

Recap of 9/15/16 Senior Fellows and Friends Event

**Lab @ OPM: Using Human-Centered Design to Unleash  
Employee Innovation and Improve Government**

Dear Senior Fellows and Friends,

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy has been working with federal agencies since 2011 to identify and share practices that promote innovation and make government work better and cost less. One approach is called human-centered design (HCD) thinking, which seeks to tap into the passion, energy, and ingenuity of federal employees and build their capacity to tackle complex challenges. This was the topic a week ago.

**Listen to what four participants had to say:**

Craig Winslow, GAO:

I enjoyed the program at the OPM innovation lab yesterday evening very much. Elaine and the lead designer, Sean Baker, were very well spoken and, of course, enthusiastic. I think what they are trying to do is very exciting and challenging. Unfortunately, I didn't think to take any photographs.

Lora [Allen, our onsite host] was very poised and did a great job as usual. And I liked the people who came a great deal. They seemed genuinely interesting and had good questions.

I had a chance to chat a bit with Elaine and a little with Sean about their reaction to the GAO report and they said they actually found it helpful. Sean shared a bit about the assistance the lab is providing to improve USA Jobs and also that he's involved with efforts by the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve their service to veterans. In fact, I'm going to float the idea of the GAO SESer who oversees our VA work meeting Sean for lunch sometime. We've issued so many reports critical of VA and he may be interested to learn that VA officials have gotten the innovation lab involved to help them with improvements. It may be a dumb idea but we'll see.

It's probably just me but many times when GAO issues a report with agency recommendations, it seems like the agency should immediately call the lab and ask for help. Sean explained that sometimes their involvement is relatively minor—serving as essentially catalysts or cheerleaders—and at other times not so minor, including field work, etc. They have a limited staff and enter into agreements with agencies wishing to use their assistance that include funding. Their biggest success so far has been working with school lunch officials to improve the application process, which was hailed as a great success that will save \$600 million dollars. They had the support of the school lunch leadership team and that, they said, is always a big plus, which isn't surprising.

They use human-centered design but acknowledged that there are other options that may also be useful. I think that as much as anything they are trying to be change agents and they certainly have their work cut out for them.

They also provide a number of courses and workshops. Elaine also said that many other agencies and departments now have their own innovation labs to one extent or the other. That pleases them because

part of their mission is to teach and inspire others to think creatively, etc. and they are a very small shop. So small, in fact, I guess that, although I'm sure they must have an online presence somewhere, I was unable to find them at all through the OPM Website. No wonder they said that they get most of their customers through word of mouth. So far as the OPM Website is concerned it's like the lab is a secret.

I'm attaching an article I found when I Googled Sean Baker.

Dagne Fulcher, Fulcher Consulting LLC:

First, I wanted to thank you for hosting last week's group at OPM. It was great, and I will follow up because HCD will potentially be very useful at FDIC where we are beginning to implement changes to mitigate gaps found in our assessment and gap analysis of the Information Security Management Program.

Marty Emory, Emory Associates:

A couple of items that I thought were interesting were—

\*the wording of "blue sky aspirations" which visually gives a leap ahead vision for all; "ethnographic observation"—wording that I am going to start using to make people think...and "hairy wicked program"—version of "big hairy idea..."

Also, I plan on doing some reading on Human Centered Design.

Tony Notaro, Social Security Administration and Chair, Leadership Alumni Board at Partnership for Public Service:

I enjoyed our 9/15 visit to the OPM innovation lab and the introduction that staff gave us concerning human centered design (HCD). In all of my different positions in State and Federal government, I have striven to work with internal and external stakeholders to design tools, applications, forms, and business processes with the end-user or with the public in mind, so this process really resonates with me. The conversation was interesting and engaging; I left the event wanting to learn more about the specifics and how those specifics could be applied. Maybe this introduction to HCD could lead to a follow up event focused more on specific HCD techniques.

I hope Tony will take his suggestion back to the Leadership Alumni Board, which could host such an event at the Partnership.

**Two other valued colleagues weighed in:**

Ilyse Veron, Editorial Director, Veron Ventures:

This sounds fascinating. I'm sorry I won't be there due to Back to School Night. I'd love to know more about what's making innovation happen in the National School Lunch Program. My household appreciates the improved offerings.

Judy Douglas, NAPA Fellow, Client Industry Executive at Hewlett Packard Enterprise, and Vice Chair Institute for Innovation Advisory Board at ACT-IAC:

Given my new volunteer leadership role with the ACT-IAC Institute for Innovation, I would like to stay particularly tuned in to how this session goes and feedback from attendees. May I ask you for this insight? Please share my greetings with all!

Here's the press release on Judy's new role: <https://www.actiac.org/act-iac-announces-new-vice-chair-institute-innovation-advisory-board>. Some of you will remember Judy from the Council for Excellence in Government, where she served as Vice President, Leadership and Performance between 2003 and 2006.

**Senior Fellows and Friends volunteer staff:**

Lora Allen served as last week's SFF host on my behalf. Lora, a human capital expert who is known within several agencies for engaging PMFs, hiring managers, and midcareer employees to improve agency performance, recently declined a private sector HR Director job offer to keep making government better. Craig Winslow, federal attorney and staunch supporter of Senior Fellows and Friends, served as last week's SFF registrar and escorted participants from the OPM entrance to the Lab.

**Contact information for Lab @ OPM presenters (Thank You, Elaine and Sean!):**

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Everyone, here's to your continued success.

Sincerely,

Kitty Wooley  
[Senior Fellows and Friends](#)  
Colorado Springs, CO

**Attachments:**

Fall schedule for Human-Centered Design Fundamentals Workshop

OPM Lab One-Pager

Article on Sean Baker's work and point of view