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Introduction

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The Festschrift, or tribute volume, is a well-recognized academic genre: an opportunity for colleagues, admirers, and intellectual fellow travelers to pay tribute, in print, to the scholarly achievements of an eminent member of their field. At its best, the Festschrift aspires to more than eulogy. It uses the occasion of a retirement or other significant milestone to advance the state of knowledge in the discipline. The homage to excellent scholarship takes the fitting form of further scholarship and new research. Though we are honoring a distinguished program that has come of age, not a venerable scholar who has reached retirement, our goal for this volume remains that of a Festschrift. Collectively, we hope to advance the state of scholarship on innovation in government, in tribute to a program that has fostered, and continues to foster, both the practice of innovation and its study.

A Festschrift generally begins in retrospect, with valedictory accounts of the honoree's illustrious career. The sense is of summation, of the final words of a chapter soon to be closed. We, too, will look back, but our focus is at least as much on the present and the future, as our subject enters its third decade with ambition, productivity, and relevance undiminished.

The Innovations in American Government Awards Program began in 1985 with the first in a series of annual grants from the Ford Foundation to the Kennedy School of Government to conduct a program of awards for innovations in state and local government. The foundation's objective was ambitious

and, in an era of “government *is* the problem” rhetoric, determinedly proactive. It sought to counter declining public confidence in government by highlighting innovative and effective programs. At a time of public-service bashing and highly publicized governmental failures, the program would seek out, and publicize, the good news in government.

From its inception, however, the program recognized the need for more than mere boosterism. The grants also included funding to disseminate information about winning programs, thus encouraging replication, and dedicated funds to support research on innovation in government. These three strands—recognition, replication, research—are the source of the program’s continuing influence and vitality.

The first ten winners were announced in 1986. Since that time, the program’s scope has widened dramatically. In 1995 applications from the federal government were made eligible for consideration. In 2001 the Ford Foundation transformed its annual grants to an endowment of \$50 million. It also built on its successful experience in the United States by providing support for innovations awards programs in Brazil, Chile, China, East Africa, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines, and South Africa. The Kennedy School program, meanwhile, has become instrumental in the Global Innovators Network, established to help government innovators in all these countries, and beyond, share their experiences. Finally, in 2003 Roy L. Ash, who reshaped the Bureau of the Budget into the Office of Management and Budget and served as its initial director under Presidents Nixon and Ford, provided a generous endowment to create the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation, of which the awards program became a part. The new name reflects a new focus on the principles and practices of democratic institutions, both in the United States and internationally—a change in perspective and priorities that is proving no less timely than the Ford Foundation’s own founding initiative.

Two Decades of Innovation

The original impetus for the Innovations in American Government Awards Program may well have been defensive. In retrospect, however, it seems clear that the Ford Foundation’s emphasis on innovation was also prescient. The twenty years of the program’s existence have witnessed waves of change of almost unprecedented magnitude, driven by the twin engines of globalization and information technology, with innovation as both forerunner and consequence. With the spread of the Internet and its ancillary communication technologies, the conversion of the former Soviet Union and its satellites to more market-based economies and more democratic modes of governance, and similar shifts in developing countries throughout the world, billions more people are

now participating in the global economy and in democratic governance than two decades ago. These seismic shifts have affected, and continue to affect, virtually every corner of the private sector, making innovation a condition of survival (Friedman 2005).

The public sector has been equally transformed, though perhaps in ways more visible to students of government than to the average citizen. Analysts have categorized these changes under a number of rubrics, including “New Public Management,” “Reinventing Government,” “Administrative Reform,” and “Citizen-Centered Governance.” Although there has been considerable debate among practitioners and academics about the precise meaning of these terms, there is now some consensus that they denote changes in the structure of government institutions, applications of new technology and private-sector production methodologies, an emphasis on defining and measuring the performance of government, and new patterns of involvement of the private and third sectors in governance. The noted public administration scholar Donald Kettl (2005) has gone so far as to define the sum of these phenomena as nothing less than a global public management revolution. And it was in the throes of this revolution that the awards program came of age, its applicants often literally the vanguard of reform or reinvention. What is more, the program itself became an agent in the process it was witnessing, its “three Rs” of recognition, replication, and research further disseminating innovative ideas and practices and promoting a culture of innovation within the public sector that has now become a virtual creed.

