BUILDING CAPACITY:

Advancing Philadelphia's Public Sector Innovation Ecosystem

Office of
Innovation & Technology

OVERVIEW

The Innovation team developed in 2013 as the first in Philadelphia, and one of the first nationally, with a dedicated focus on innovation as a process. The team's initial goal was to build capacity for innovation within Philadelphia's government. Under the original framework of "People, Place, and Process," the Innovation team at the City established several programs to support innovation, provide opportunities for new growth, ideas, and programs, and train employees in creative problem solving. This holistic and coordinated grouping of work evolved to become what we now call the 'innovation ecosystem.' Over the last decade, this ecosystem of programming and support has grown to include in-house innovation consulting support, a pipeline for establishing university partnerships, and new efforts for recruitment, hiring, and retention.

The innovation ecosystem work includes integrating the principles of design thinking with collaborative, creative processes within the City and empowering employees to solve problems in new ways. Our goals are to:

- Establish a network of innovators across City departments to creatively address public sector challenges
- Offer in-house consulting services and other engagements to help City departments and external organizations frame problems clearly and develop creative solutions
- Leverage cross-departmental resources and support to test ideas through small-scale implementation
- Create a formal University/City innovation network to provide mutually beneficial opportunities for research, employment, and awareness of the public sector

Our Framework

Philadelphia's official innovation function is housed within the Office of Innovation and Technology, a location that offers increased stability across mayoral administrations but also a first-hand opportunity to enable innovation with technology. The primary goal is to build internal capacity across departments by teaching City staff the principles of innovation rather than dispatching a designated innovation team to departments to work on a single, temporary challenge. In doing so, departments themselves can often address their challenges of the moment without relying solely on the innovation team and are also better equipped to address other challenges as they arise. Using this approach, innovation spreads widely, becomes further embedded in the City, and can more effectively seed a culture of change and the use of fresh thinking to solve problems.

Philadelphia is a city of opportunities, and the City's municipal innovation culture has helped our team identify, implement, and improve upon processes to better serve Philadelphia residents. While many of these innovations are behind the scenes, they work in concert to support larger system change and have helped our division leverage an assets-based approach to serving communities. We've created a culture of innovation in our team by collaborating with other divisions to facilitate discussions across multiple City agencies and residents, which in turn have sparked improved programming and service delivery. We've also shared our innovation strategies with other municipalities at national conferences to highlight some of our biggest successes and encourage others to adopt similar approaches in their cities. I am grateful to be part of a forward-thinking team that invests in its residents and prioritizes creative solutions that improve outcomes for all."

Katie Englander
Office of Children and Families

Our Programs

Philadelphia's innovation team has intentionally structured innovation-focused programs and systems to focus on training employees, providing support, and building capacity across government. Currently, our programs include:

Innovation Fund
provides a framework in which to apply innovative principles and pilot new concepts

Academy for Municipal Innovation
trains employees in the principles of innovation

Innovation Consulting
creates intentional, facilitated opportunities for continued ideation and collaboration on solving some of our most challenging problems

Collectively, this 'ecosystem' of programming and support ensures that our work remains available and accessible for any City employee who is interested in challenging the status quo and applying the principles of innovation to their own workstreams.

THE INNOVATION FUND

The Innovation Fund is a grant opportunity for small-scale projects and pilot initiatives proposed by City employees that will positively impact the services and functions of municipal government. Managed collaboratively by the Innovation Team and the Philadelphia City Fund, the Innovation Fund gives municipal employees access to seed funding that allows them to test new and creative ideas within the city. Funding for this program comes from the administrative fees generated by the Philadelphia City Fund through its work as the dedicated fiscal sponsor for the City of Philadelphia. An allocation for the Innovation Fund is approved annually by the Philadelphia City Fund's Board of Directors.

