Case Studies in Policy and Design

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10 Things Public Policy Analysts Should Know about Design + 10 Things Designers Should Know about Public Policy

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100 Conversations

It's speed dating, for policy and design issues! Ten policymakers and ten designers will have short (3-5 minute) chats around ten topics related to design, governance, and innovation. Policy participants include Andrea Coleman, CEO of the Office of Innovation at the NYC Dept. of Education and Abby Wilson, Program Director of the Innovation Practice at the Office of Personnel Management in Washington, D.C. Designers include Bryan Boyer, recently of the Helsinki Design Lab and Hailey Brewer, Project Lead, Public Innovation Portfolio, IDEO. The Public Policy Lab's Chelsea Mauldin and Jennifer Rose will moderate. See the AIA online calendar for complete list of participants.

Ten Things **Public Policy Analysts** Should Know about Design	Ten Things **Designers** Should Know about Public Policy Analysis
Objective of the work	
Designers interpret, translate and permit communication for the intended audience, designers engage in a creative process aimed at making complex policy ideas, public processes and policy decisions visible or legible, comprehensible and usable; while design has visual elements, it is more than about style and is not an end in and of itself but a tool to solve a problem, provide solutions, address issues, and work toward a shared goal	Policy analysts use various quantitative and qualitative analyses, within the efficiency criterion of choice contextual paradigm, to support publicly elected and appointed administrative decision makers; the efficiency criterion of choice deems changes in goods allocation that make at least one person better off without making anyone worse off to be an acceptable standard for action; specific areas of analysis include finance/budget, management and urban planning
Nature of the work process	
An iterative, multi-disciplinary and collaborative process involving systems analysis, critical thinking and feedback to arrive at its target; translating and simplifying complex information into visual forms to reach broader audiences	Various quantitative and qualitative social science research methodologies, the most conventional methodology involving a question, a literature survey, a working hypothesis and related data analyses, often of a statistical nature; policy analysts often conduct an external systems or environmental assessment of issues as part of policy development and analysis
Values	
Since the objective of design is communication, design tends to focus on the end user of the information, which in the public setting are people within various communities at various scales; this focus on the end user can also support forward-looking participatory input gathering methods	Efficiency analysis and efficiency criterion of choice (Pareto, Coase, Tiebout et al.) not only reflect the reality of government as balancer of competing infinite needs and finite resources, they also reflect values; government must reflect and be accountable to many "users" whose interests exist in tension
Politics → Government	
Politics and the real nature of an agency's constituency may be wholly new to the designer; helping him/her understand the political context will increase the chances the resulting design will be usable	The policy process occurs within a political context; while politics may appear to be "evil" and politicians "self-aggrandizing", politics is the underlying reality for government and the civic conversation so just as policy analysts need to understand politics, so too do designers working with policy analysts; the multiplicity of stakeholders that arises from the realities of politics increases the difficulty in identifying workable solutions and renders policy implementation as hard as, if not harder than, policy development
Government	
Designers think about the audience of a given policy in design/communication terms and, as a result, may create additional options policy analysts hadn't thought of to make improvements to the policy on behalf of the user/audience; thus, on a design project, policy analysts need to be open to new ways of doing things and distinguish between new ideas that are only unfamiliar as opposed to new ideas that have real obstacles.

Policy change, once adopted, requires implementation, which is not always the easier of the two; design can help government achieve its stated goals by helping the public obtain its goods and services with more clarity and efficiency and through a more positive experience | Public work is powerful, but laws and practices to protect the public fisc may constrain certain practices in design and may limit the expression of issues, the identification of solutions and the manner of implementation including the application of design; what you are familiar with in the private sector is not always appropriate for the public sector; yet, there is much opportunity for creative thought

As designers move government from the traditional authorship model of communication to the participatory model focused on service, public costs incurred as a result of a communication's ability to increase participation in a service may need to be balanced with other stakeholder interests, potential limiting aspects of the message |
Issues of scale	
Within the civic entity: designers can help policy analysts understand how broader scale policies relate to or translate into more fine grained impacts and can help them avoid inconsistencies between the scales within the civic entity.	Among civic entities: though designers are comfortable working at different scales, understanding intergovernmental spatial issues from legal, finance and systems perspectives will help them better understand the appropriate user/audience and related message for communication; government plays several roles in any issue area and there may be multiple levels of government involved as well so that government's role in a particular issue area will determine the nature of the design approach it will support
Audience	
While there will always be more than one audience, with corresponding differences in messages, for any policy issue/decision, the design field's current trend is toward a participatory model focused on service and away from the traditional authorship model focused on form—that means the design exercise will pull toward the individual, a focus with which public policy analysts may not familiar.