The “Kennedy School School”: Two Decades of Innovation Scholarship

Clearly the Ford Foundation envisaged the important role scholarship had to play in enabling the replication of innovations (through analysis, contextualization, and conceptualization), but it may not have foreseen the contribution the awards program itself would make to that scholarship through the database its applicant pool would generate. The raw material that database has provided to scholars, coupled with the foundation’s generous research support, has in fact produced a significant and distinctive body of writing about innovation in government, in effect the Kennedy School school. To understand how it has done so we need to look briefly at the awards program’s structure and methodology, before returning to the place that the Kennedy School school has staked out for itself in the field of public administration scholarship.

The design of the awards program itself has created incentives for gathering a large amount of valuable data. This is true of both the large number of initial applications and the amount of detailed information elicited about the best of

them. To ensure that the net is cast widely, the awards are not limited by either policy area or theme. The initial application form is short and easily completed, asking only for a brief description of the program, the nature of its innovation, and information about clients, budget, achievements, and replication. Program staff publicize the awards extensively and watch the media closely for emerging trends and leaders, proactively contacting public servants who are mentioned. The participation of the Ford Foundation and Harvard University made the awards program prestigious from its inception, and the enthusiastic endorsement of the Clinton administration, beginning in 1995, further raised its profile.

As the applicants are narrowed down to semifinalists and then finalists, the program requires more information about the innovation, including detailed financial and evaluative or audit data, as well as particulars of the innovative process itself (the genesis of the idea, the organizational structure used, and the process of gathering support and overcoming opposition). The finalists are all subjected to a two-day site visit by a recognized expert in the field. The judges read the site visit reports and hear presentations by the finalists. The winnowing process thus produces a substantial body of information about the top-ranking applicants (Borins 1998, pp. 12–18).

Because the awards program casts its net so widely and generates so much interest, we can be confident that its pool of applicants represents the range of trends in innovations in government. One way to categorize innovations is by policy area, and the awards include all policy areas. When the awards were restricted to state and local government, there were substantial numbers of applications in such areas of subnational government activity as environment and energy management, community building (policing, housing, economic development), social services, and education. Expansion of the program to the federal government added traditional areas of federal responsibility such as defense and economic regulation. As trends manifested themselves, the applicant pool reflected their influence. So when community policing became a growing trend, there was an upsurge of applications in that area, proving the effectiveness of the program in maintaining its relevance.

A second way to classify government innovations is in terms of their comprehensiveness within their own jurisdictions, and by this measure, too, the applicant pool has proved representative. Government-wide innovation denotes an initiative established centrally to be put in place in all departments. This category would include various aspects of administrative reform such as procurement reform or performance reporting and evaluation. All of these have been amply represented, at both the local and federal levels. The program also receives applications arising from organizational “turnarounds,” that is, instances where departments that were notably poor performers develop innovative practices while in the process of dramatic self-improvement. The third and

most common type of application comes from local innovations that affect part of the operations of a given agency or agencies. Although these applications are local from the point of view of the applicant agency, when viewed nationally they become important markers of trends in a given policy area.