Since its establishment in 2014, the Innovation Fund has continued to elevate and nurture a culture of innovation across the City of Philadelphia. The primary goals of the Fund are:

- To improve government services by challenging the status quo
- To empower employees to bring their ideas to life
- To encourage space for testing concepts before they are taken to scale

Process

The application process is coordinated by the Innovation Fund Advisory Group, a cross-departmental advisory team of City employees who are trained and invested in seeding innovation. The Advisory Group, under the leadership of the City's Innovation team, has helped to create the current governance and structure for the Innovation Fund process: solicitation, refinement, funding, and piloting of innovative ideas meant to improve the services and functions of municipal government.

The application process is unique and designed to be inclusive, equitable, and accessible to any City employee who would like to request funding for a proof-of-concept project. After the Innovation Fund Advisory Group reviews and selects proposals best suited for funding, they share recommendations with the Philadelphia City Fund's Board of Directors who make all final funding decisions.

By the numbers

*These numbers are reflective of data collected since 2020.

$250,000+
granted
to support pilot projects and programs proposed by City employees

95+
ideas
submitted and reviewed by the Innovation Fund Advisory Group

35+
different city departments
and offices have participated in the implementation of an Innovation Fund project, showing cross-departmental collaboration across government

27
projects
received funding

15
projects
are now permanently operational and/or scaled up

85%
of grantees report
that their projects would NOT have happened without an Innovation Fund grant

Project Spotlights

Healing Garden

Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center (PJJSC), Artemisia Orchard, and Down North Foundation
Grant Cycle: Spring 2022

After receiving a Spring 2022 Innovation Fund grant to build a Healing Garden space at the Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center (PJJSC), this cross-sector project team held a focus group with youth, staff, and administration to determine what everyone hoped to see in the garden. The outdoor space now includes a pollinator garden, 16 raised beds, and fruit trees. Based on youth interest in the focus groups, the garden also features a koi pond with several fish and a waterfall, which has become a favorite feature among staff and residents. The team continues to involve youth in the garden design, and upcoming installations include a sensory garden, labyrinth, and edible landscaping. Additionally, the team has coordinated with the carpentry program at PJJSC so youth can build structures for the garden including benches, planters and storage.

> We held two farmer's markets in the garden for staff, with proceeds going to youth programs. It was such a hit that we plan to have several of them throughout the season next year! We'd like to establish a program where participants can learn gardening techniques in the Healing Garden and receive at-home support from us to make sure that they have success."
>
> **Heather Leach**
> Artemisia Orchard

In addition to the outdoor component of their project, the team also began piloting a series of culinary and horticulture education classes on a weekly basis for residents. Classes are led by an agriculture educator from Artemisia Orchard, a professional chef from Down North Pizza who was formerly incarcerated, and a farmer and permaculture designer with expertise in meditation and self-compassion facilitation. Given the success of the program, Artemisia Orchard was awarded a contract with PJJSC to continue providing weekly classes into the future.

This project started as a collaboration between PJJSC, Artemisia Orchard, and Down North Foundation, and they've continued to build strong community partnerships that will help sustain their efforts and make the space even better. Early in the process, DTLR apparel company heard about the project through Down North and contributed funding and support as well. The team has also been working with The Audubon Society and the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge to explore opportunities for their educators to participate in programming, as well as introduce youth to internship and job opportunities in the environmental field.

The positive reception of the Healing Garden has only encouraged the project team to continue incorporating innovative ideas and programming for the space in the future. The team also plans to develop a program for the Spring to pilot a small-scale home garden program with PJJSC staff and the families of youth who are incarcerated.

Equitable Community Engagement Toolkit

Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement & Volunteer Services (MOCEVS) and Service Design Studio, Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

Grant Cycle: Winter 2020

The Equitable Community Engagement Toolkit ("Toolkit") serves as a compass for how to improve collaboration between the City of Philadelphia and the communities we serve. It provides guidance, stories, tools, and training on how to center equity in engagement work. The project team received an Innovation Fund grant in Winter 2020 to support their collaborative design process with City engagement practitioners and community members. The work to develop the Toolkit aimed to make sure the design process mirrored the equity centered recommendations made in Toolkit guidance. With funds from the Innovation Fund, the team was able to work with diverse collaborators who would be most impacted by the Toolkit to ensure recommendations reflected their interests and needs.