Any piece of communication could look an infinite number of ways; the correct way will depend on the audience in question and the desired effect; thus, defining the intended audience and the desired effect at the beginning of the process is the most important step to making impactful design | The policy analyst must estimate the fiscal and/or management impact of designers' effective communication at the audience level to make sure that increasing communication efficiency and effectiveness also increases programmatic efficiency and effectiveness in a way that is consistent or balanced with government's need to balance competing needs and resources |
| **Communication** | |
| Design is communication, and designers communicate images, environments, things and systems.
Design can help clarify the intended message by translating and simplifying complex information into visual forms that reach broader audiences

Thinking about the audience of a given policy in terms of design communication may help analysts in the policy formation and implementation stages because designers can help the communication **feel like** the desired effect

Policy analysts working with the hidden legal, operational and financial complexity need to consciously and continually reveal such complexity in their work to increase the chances that a
designer can communicate the complexity to the eventual audiences | The designer can look holistically for ways to improve the systems that government uses for its mission and pull government clients out of the details to see who the actual user of the communication is—it is likely the public and not the government

Research the substance of the government client's work because they may take for granted what would enrich the public to know, go behind the conventional and popular expressions of public policy issues in order to understand the hidden complexities themselves and to help make policy makers communications more meaningful and impactful |
Value and values	
While the value of design may be hard to quantify/qualify (UK Design Council has estimate a rate of return at 15%), designers should be paid for their work	Efficiency analysis and the efficiency criterion of choice represent values that support the complex balancing system that is government but may become at odds with personally-held values
A little more detail about the work	
The government client should put care and attention into a comprehensive and responsible "design brief" for the designer, delineating social/soft content (user group, functions, etc.) as well as hard performance criteria (codes, materials, sizes etc.), being clear about project time, budget and any other parameters, notifying the designer in writing with as much advance notice as possible when these parameters change; if project needs are unclear, best to start with just a scoping phase.

The client should identify a point person to handle reviews and edits for the designer and obtain ALL relevant reviews at concept, and pre-final phases so work of the team is not wasted; give the designer direct (not unlimited!) access to the ultimate decision-maker because subordinates can convey conceptual edits very badly yielding waste | When an analyst finishes a project that involved articulating a researchable question, reviewing relevant literature, identifying relevant data that was likely not created for purposes of research and scrubbing it, developing the model, running the model, interpreting the results, identifying policy recommendations supported by the data and then writing it all up for eventual peer review, the step of thinking about how to translate the work for a non-peer audience does seem daunting and yet analysts do the work for the purpose of educating others in the civic conversation.

Government clients may not be experienced with design and thus may not know how to be a client of design services; if you cannot locate the experienced design client, help your client understand what you have to offer and why it will help their mission. |

Log Rolling in Our Time. *Policy, Meet Design* is the fourth event in Town+Gown's ongoing exploration of *design*. The first event, *Design: Just What the Heck Is It?,* on October 17, 2012, explored the many meanings of design and included a case study project at the New York City Department of Probation (DOP) that was informed by a series of design/research projects that ultimately led to the repurposing of DOP's waiting rooms into resource hubs in connection with its Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NeON) program. The second, *When Does Design Begin and End?,* a Town+Gown symposium event on March 14, 2013, used this case study project once more to explore how design-based research methodologies and techniques turn data into knowledge in a cyclical process that includes policy recommendations, implementation and evaluation. Mapping social indicator data, an analytical methodology on its own, can also help inform other quantitative and qualitative social science methodologies. Resulting policy recommendations that require translation into physical space then tap into the traditional design-related disciplines of architecture, engineering and interior design. Service design, which can focus on interior physical spaces and all other forms of communication, facilitates associated reforms in service delivery, the traditional domain of program management analysis.

The third event, *Looking Ahead to NYCxDesign 2014*, on May 21, 2013, during NYCxDesign 2013, the city's first "design week", continued to explore the meanings of design in a way that brought some of the engineering disciplines, as designers, into the design conversation. The event also discussed how the city's design-related academic institutions and government can support the design sector of the local economy, in particular, focusing on pedagogical programming to integrate basic business and entrepreneurial skills with the design curriculum and ways to connect the design programs with New York's other economic sector businesses, developing city-wide academic partnerships. The event concluded with a discussion about how city agencies use design in their work, cataloging design resources within government and identifying challenges that lay ahead for the next administration.

Today's Conversation. In the lead-up to NYCxDesign 2013, it was suggested that the City "become a much smarter client of design" through "a collective effort to implement better

design citywide."[1] In addition to building channels for more design at agencies through budgetary and procurement changes and increasing design awareness at city agencies, more specific suggestions included policymakers focusing on user access and ease of use when implementing policy decisions, letting the preferences of users drive design decisions in addition to those of policy makers, and integrating the public into preliminary design processes (not just end-stage approvals).

Building design, infrastructure design and urban design are design fields familiar to public agency practitioners that directly participate in the operation of the city's capital program and city planning processes. These fields are less familiar to those agency practitioners that directly participate in the delivery of public services or goods funded by the expense budget, even though they are delivered in, on or through capital-funded built environment artifacts. Even less familiar to most public agency practitioners, regardless of what budget component they work in, are the allied design fields—interior design, communications design, service design and industrial design. The preceding chart—10 things public policy analysts should know about design and 10 things designers should know about public policy analysis—provides the foundation for a cross-disciplinary conversation to help both sides reach across the divide and increase cross-disciplinary collaborations.

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[1] Center for an Urban Future, *Growth by Design*, June 2011, p. 25.