The database the program has generated is thus sustained, continuous, broadly inclusive across the fullest range of innovation types, and—at the level of the finalist applicants—fine-grained. Its strength can be judged by the range and quality of the scholarship it has supported. Michael Barzelay, in *Breaking through Bureaucracy* (1992, rev. 2002), drew on it to undertake a detailed study of Minnesota's reform of an administrative support organization and used this to develop an early conceptualization of New Public Management. Eugene Bardach, in *Getting Agencies to Work Together* (1998), used the awards to identify a number of successful interagency partnerships and, on the basis of subsequent interviews, developed a set of smart practices for interagency collaboration. Jack Donahue's *Making Washington Work* (1999) took a number of award-winning federal programs as subjects of further study, using these cases to demonstrate how successful innovations could be realized in the complicated Washington environment. Robert D. Behn, in his article "Management by Groping Along" (1988) and his subsequent book *Leadership Counts* (1991), drew on cases from the innovation awards program to conceptualize a model of public management by "groping along," in which innovative agency leaders set out a broad vision and then respond adaptively to changing circumstances in order to realize it. Sanford Borins's *Innovating with Integrity* (1998) examined the overall characteristics of a large sample of the best applications to the program, as well as the particular characteristics of programs in a variety of policy areas, to generate a quantitatively based typology of innovative processes, organizations, and leaders. And this is only a partial list of authors whose writings make up the Kennedy School school.

Beyond their drawing on a common database, however, what characterizes the authors of the Kennedy School school? When we analyze this substantive body of work it becomes clear that these scholars share a set of intellectual premises. First, they uniformly conclude that the innovations they have studied have improved the performance of government and are valued accordingly by the public. Second, they challenge the stereotype of the risk-averse bureaucrat awaiting orders from her political masters and instead collectively paint a portrait of entrepreneurial public servants making their own efforts to determine public expectations and needs and taking the initiative to meet them. Third, they see innovation as an equal-opportunity phenomenon capable of being initiated at all levels of government, from the elected politician to the frontline worker. They are, in short, innovation optimists who see in what the public administration scholars Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert (2000) have

termed “micro-improvements” an important subject for research and an important source of knowledge for practitioners. It is a position that marks them as dissenters from much of the scholarship in the field.

Research on innovation in government can, of course, be seen as a subfield of public administration scholarship. In the last two decades, many public administration scholars have focused their attention on the government-wide innovations that have characterized the New Public Management, and their findings have generally been critical. We might call them the innovation skeptics (or pessimists). Steven Kelman (2007a) has discussed the reasons for their criticism. These include hostility to public management practices that draw on management practices of the private sector, hostility to contracting out or entering partnerships with the private sector, a judgment that respecting traditional public-sector process constraints (equity, fairness, probity) always outweighs enhanced effectiveness, public satisfaction, or cost efficiency, and a view that innovative or entrepreneurial public managers are undemocratically usurping the powers of elected politicians. Concentrating their critical fire on systemic reform initiatives, these scholars have generally ignored the local initiatives, agency turnarounds, or successful local examples of systemic reform that have been the focus of attention for the Kennedy School school. Indeed, Pollitt and Bouckaert’s (2000, p. 191) comprehensive study of public management reform closes with an admission of precisely what is missing from this analysis:

And yet there is another side to public management reform, which has a more solid and sensible persona. The pressure, the rhetoric, the loosening of the old ways—all these have combined to give many public servants the opportunity to make changes which make local sense to *them*. Such “improvements” may occasionally be self-serving, but often they are substantially other-directed and result in gains in productivity, service quality, transparency, fairness, or some other important value. . . . [O]ne of the major limitations of our approach—and the approaches of many others who have concentrated on big reforms and big ideas—is that they capture very little of this micro-improvement. As some of the most successful reform leaders in several countries have recognized, a crucial ingredient of a successful reform strategy is that it should create and sustain conditions in which small improvements—many of them unforeseen and unforeseeable—can flourish.

Where the academic analysts of comprehensive reform have generally tended to ignore or dismiss the significance of successful local innovations, other scholars have criticized research devoted to them as being hostage to the “best-practices” tradition, with all its associated limitations (Lynn 1996; Overman and Boyd 1994). The point here is not that the innovations are negligible, but

rather that they are unreliable, unstable, or insufficiently analyzed as possible models. The general critique of best-practice research is threefold: it rarely attempts to verify self-reported claims; organizations lauded for best practices today may, without warning, fail tomorrow; and best-practice research focuses solely on the characteristics of successful organizations, rather than comparing the successful with the mediocre and the failing. In a statistical context, the latter point is referred to as selection on the dependent variable. In regression analysis, it is desirable to have as much variation as possible in observations of the dependent variable; in this instance, organizational performance. Best-practice research, by focusing only on well-performing organizations, violates this principle (Kelman 2007a).