A beta version of the website launched in June 2023 and can be found at https://engagement-toolkit.phila.gov. A programmatic strategy is currently being developed to help further embed the Toolkit into agencies citywide.

> With the Innovation Fund money, we were able to collaborate with community members to help us develop an initial vision for the Toolkit. With that vision and understanding, we were able to [subsequently] secure over $500,000 in Operations Transformation Fund grant dollars to build out the project to scale."
>
> **Andrea Ngan**
> Winter 2020 Grantee

Sensory Inclusion Project

Office for People with Disabilities

Grant Cycle: Spring 2023

> I am beyond grateful to be an Innovation Fund grantee. As a neurodivergent, I have often struggled with grant application processes. The Philadelphia City Fund and Innovation teams ensured that the process was equitable to all levels of employees, and not over-complicated. Information equity is important to any process, and the Innovation Fund ensures that all interested employees have what they need to make their equity-centered innovations a reality."
>
> **Amy Nieves**
> Spring 2023 Grantee

The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities received an Innovation Fund grant to launch the first ever Sensory Inclusion Project for the City of Philadelphia. By partnering with KultureCity, the global leaders in this space, this project led Philadelphia to become the first certified sensory inclusive city through an employee training program and launch of a sensory lending program for City departments. The Sensory Inclusion Workgroup, made up of representatives from several City departments, has helped to support and advance this pilot. As of December 2023, over 70% of Philadelphia city employees are now certified in sensory inclusion, and the Sensory Lending program is set to launch in early 2024.

Immigrant & Refugee Wellness Academy

Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services (DBHIDS), Office of Immigrant Affairs, Department of Labor, Department of Commerce, The Welcoming Center, Nationalities Service Center, HIAS PA, and Vietlead

Grant Cycle: Spring 2021

The Immigrant & Refugee Wellness Academy (IRWA) is a cohort-model training program designed to empower and prepare Philadelphia's multilingual and multicultural immigrants and refugees with the knowledge, resources, and tools necessary to engage in activities that address behavioral health and intellectual disAbility challenges, trauma, and inequity experienced within the immigrant and refugee community.

The project team – a collaboration between DBHIDS and both internal and external stakeholders – developed a 10-week virtual interactive training that covered critical topics including trauma resilience, opioid overdose prevention, immigration and wellness, leadership skills, and mental health first aid (MHFA). Within two weeks of announcing this pilot program opportunity, the team received 65 applications from multilingual immigrants and refugees. 30 applicants were selected to participate in the pilot – representing 23 countries of origin and 25 different languages – based on their community involvement and commitment to complete the program. A survey at the end of the 10-week program during the spring of 2022 showed a 96% retention rate of participants. Participants self-reported knowledge and understanding of mental health and substance use increased from 21% pre-training to 95% post-training, and knowledge of intellectual disAbility challenges increased from 21% to 88%. Furthermore, 96% of participants stated that they are prepared to share what they learned with their communities.

After the success of the first pilot cohort, DBHIDS was able to fund and implement a second cohort in 2023 with similar positive outcomes. The team plans to use data outcomes from these two pilot cohorts to plan Phase II of IRWA and future cohorts.

ACADEMY FOR MUNICIPAL INNOVATION

A key goal of the innovation ecosystem is to empower other City employees, teams, and departments to develop and successfully integrate innovative practices into their own work. In 2014, the Innovation team began a partnership with Jefferson University (formerly Philadelphia University) and welcomed the first cohort of the Academy for Municipal Innovation (AMI). Academy is an eight-week program that introduces City employees to the principles and practice of innovation. Led by Jefferson professors, Academy alumni, and the Innovation team, participants learn to integrate tools and techniques drawn from systems thinking and ethnographic research to discover creative solutions to complex real world problems.

