect: The City of Boston had maintained a 24-hour Hotline that allowed city residents to call in with requests and reports from around the city. In 2008, the city decided to capitalize on the growth of smart phones and to improve constituents' ability to contact the City Hall by creating a mobile app that mimicked the abilities of the hotline.

- Action: In partnership with a local technology firm, the city used **a collaborative and iterative design approach** to launch Citizens Connect for iPhones in 2009.
- Results: By 2014, **28% of all service requests** came through Citizens Connect. Additionally, a study has shown that citizens using Citizens Connect report at a slightly higher rate and cover a larger geographic range. The study also showed that **the app increased engagement** from younger, renter residents.

Self-Organization Over Centralization

“Governments should encourage and incorporate the self-organization made possible by technology.”

US Government – 18F Digital Services

About: [18F is a civic consultancy](#) within the Government Services Administration (GSA) made up of tech designers, developers, and product specialists. It was formed in the wake of the healthcare.gov disaster and now bundles its consultancy services to improve the digital services provided by states and federal agencies. The consultancy works with teams within government agencies to promote **Agile thinking, human-centered design**, and other **proven tech industry standards** to improve governments’ digital services.

Project Example:

[Analytics.usa.gov](#): In order to improve government transparency, 18F created an analytics portal to monitor and track user traffic to individual government websites. The site uses real-time data download from the government’s Google Analytics account, which collects data from participating websites. The website was unveiled by the Whitehouse during Sunshine Week as a Digital Analytics Dashboard and will be updated with information as more sites join the program.

- **Action:** Using tech industry technics, 18F **designed, created, and tested for usability** a government analytics portal that provides data and information on web traffic to select government websites.
- **Results:** Citizens and users now have access to real-time data on government web traffic, are able to capture digital government usage trends, and can **better understand how citizens interact with** their government online.

Dublin City Council – The Studio

About: [The Studio](#) was an innovation lab created by the Dublin City Council to foster innovation within municipal government and improve local services. The Studio was operational from 2010 – 2014 and was responsible for a number of projects aimed at increasing citizen involvement with the City Council and facilitating improved digital governmental services.

Project Example:

[Dublinked: Open Data](#): Launched in 2011, Dublinked offers public access to city data in areas such as transportation, planning, and the environment. It also provides an organizational link for the city’s four Local Authorities, universities and citizens to collaborate and provide new services. The website offers an easy to access platform for interested parties to query governmental data and enables the creation of services, such as mobile apps, based on the data to improve the lives of Dublin residents.

- **Action:** The Studio created a portal for **easy access to government data** and collaboration. The site boasts of hosting 252 data sets that are readily available for public access and use.
- **Results:** The opening up of Dublin’s government data has resulted in the **creation of dozens of new apps**. It has also allowed for citizens to access **real time information on public transportation services**.

Additional Resources:

- You may be interested in looking at [this map](#), created by Public & Collaborative NYC, that lists a number of innovation labs located around the world. Public & Collaborative NYC is a group created by Parsons DESIS Lab, of New School (in New York City), to help find innovative ways to improve New York City public services.