The first two criticisms, as they apply to the Kennedy School school, can be addressed through reference to the awards program's audit process, which rigorously verifies applicants' self-reported claims. The program also revisits previous years' semifinalists, finalists, and winners and has consistently found a very high percentage of them still in operation and flourishing (Borins 1998, p. 115). Selection on the dependent variable remains a more salient criticism of any research using applications to the innovation awards program. Such research may fail to compare successful innovations with unsuccessful attempts, and it may fail to compare organizations that produce innovations (successful or otherwise) to those that do not. We offer two partial lines of defense. The awards program explicitly asks successful applicants to detail what obstacles they overcame and how they did so and which obstacles remain. At the very least, this information points to reasons for unsuccessful attempted innovations. Additionally, the awards program consistently draws a number of "turnaround" cases. By definition a turnaround is a before-and-after experiment in a given organization, allowing the researcher to compare a set of policies or practices associated with failure to those associated with success. The problem with individual turnarounds, however, is that they are usually overdetermined: turnaround leaders typically implement a package of reforms, and it can be difficult to establish which are necessary and which of all possible subsets are sufficient.

Despite these defenses, the critics of the Kennedy School school of innovation research do have an undeniable point. It has focused its attention on successful innovations and has had little to say about the populations of agencies within which these success stories have unfolded. Our response is to identify this and several other key areas as fruitful ground for new research initiatives. We clearly have important questions still to answer. One of the main goals of the awards program has always been replication, but do we know whether successful replication is in fact occurring? Or what factors are most likely to lead to it? The program focuses on individual innovations, but there are instances when a particular organization produces a number of them. What characterizes an

innovative organizational culture in a large government agency?¹ Can this, too, be replicated? The awards program itself has now been replicated internationally. Is the experience of the programs in other countries, and the data generated, similar to that of programs in the United States, both in terms of the nature of the innovations in a given policy area and of the innovative process? The contributors to this volume all seek to advance the state of government innovation research in these directions. Their desire to do so, and the range of their inquiries, is itself a tribute to the vitality of the Kennedy School school.

The chapters that follow not only demonstrate a range of analytical approaches and critical concerns but also share a common impetus to raise “big-picture” questions. Many of the contributors explicitly address issues of methodology and conceptualization. Others offer international comparisons as a means of widening the context for discussion. All seek to build on the foundation of the case-based deductive research that is one of the awards program’s most important legacies. And all demonstrate their continued adherence to the innovation optimism that is a hallmark of the Kennedy School school. We write here in the belief that understanding how innovations in government happen continues to be a serious challenge to scholarship and an important source of practitioner knowledge. In this, we hope we pay fitting tribute to the spirit that has animated the Innovations in American Government Awards Program from its inception.

Book Overview

Edited books often lack coherence, including chapters that are loosely oriented around a common theme and are presented in no obvious order. That cannot be said of the chapters of this book and their order of presentation, which present a coherent narrative.

We begin, appropriately, with origins. In the next chapter, Jonathan Walters provides a history of the Innovations in American Government Awards Program’s first twenty years. He opens by discussing the Ford Foundation’s intentions in establishing the program as a response to skeptical political and public attitudes in the mid-1980s toward the public sector. He shows how the Ford Foundation and the Kennedy School built a partnership whereby the Kennedy School would manage the awards program on behalf of the Ford Foundation and the Ford Foundation would support research on innovation spearheaded by

1. Paul Light (1998) studied a sample of twenty-six nonprofit organizations and government agencies in Minnesota that displayed innovative organizational cultures. He could not find large government agencies that met his selection criteria; the seven government agencies that did were atypically small, autonomous, and market-driven.

the Kennedy School. Walters then recounts the evolution of the program to include federal government involvement, its achievement of endowment funding from the Ford and Ash foundations, and its new focus on democratic governance. The chapter concludes with a discussion of future challenges, in particular that of maintaining a strong link between recognition and research.