Each year, the City generates an applicant pool and selects 20 City employees to participate. To apply to the Academy, employees must have worked at the City for at least 1 year and show a demonstrated commitment to innovation. The Innovation team selects the cohort that best represents employees from a diverse array of departments and roles across the city. In 2023, the Academy saw the most applicants since it was launched.

"I cannot speak highly enough of the Academy for Municipal Innovation and my time with the Academy's 10th Cohort! The Academy not only provided the innovative tools and techniques with which to approach an issue, but also helped shift my mindset on how I approach identifying and solving the issue itself. I already find myself implementing the learned strategies within the Streets Construction Unit to great effect. The Academy also offers the unique opportunity to build relationships between other, like-minded City (and SEPTA) personnel that you may not ever get the chance to interact with otherwise. I found this aspect of the Academy to be just as vital as the technical tools! I'd highly recommend the Academy to anyone interested in leaving the City in a better position than they found it."

Tyler Barile
Streets Department,
Fall 2023 alumnus

Departments who participated in The Academy for Municipal Innovation

- Animal Care and Control Team
- Arts, Culture, & Creative Economy
- Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services
- Board of Ethics
- Budget Office
- Chief Administrative Office
- Citizen's Planning Institute
- Citizen's Police Oversight Commission
- City Planning Commission
- Community Empowerment and Opportunity
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Human Services
- Department of Labor
- Department of Planning and Development
- Department of Public Health
- Department of Records
- District Attorney's Office
- Finance Department
- Fleet
- Free Library
- Human Resources & Talent
- Law Department
- Licenses and Inspections
- Managing Director's Office
- Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service
- Mayor's Office of LGBT Affairs
- Office of Children and Families
- Office of Economic Opportunity
- Office of Emergency Management
- Office of Homeless Services
- Office of Immigrant Affairs
- Office of Innovation and Technology
- Office of the Mayor
- Office of Property Assessment
- Office of Reentry Partnerships
- Office of Sustainability
- Office of Transportation, Infrastructure, and Sustainability
- Parks and Recreation
- Philadelphia Fire Department
- Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation
- Philadelphia Police Department
- Philadelphia Water Department
- Philly311
- PHL Airport
- Procurement
- Public Property
- Revenue Department
- Streets Department

> The Academy for Municipal Innovation is one of the most practical and useful professional development experiences I've ever had. I really appreciated the mix of experiences and professional backgrounds of everyone in the class because everyone was able to see common issues or get ideas from people completely outside their normal circle."

Liz Pride
Health and Human Services, Office of Domestic Violence Strategies
Fall 2023 alumnus

Graduates report that one core strength of the Academy is working with people from various departments, backgrounds, and experience levels because it gives them an opportunity to learn from others, think differently, and propel their own work forward. Additionally, graduates walk away with tangible tools and resources to implement in their own departments.

Since its inception, the Academy has graduated ten cohorts with more than 180 employees from over 50 distinct units and departments Of these graduates, more than half are still employed with the City. Graduates represent a diverse array of backgrounds, including:

