LONG BEACH INNOVATION TEAM
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The Long Beach Innovation Team (i-team) is funded by a grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies to design and implement solutions that improve the lives of its residents. Launched in May 2015 by Mayor Robert Garcia and City Manager Pat West, the i-team acts as an in-house research and development unit, focusing on one city priority and then moving on to the next.

Bloomberg has also partnered with Living Cities, an organization that harnesses the collective power of philanthropy and financial institutions to improve the lives of low-income people and the cities where they live. Living Cities will lead efforts to connect the growing network of cities with i-teams (currently 17 U.S. cities and two cities in Israel) and to share emerging learnings from this work with the field.

The i-team’s current priority is identifying economic development opportunities that will stimulate new investment, create jobs, strengthen the local workforce, and improve the city’s business friendliness. Guided by Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Innovation Delivery approach, the i-team uses a data-driven process to assess problems, generate solutions, and deliver measurable results.

The i-team is not responsible for the direct implementation of solutions, but instead acts as a coordinator, collaborator, and connector with the various partners, sponsors, and stakeholders within city government and non-governmental organizations. Although the i-team is based in city hall and works alongside city staff, it is outside the normal organizational hierarchy.
GETTING UP TO SPEED

When I first arrived in Long Beach, the i-team had already been working together for nearly four months. During that time they had met with hundreds of individuals all across the city and had compiled an extensive amount of research on Long Beach’s economic landscape.

I knew that I would be responsible for managing and developing much of the visual communication for the i-team, but beyond that I wasn’t sure what to expect, having never worked in government or the public sector. I wondered how I would fit in as a designer. Thankfully I had an amazing group of colleagues who instantly made me feel not only like a welcome member of the team, but a valued one. Everyone did their best to fill me in on what had been going on. It was a lot to take in all at once and I spent my first few weeks trying my best to absorb as much information as I could, all while adapting to city hall culture and enduring a brutal commute to and from LA.

It was a whirlwind of staff meetings, new faces and names, site visits, government terminology, and presentations. It took some time, but eventually I settled into the team and felt like I was finally able to keep up and understand what was going on.

To my surprise, I found it incredibly stimulating to participate in discussions about the local economy. Here was a group of people who were seriously passionate about Long Beach and committed to making meaningful improvements for all of its residents. We got to talk about the economy in a very real and tangible way, not just as some abstract, academic concept. It was exciting to think that what we said and did could one day make a positive impact on people’s lives. I came to realize that just about everything in life was related to the economy somehow, and I became obsessed with NPR’s economic podcast *Planet Money*, which gave me new insight into my Fellowship and appreciation for what I once considered a dry topic.
The i-team follows a rigorous research process that is laid out in great detail in Bloomberg’s City Hall Innovation Team Playbook. In this research process, known as the “Innovation Delivery Process,” an emphasis is placed on:

- Commitment to data
- Careful exploration of what has worked before
- Space and techniques to generate new ideas
- Structured project and performance management
- Engaging internal/external partners, stakeholders, and champions

In reading the playbook, I noticed many similarities between Bloomberg’s process and IDEO’s Human-Centered Design process, which I had become familiar with during my Interface Design class at ArtCenter in my previous term, where graphic designers were paired up with product designers. We learned that when it comes to designing products and services for people, primary research (observations, interviews, etc.) is just as important as secondary research (literature reviews, gathering data, etc.).

As a result of taking this class, I acquired valuable first-hand experience in implementing a Human-Centered Design research methodology which helped prepare me for the kind of work I would be doing during my Fellowship with the i-team. I was even able to use my personal experience to help my colleagues better understand this process, which was a way of thinking and working that was totally new for some of them.
Early on I was tasked with re-designing the annual report for the CPCC (Citizen Police Complaint Commission). In order for the i-team to be successful, we would first need to build strong relationships with the various departments and senior staff within city hall.

We wanted to quickly demonstrate what the i-team had to offer. Our hope was that a well-designed annual report would be a fast and effective way to show other departments the benefit of good design and the potential impact it could have in government. Before the arrival of the i-team, there had never been an “in-house” designer at Long Beach City Hall. It soon became very clear to me that there was a serious need for design and design-thinking in government.

My goal with the re-design of the annual report was to give the CPCC an air of friendliness, credibility, and trustworthiness. I wanted it to feel inviting and easy to read for the average person, especially for wary citizens who might be hesitant about submitting a complaint against the Police Department.
From October 2–22 the City of Long Beach hosted a wide range of events celebrating local innovation and entrepreneurship during Innovation Week(s), partnering with Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC), and Los Angeles County’s Innovation Week(s).

I designed a number of promotional materials for the events such as a banner, a web page, an email newsletter, and a public engagement campaign. Because we were partnering with Los Angeles County, it was important to echo the look and feel of their branding guide while maintaining our own unique identity so that the two campaigns felt related but distinct. To do this I borrowed the gradient and framing elements of the LA Innovation Week campaign and incorporated the i-team’s established colors, fonts, and imagery.

The i-team used Innovation Week as an opportunity to initiate an ongoing public engagement campaign asking residents of Long Beach questions about local innovation, business start-up needs, and economic opportunity. The i-team participated in many of the events, making connections with local innovators, entrepreneurs, creatives, leaders, and residents, gathering valuable insights and observations about the challenges and advantages that are unique to the City of Long Beach.

