



# Tech Executive Leadership Initiative

Pilot Syllabus  
August - October 2020



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## Tech Executive Leadership Initiative Pilot Syllabus

Tech Executive Leadership Initiative (TELI) is a pilot 8-week skills-building initiative to prepare experienced technology leaders to engage effectively with public sector challenges. The TELI pilot provided senior technology professionals with a unique leadership opportunity to build their executive skills through real-world engagement with government, policy, and human-centered design. Through experiential learning with real service delivery challenges, leaders honed their skills to work effectively with dedicated public servants and mitigate risk on technology projects.

This document summarizes what was taught and accomplished during the 8-week pilot that ran from mid-August to mid-October 2020.

### Course Format and Procedures

**Duration:** 8-weeks, part-time; began on August 22, 2020 and ended on October 19, 2020

**Location:** Remote (in part due to COVID-19 pandemic)

**Meetings and time commitment:**

Class met once per week (3 hours/week)

Teams worked independently on their Challenge Projects (6+ hours/week)

Teams met once per week with the instructor on Challenge Project (30 min/week)

Teams spent a weekend working on a challenge sprint exercise (48 hours)

**Instructors:** Dana Chisnell, Betsy Cooper, and invited guest speakers

### Attendees: TELI Leaders

The inaugural cohort of TELI leaders was composed of:

- Seasoned professionals from tech companies
- Engineers, product managers, designers, data scientists, and legal professionals in leadership or management roles
- Executives who had not served or been exposed to policy or government

- Technologists who had worked in companies that valued human-centered design but may not have been directly involved
- Technologists who had an interest in working on public sector problems

More information on the leaders of the pilot cohort can be found [here](#).

## Learning Objectives

If the Initiative is effective, in the first year in government, attendees should be able to apply what they've learned to:

- Understand how government structures differ from industry
- Lead and manage stakeholders, peers, and direct reports without formal authority in high risk, highly political contexts
- Design, research, analyze, and execute policies in ambiguous, complex, and fast-paced environments
- Drive projects to successful delivery within entrenched bureaucracies and under-resourced partners with limited financial tools
- Communicate effectively via concise, accurate, accessible, and timely written materials
- Operationalize ethical, fiduciary, and legal responsibility to the American people
- Build a healthy culture of collaboration, learning, risk creation, direct feedback, and leadership development for public servants

## Course Overview and Schedule

Class meetings were generally lectures and discussions taught by the instructors or guest speakers. We scheduled topics around staffing constraints and speaker availability.

### **Human-Centered Government Service Delivery Course (led by Dana Chisnell)**

The Human-Centered Government Service Delivery content covered 4 phases:

- Problem discovery
- Problem definition
- Delivery prep and testing
- Production and delivery

### **Government and Policy Course (led by Betsy Cooper)**

The Government and Policy Course was divided into 3 sections:

- Skills (6 sessions; practical tools leaders could use to engage in policy)

- Structures (2 sessions; background on government structures and how to engage with them)
- Substance (3 sessions; detailed review on the status of existing policy)

\*External speakers denoted in **blue**

Date	Human-Centered Government Service Delivery Course	Government and Policy Course
<b>Immersive Weekend, Day 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Overview</li> <li>→ Team Assignments</li> <li>→ Challenge Project Introduction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ What is Policy?</li> <li>→ <b>Guest Speaker:</b> <a href="#">Tom Kalil</a> on Policy Entrepreneurship</li> <li>→ Translating Technical Concepts into Plain Language (<i>Skills Part 1</i>)</li> <li>→ Government Policy and Separation of Powers (<i>Structures Part I</i>)</li> <li>→ Policy Reading 101 (<i>Skills Part 2</i>)</li> <li>→ <b>Guest Speaker:</b> <a href="#">Chris Riley</a> on Tech Policy 101 (<i>Substance Part 1</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Immersive Weekend, Day 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Stakeholder Mapping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Writing for Policy (<i>Skills Part 3</i>)</li> <li>→ Executive Branch Policy 101 (<i>Structures Part 2</i>)</li> <li>→ <b>Guest Speakers:</b> <a href="#">Eric Hysen</a> and <a href="#">Mina Hsiang</a> on Getting Things Done in Government (<i>Skills Part 4</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Discovery Sprints &amp; the Human-Centered Delivery Process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Guest Speaker:</b> <a href="#">Jennifer Anastasoff</a> on Engaging with People in Government</li> </ul>
<b>Week 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Designing Discovery Research (<i>Problem Discovery</i>)</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Equity + Ethics in User Research</li> <li>→ <b>Guest Speaker:</b> <a href="#">Sarah Fathallah</a> on Working with Vulnerable Users</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 3</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Memo Writing (<i>Skills Part 5</i>)</li> <li>→ Policy Outputs &amp; Advocacy (<i>Skills Part 6</i>)</li> <li>→ <b>Guest Speaker:</b> <a href="#">Alex Iftimie</a> on Ethics 101</li> </ul>
<b>Week 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Problem Definition (<i>Problem Definition</i>)</li> <li>→ Mid-course presentations and feedback</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Guest Speaker:</b> <a href="#">Lisa Gelobter</a> on Generating Solutions: Prototyping and Piloting in Government (<i>Delivery Prep and Testing</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Guest Speaker:</b> <a href="#">Allison Bender</a> on Cybersecurity Policy 101 (<i>Substance Part 2</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Guest Speakers:</b> <a href="#">Victor Garcia</a>, <a href="#">Mark Lerner</a>, and Harlan Lieberman-Berg on Dev Ops and Procurement (<i>Delivery Prep and Testing</i>)</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Guest Speakers:</b> <a href="#">Mark Schwartz</a> and <a href="#">Dave Recordon</a> on Being a CIO in the Federal Government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Guest Speaker:</b> <a href="#">Lisa Dyer</a> on AI Policy 101 (<i>Substance Part 3</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Q&amp;A About Usability Testing (<i>Production and Delivery</i>)</li> </ul>	