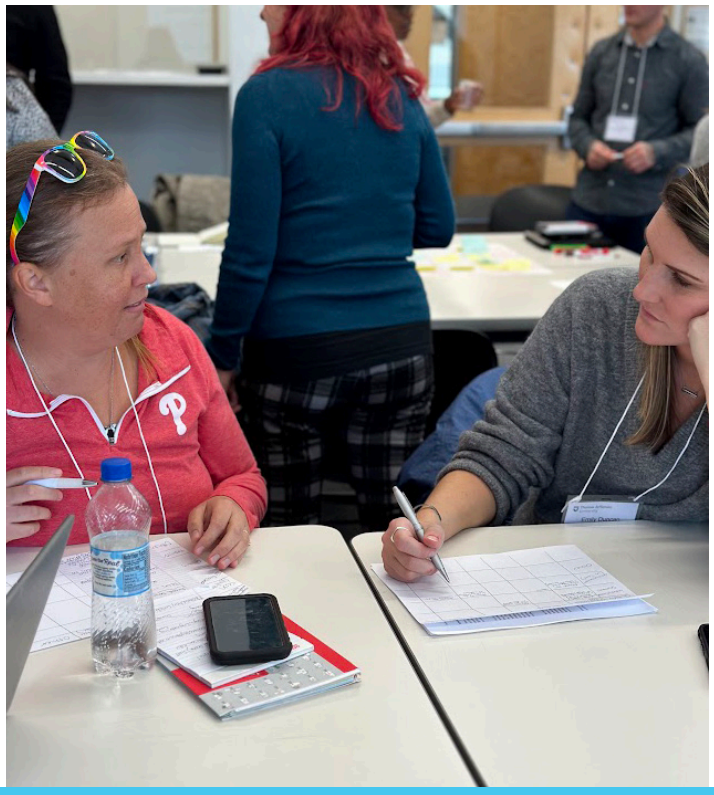
- Civil service, exempt, and contracted employees
- Early, mid and senior level employees
- Employees with technical, management, and coordinator roles

> I had a completely enriching experience during my time at the Academy. Along with having the pleasure of sharing the experience with fellow City employees across varying departments, each class was mind-opening and thought-provoking and I'm sure I'll carry what I learned throughout my career and beyond.

Falena Hand
Free Library of Philadelphia,
Fall 2023 alumnus

I hope each City employee, no matter what their job title is, at some point in their career path, can fully partake in the Academy for Municipal Innovation. The Academy provided me with a set of mentally stored tools that allows me to see things from different perspectives when it comes to problem solving. The Academy helps you to find and understand your voice, reason, and purpose as a city employee. It brings out your inner critical thinking skills that you may not have known you were capable of having or using. Our colleagues both here within the city, and the staff at Jefferson University, were there as resources every step of the way. In the end no matter what title we had when we began the program we all completed it as one title and that title is a leader."

Nadiyah Jackson
Procurement Department,
Fall 2022 alumnus



In 2023, the Innovation team partnered with the Southeast Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) for the first time to bring the Academy curriculum to its employees. SEPTA selected four employees representing business innovation, sustainability, planning, and engineering to participate in the 8-week program. This pilot has made it possible for the two entities to strengthen relationships and collaborate more intentionally.

The Academy for Municipal Innovation was a formative experience for me as a City employee. I participated in the Academy at the end of the Nutter administration and being part of a cohort of staff members from various departments was extremely helpful just months before a mayoral transition took place. I felt as though going through the Academy at the time that I did, boosted my confidence, and prepared me to be open-minded towards change as I faced the uncertainty of a new mayor taking office. The tools that I learned and the connections that I made in the Academy helped me to advance my career to the next step through the transition! "

Amanda Gamble
Managing Director's Office,
Fall 2015 alumnus

INNOVATION CONSULTING

Innovation Consulting offers individually curated and facilitated workshops rooted in the principles of innovation to teams both internal and external to City government. Facilitators on the Innovation team develop workshops using design-thinking exercises and leverage the experience and knowledge of participants to generate new ideas. Consulting workshops include topics ranging from developing a strategic plan, tackling challenges with stakeholder communication, or general program development and evaluation. These Innovation Consulting services offer some key benefits to City departments, such as flexibility and leveraging institutional knowledge and awareness of City-specific topics.

In 2023, the Innovation team conducted 15 internal workshops and 2 workshops with external partners. Topics included strategic plan development, program evaluation, program development, and team planning. The team has 5 workshops planned for the first quarter of 2024.

"The fact that the City hosts Innovation Consulting demonstrates its investment in growing its employees' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The Consulting work represents a disruption of the status quo of government operations and serves as a good for all staff across the City. Additionally, the fact that this work is led by City employees and not external folks honors employees' leadership and contributions in a way that communicates that we as a collective can work to solve challenges.

