



# Add Some “Innovation” to Your Teaching

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Local governments are increasingly challenged to adopt new practices and develop innovative approaches to serving citizens in a shifting environment with reduced resources. Despite the importance of innovation, it is not clear that the topic receives much explicit attention in courses on local government management. In *Academic Matters* in April, 2008, I noted that there are two paths to innovation: adopting ideas developed elsewhere and inventing new approaches within the organization. There must also be incentives to encourage innovation and an organizational culture that values and supports change. These topics are key components for a class session on innovation in a survey course on local government management or for organizing a specialized course.

Readings for a single class session could include a review of the factors related to adoption of innovations such as Richard Kearney’s examination of reinventing government adoptions that appeared in *The 2005 Municipal Year Book*. The dynamics and implications of inventing of new approaches is introduced in Sanford Borins’ “Loose Cannons and Rule Breakers, or Enterprising Leaders” that appeared in *Public Administration Review* in 2001. Janet Vinzant Denhardt and Robert B. Denhardt examine organizational dimensions in “Creating a Culture of Innovation: 10 Lessons from America’s Best Run City” based on a case study of Phoenix. Jim Collins’ book *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* provides guidance for blending innovation with enduring core values as part of an overall commitment to excellence.

Books devoted to innovation in government and nonprofits include Alan A. Altshuler and Robert D. Behn, editors, *Innovation in American Government: Challenges, Opportunities, and Dilemmas*; Paul Light, *Sustaining Innovation*; and Sanford Borins, editor, *Innovations in Government*. Broad-ranging discussions of innovation across sectors are found in Everett Rogers, *The Diffusion of Innovation*, and Scott Berkun, *The Myths of Innovation*.

Syllabi for two courses on innovation from Arizona State University and Northern Illinois University are available at the Alliance for Innovation website under Teaching Resources on the Research page <http://www.transformgov.org/research.asp>. If you have modules on innovation that you have used in courses or a syllabus for an innovation course, these are welcome and will be added to the site.

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