Chapter 3 moves from organizational history to intellectual history. In it, Steven Kelman evaluates the Kennedy School school of research on innovation in government and its relationship to traditional public administration scholarship and mainstream organization theory. He finds that the Kennedy School school indeed constitutes a distinctive body of research but also finds that it has not built bridges to either public administration scholarship or to organization theory. Kelman is critical of much traditional public administration, in particular because of its focus on, and occasional glorification of, the constraints on public servants, and sees the Kennedy School school, with its emphasis on public servants' taking the initiative to improve government performance, as a valuable alternative. Kelman concludes with some recommendations for future directions in research on government innovation, in particular utilizing the concepts developed in organization theory and employing methodologies such as laboratory studies that use practicing civil servants and statistical studies that include in their samples innovation failures as well as successes.

Subsequent chapters all extend the work of the Kennedy School school in a variety of new directions, including innovations in democratic governance (chapter 4), innovations overseas (chapter 5), innovative organizations (chapter 6), the dynamics and sustainability of innovations (chapter 7), the replication of innovations (chapters 8 and 9), and innovations within a population of organizations (chapter 9).

Chapter 4, by Archon Fung, is particularly relevant to the awards program's evolution as the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation. Fung begins by arguing that, to a great extent, the program began with a focus on innovations within the four walls of government agencies—in effect, innovations in production processes for government services. He then draws examples of innovations recognized by the awards program to show that in fact a considerable number focused on the role citizens could play as co-producers in areas such as environmental management, health care, and policing. Fung continues this theme by looking at innovations in public consultation such as deliberative polling, study circles, and citizens' assemblies, many of which have come to the fore outside the United States. He concludes by discussing some of the challenges inherent in citizens' participation and how they can be resolved.

Chapter 5, by Marta Ferreira Santos Farah and Peter Spink, follows logically from Archon Fung's. It focuses on Brazil, a country where the strengthening of democratic institutions and the construction of citizenship are important

aspects of innovation in government. Building on the work of the Center for Public Administration and Government at the São Paulo School of Business Administration (EAESP-FGV), where the Ford Foundation has supported the Innovations in Subnational Government Program since 1996, they discuss patterns and processes of innovation in that country. They also look for answers to the question of whether the Brazilian experience is similar to the American, in terms of both the nature of the innovations and the nature of the innovative process (for example, sustainability and replication). They find that although innovations are deeply connected to the social, economic, and political characteristics of each country, they are also able to communicate across language, cultural, and political boundaries.

The awards program's basic unit of analysis is the innovative program. Going beyond individual programs, however, we have observed from studying the applications that some organizations give rise to a series of innovative programs, leading us to hypothesize that they developed a culture that is particularly supportive of innovation. One such organization is the U.S. Department of Labor under Secretary Robert Reich (from 1993 to 1997), which was both a frequent applicant and a frequent winner during the first three years the awards program was open to the federal government (1995 to 1997). Jack Donahue, the author of chapter 6, was assistant secretary for policy and counselor to the secretary of labor at the time. Drawing on his own recollections, he explains the factors that created and sustained innovation in the Department of Labor: excellent political appointments, management systems that gave senior executives latitude to be innovative and made them accountable for results, and a culture that encouraged innovation at all levels of the organization. Donahue also focuses on Robert Reich as a person of passionate conviction with a great willingness to take risk who thus fostered an innovative organization.