I've participated in several Consulting sessions and appreciated the frameworks my colleagues leading the sessions introduce to challenge participants' thinking. Given that they too work in City government, session leaders understand the inherent assets and challenges that come with City work, yet they're distant enough from the day-to-day that they serve as an independent party that can support a holistic perspective during the workshops and facilitate the group to meaningfully solve problems."

Ashley Pollard
Office of Innovation and Technology

"Innovation consulting workshops are in-person exercises with physical assets – white boards and sticky notes – that let each participant contribute their ideas in a safe space. The facilitated conversations encourage collaboration to identify issues and begin shaping possible solutions."

Akshay Malik
Office of Innovation and Technology

INNOVATION LAB

Opened in 2014 in the Municipal Services Building, the Innovation Lab provides a physical environment for employees across the City to work collaboratively in a space suited for collaborative work and supportive of cross-departmental employee interaction. Designed to resemble other co-working spaces – with Wi-Fi, rolling whiteboards, moveable desks, and screens – the Lab allows City employees from different departments to gather for brainstorming and collaboration in a setting that encourages creative thinking and problem solving.

NEW INITIATIVES

As the flagship innovation ecosystem programs enter their tenth year, the Innovation team continues to expand and evolve its original work. Moreover, the team has identified new ideas to advance in response to the current needs of the public sector.

Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention

Employment in the public sector has declined, and studies show that private sector employment is currently outpacing it. Particularly in the technology field, public sector hiring falls well behind private industry. To attract more qualified and well-skilled workers to join OIT, the Innovation team has begun to generate new ideas for recruiting, hiring, and retaining workers. The team hosted – along with OIT's Human Resources department – a series of Innovation Consulting workshops to re-imagine recruiting, hiring, and retention. Initiatives from these workshops included near-term, mid-term, and long-term goals, that include:

- **Recruitment:** Develop and implement a recruitment strategy, standardize city job descriptions, and develop intentional partnerships with universities to create a talent pipeline.
- **Hiring:** Develop a more streamlined and engaging onboarding process by completing more documents electronically and establishing in-person touchpoints for new employees and managers.
- **Retention:** Establish guidelines for how OIT can enhance professional development and training opportunities and identify and dedicate funding for training and professional development.

After identifying action steps for improvement, the Innovation team has been collaboratively engaging with other departmental stakeholders to lead implementation of these initiatives.

University Partnerships

Using a three-pronged approach, the Innovation team has begun the process of establishing formal relationships between universities and City agencies. These avenues include research and evaluation, employment and talent, and awareness and accessibility.

Research & Evaluation

Improve City services through quality research

The Innovation team is developing a process for identifying research needs and matching departmental resource needs with university faculty and graduate-level students.