	→ <b>Guest Speaker:</b> <a href="#">Andrew Mayock</a> on Government Budgeting  → Final Challenge Project presentations	
<b>Week 8 Weekend</b>	<b>48-Hour Exercise</b>	

## Course Projects

A key feature of the program was project work, in which teams learned and practiced new skills. The course had 2 main projects:

- 1. Policy Challenge Project.** This project provided experiential learning through discovery and delivery on a policy challenge throughout the 8 weeks of the program. Each team chose a challenge to focus on:
  - Immigration:** How might we scale up processing applications for status with existing resources?
  - Unemployment:** How might we close the gap between federal laws and state implementations to speed up delivery to people in need?
- 2. 48-Hour Exercise.** At the end of the 8 weeks, TELI leaders put the lessons from the TELI program into practice in a 48-hour exercise. In this activity, teams took on and responded to a policy problem focused on the 2020 US Census over a weekend. The 48-hour exercise was devised in partnership with local and state government leaders, and TELI leaders presented their work at a feedback event. The purpose of this exercise was to provide participants the opportunity to work on a problem that sits at the intersection of policy and human-centered government service delivery in a short period of time, and to create real-world impact with their work.

## Course Readings

See below for the required readings for the course.

### Weekend 1

- Harrell, Cyd. [A Civic Technologist's Practice Guide](#)
- Hudson, Sarah and Schank, Hana. [The Government Fix](#)

- Kalil, Tom. *Increasing Policy Readiness*
- Kalil, Tom. *Policy Entrepreneurship at the White House*
- Pham, Kathy, DeFrias, Kara, Hunt, Ginny & Rachmeler, Kim. [\*Digital Service Discovery Sprint Playbook\*](#)
- [\*The US Constitution\*](#)

#### Week 1

- US Digital Service. [\*The Digital Services Playbook\*](#)
- Code for America. [\*Qualitative Research at Code for America\*](#)
- Girling, Rob and Palaveeva, Emilia. [\*Beyond the Cult of Human-Centered Design\*](#)

#### Week 2

- Chisnell, Dana. [\*What Can Go Wrong When We Get Things Right?\*](#)
- Fathallah, Sarah. [\*Lessening the Research Burden on Vulnerable Communities\*](#)
- Hall, Erika. [\*Research Questions Are Not Interview Questions\*](#)
- Harrell, Cyd and Chisnell, Dana. [\*Researching the Safety Net During the COVID Crisis: Approaches for Urgent and Respectful Reviews\*](#)
- Mannan, Hareem. [\*The Hidden Privilege in Design\*](#)

#### Week 4

- Álvaro, Alberto Rodriguez and Chisnell, Dana. [\*Bringing Design to the Public Policy Cycle\*](#)
- Chisnell, Dana. [\*Mapping and Visualizing the User Experience\*](#)
- Miller, Megan. [\*The Difference Between a Journey Map and a Service Blueprint\*](#)
- Sinai, Nick, Leftwich, David, and McGuire, Ben. [\*Human-Centered Policymaking\*](#)
- UNHCR. [\*Problem Definition\*](#)

#### Week 5

- Colorado Department of Transportation. [\*Problem Definition\*](#)
- Hébert, Marc K. [\*A Pilot is Not a Prototype: How to Test Policy Ideas Before Scaling\*](#)
- Sinai, Nick and Farmer, John Paul. [\*The Push to Bring Tech Efficiencies to Government Bureaucracies\*](#)
- Sinai, Nick and Lira, Matt. [\*Why Can't Washington Build a Website?\*](#)

#### Week 6

- Boyd, Ian et al. [\*Promoting Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Through Public Procurement\*](#)

- Carnahan, Robin, Hart, Randy, and Jaquith, Waldo. [\*De-Risking Custom Technology Projects\*](#)
- Feldman, Aiden. [\*Taking the ATO Process from 6 Months to 30 Days\*](#)
- Hysen, Eric. [\*Lessons Learned from the Government's Biggest Attempt to Fix Tech Procurement\*](#)
- TechFAR Hub. [\*Acquisition Principles for Digital Services\*](#)

#### Week 7

- Chisnell, Dana. [\*When "Fail Fast" Isn't an Option\*](#)
- Chisnell, Dana. [\*Government Tech Testing Landscape\*](#)
- Harrell, Cyd. [\*A Civic Technologist's Practice Guide\*](#), Chapters 5, 8, and 13

#### Optional Readings

Throughout the course, we offered articles, blog posts, videos, and podcasts that also helped the leaders through policy challenges. They were optional but highly recommended. An [ever-evolving selection](#) can be found here.