Chapter 7, by Eugene Bardach, deals with the processes by which innovations that create interagency collaborative capacity are established and sustained. Bardach's 1998 book, *Getting Agencies to Work Together*, had as its empirical basis an analysis of nineteen cases drawn from the Innovations in American Government Awards Program. In his research for this chapter, Bardach revisited the cases he analyzed a decade ago and found that some were still thriving, others were coping, still others were being buffeted by external forces, and some were dying. Bardach then discusses smart practices for establishing interagency collaborative capacity (ICCs), for example, strategies for acquiring resources, building momentum, and sequencing developmental steps. He then considers the sustainability of ICCs in the face of a variety of external shocks, such as the loss of political support following election turnover or a change in fiscal circumstances, envisaging a dialectical process of challenges and responses. Bardach

concludes by suggesting an entirely new direction for further research on developmental processes for ICCs, namely, computer simulation.

Chapter 8, by Robert D. Behn, deals at a conceptual level with replication, which is one of the primary goals of the awards program. Replication poses a challenge to both the exporter and importer: for the former, to articulate a causal explanation of why the innovation works, and for the latter, to go beyond a superficial understanding of the innovation to grasp its essential components and how they can be adapted to a new context. Behn also analyzes the vocabulary of adoption to draw distinctions among diffusion, transfer, propagation, and replication. Much of what is involved in an innovation is tacit knowledge; the ultimate challenge to the exporters of public-sector innovations is to communicate tacit knowledge, and the challenge to would-be importers is to understand it and then apply it to their own context. Behn illustrates his argument by contrasting the successful adaptation by many New York City agencies of the Police Department's CompStat (comparative statistics) performance strategy with less successful attempts by many city governments to emulate Baltimore's CitiStat version of that strategy.

We continue the focus on replication in chapter 9. Jean Hartley examines the Beacon Scheme, which is an English central-government program to recognize, reward, and disseminate excellence and innovation in local government and other local public services by sharing knowledge about good or promising practices by local authorities and their partners. Hartley's chapter is based on extensive research on the Beacon Scheme conducted at the University of Warwick. The research project examines award applications, learning from the innovations and the nature and extent of improvement. The research has looked at all 388 local governments in England to determine which apply for the scheme and why, thus providing an example of innovation research that looks at an entire population, rather than just the innovative organizations within that population. Hartley outlines a model of knowledge transfer that has similarities to Behn's discussion and then applies it to knowledge transfer in the program. A key result is that local governments found "open days" held by Beacon award winners to be the most effective means of dissemination and the most likely to lead to the transfer of tacit knowledge. The chapter concludes with a report on what local governments learned at Beacon Scheme events, changes they implemented as a result, and their assessments of the success of such changes, thereby providing evidence not only on the diffusion of innovation but also on the extent to which the innovations affected performance.

Our book concludes with two chapters from different, albeit complementary, perspectives. In chapter 10, Gowher Rizvi, director of the Ash Institute, reviews the contributions of the innovations awards program and Ash Institute

to improving the performance of government and speculates about their future roles. He discusses the importance to society of trust in government and how democracy is the form of government most likely to produce public trust in the future. He shows how the Ash Institute's new focus on democratic governance, both in the United States and abroad, responds to the challenges of governance, especially in diverse and pluralistic societies. He then summarizes the key themes that have emerged from the innovations awards: collaborative arrangements, not only within governments but between government and civil society; citizens as consumers; market incentives; and flexible management techniques. Rizvi sees innovations as means to the ultimate objectives of government, namely, enhancing the quality of life for citizens, guaranteeing social justice, and strengthening democratic governance. Innovations must be judged by their ability to fulfill these objectives.

In chapter 11, Sandford Borins, drawing on the previous chapters, illuminates future directions for research on innovation in government and governance. These include research on what is happening at the leading edge in terms of both governance and government, in particular, research involving international comparisons, in both economically advanced and developing countries; research about the developmental dynamics of innovations; research about the diffusion of innovations, which depends on information about the populations within which innovations are introduced; and research on the relationship between innovation and improved performance at the organizational level. He concludes by discussing how data already gathered by the Innovations in American Government Awards Program could be used to explore some of these questions and suggests additional data that would have to be gathered to answer the others. Thus, there is a full agenda for research on democratic governance and innovation, and the Ash Institute will play an important role in the next generation of that research.