Employment & Talent

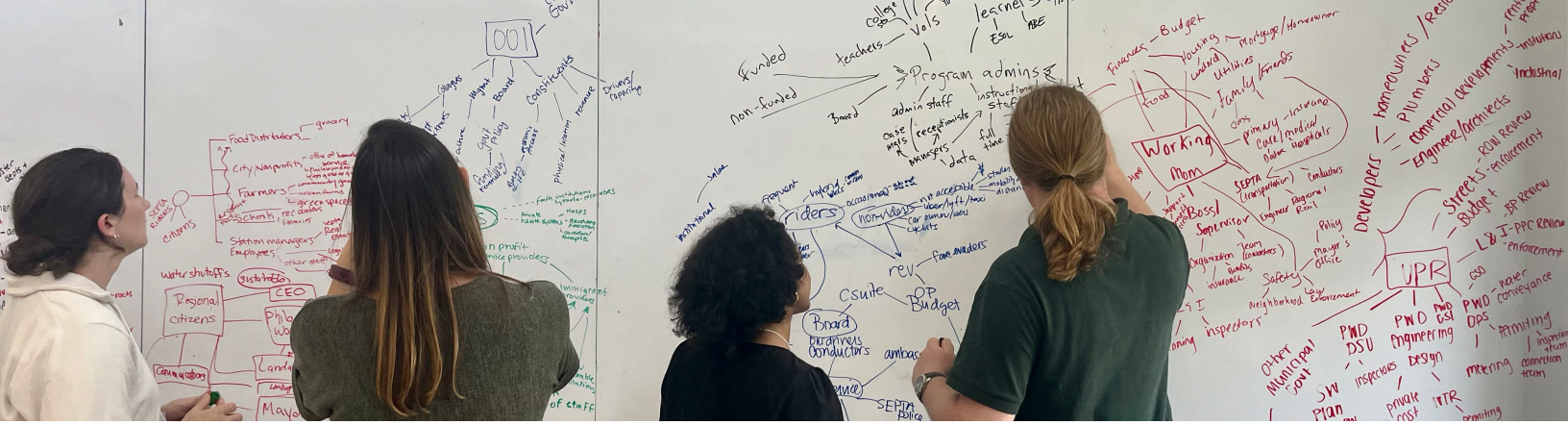
Expand talent pool for open positions

The Innovation team facilitates connections between qualified students and opportunities within OIT and other City departments, as well as providing additional recruitment opportunities for City employees.

Awareness & Accessibility

Increase awareness about public technology, innovation, public policy, and City opportunities

The Innovation team is actively establishing a City guest and speaker network, course collaborations, and an innovation resource hub as forms of outreach about public sector work.



LOOKING AHEAD

Through the last decade, the Innovation portfolio has grown and evolved into the full scope of programming that is it today. As we look forward to the next ten years and beyond, we aim to expand the reach of our innovation ecosystem with new programs and initiatives.

Continued support for testing and implementing innovative ideas across city government

- Our **Academy for Municipal Innovation** remains committed to training and supporting future cohorts of City employees as they learn the tools and skills to creatively approach departmental challenges. Academy will continue to run each year, in partnership with Jefferson University, with an increasingly diverse range of departmental representation.
- We will continue offering in-house **Innovation Consulting** to help a wider range of teams and departments frame problems more clearly and develop creative solutions to address them. As we enter a new mayoral administration and welcome new teams and colleagues to the city, we will remain intentional about setting up time to connect with each department and ensure that everyone is aware of the capacity support that we provide.
- The **Innovation Fund,** in partnership with the Philadelphia City Fund, will continue to provide the seed funding and cross-departmental support necessary for our City of Philadelphia employees to test their ideas more effectively through pilot implementation. In addition to the formal Fund grant cycles offered twice per year (in spring and fall), the team also intends to provide additional learning opportunities throughout the year focused on topics such as idea refinement, grant-writing support, and pitch session feedback.

Building upon and expanding a culture of innovation across the city

- **Networking:** We plan to offer opportunities for employees to engage in cross-departmental networking and collaboration. These opportunities could take the form of structured programming (i.e., piloting a City employee mentorship program for new hires to learn from more experienced City employees), as well as more organic, voluntary engagement (i.e., a monthly learning series for members of our innovation network to strengthen cross-departmental relationships and knowledge sharing).
- **Consulting:** We hope to expand our current innovation consulting model to involve additional Academy graduates in our consulting and facilitation work. This initiative will not only maintain the network of trained innovators across City government, but also allow Academy graduates to leverage the principles and tools that they learned during their time in the Academy.

Establish structured partnerships with non-City institutions to share knowledge and talent

- **City-University Pipeline:** We are working to formalize a city-university pipeline that provides mutually beneficial opportunities for research and employment within both the public and academic sectors.
- **Awareness:** We will increase awareness and recognition of innovation in the public sector through press, speaking engagements, and teaching opportunities with universities and other organizations.

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Office of
Innovation & Technology