I think that one of the i-team’s most important roles is to act as a connector, bridging the gaps between all of the disparate sectors, districts, and demographics that exist in Long Beach. And city government should be expanding its role as facilitator, creating spaces and conditions that allow innovation to flourish.
I designed a section on our website dedicated to Innovation Week, listing all of the different events in one location where people could RSVP directly.
In order to quickly capitalize on Innovation Week, we decided that an email newsletter would be a great way to promote the events and engage the public while introducing the i-team. By using Mailchimp, we were able to rapidly prototype our first newsletter and gather data about the results via analytics.
I also designed a one-page website for Long Beach’s Fiber Project Map, an initiative that the i-team was working on to develop the city’s high tech infrastructure by utilizing existing fiber optic assets, and eventually expanding on them for increased internet access.

I kept the design very simple and clean while doing my best to incorporate the i-team’s previously established branding guide and visual identity.
Occasionally I was asked by other departments for help designing various flyers and infographics, including the Mayor’s office and the City Manager’s office.

For this assignment I was approached by one of the Management Assistants for help with designing an infographic, mapping the disposal process of all the different types of trash. Apparently there was no single document or website that residents could quickly refer to in order to find out which department to call and what time they might expect pick-up.

Determining the best method of organizing all of the information in a clear and compelling way initially seemed like a straightforward task. But on closer examination, it proved much more challenging and complicated than we anticipated.

Eventually we developed a simple flowchart where users would be asked a few basic questions and were quickly guided to a clear answer with a phone number they could call. The process map would be accessible on the city’s website.
FLYERS

A few of the flyers I designed. Again, my goal was always to make sure that all the material followed the established i-team branding guide so that everything felt cohesive, clear, and consistent.
One of the ongoing tasks I was given during my Fellowship was to flesh out the i-team’s branding guide. My Designmatters predecessor Chase, an industrial designer, had developed the visual identity when the i-team was first formed. He told me that the identity could use some improvement and suggested that I use my skills as a graphic designer to re-design the branding guide.

Because my time was always being divided between various meetings and design projects, I was only able to work on the i-team’s branding sporadically and sadly never got to see it completed. However, I did manage to do some valuable preliminary research and ideation that hopefully the next Fellow would be able to expand on.

I started with taking a closer look at the i-team’s brand values. During one of our staff meetings, I led a brainstorming exercise where the whole team fleshed out its existing brand values by listing as many words and phrases that they felt reflected the essence and role of the i-team. I wanted to narrow down the list to a few brand keywords that could be more easily distilled and interpreted in a visually compelling, graphic way. I also did a competitive audit so that I could show the rest of the team what’s been done already.

The i-team’s current logomark, a light bulb, feels safe, expected, and even a bit cliché. A quick Google search of the word innovation proved that my instinct was right. I think that an Innovation Team should represent itself with a logomark that’s, well, innovative.
A few brand keywords that really stood out were connector, catalyst, and community. With those three words in mind, I did some rough exploration. The first round of sketches were typographic, playing with different ways that the L and B, representing the community of Long Beach, could connect into a single shape.

The second round of sketches also explored connection, but focused more on the idea of a catalyst or spark. I presented my research and exploration to the team. They found the competitive audit very helpful, having never seen the plethora of innovation-related and Long Beach organizational logos side-by-side and in one place.

Each of my colleagues had their personal favorites regarding my logo exploration, but the overall consensus seemed to favor the more abstract, catalyst-inspired marks. I was hoping to continue the sketching process even more, but I was nearing the end of my Fellowship and had to shelve my work.
Towards the end of my Fellowship, Bloomberg and Living Cities flew into LA for a three-day, on-site visit to meet with the Los Angeles i-team and the Long Beach i-team.

There were several reasons for the on-site visit. It gave Bloomberg and Living Cities the chance to meet all of the members of the i-teams face-to-face, to hear personal accounts of everyone’s experiences, both good and bad. It allowed the i-teams to give detailed and thorough presentations about our progress in developing each of our initiatives. It provided an opportunity for the i-teams to participate in hands-on workshops with some of our internal and external partners, learning how to fill out charters for initiatives. And it also provided an opportunity for Bloomberg and Living Cities to offer their expertise, guidance, and direction to both i-teams while gathered together in the same room.

After giving our presentation, Bloomberg informed us that some of the Long Beach initiatives were still too broad and macro in scope, that although they were very good strategies, they needed to be narrowly-defined, very specific, tangible interventions.

Overall the experience was exhausting yet invigorating. Everyone learned a lot from Bloomberg’s guidance. It was also really helpful to be able to swap stories and share our successes and failures with another i-team, to know that we are facing similar struggles, growing pains, and stumbling blocks. It was also very interesting to see the ways in which we differ and how each city comes with its own unique set of challenges and priorities. I was really impressed with the fact that the LA i-team hired IDEO to help them with their public engagement campaign, gathering valuable insights into how residents feel about Los Angeles and neighborhood revitalization.

1. The Long Beach i-team visited the Los Angeles i-team at their offices in LA City Hall. Both teams gave brief presentations and shared their experiences.

2–3. Bloomberg site visit to Long Beach City Hall. The day was spent giving presentations and participating in hands-on workshops with the i-team, city government staff, and other partners.

4. Bloomberg site visit to LA City Hall. The Long Beach and LA i-teams convened and participated in group workshops and continued to learn from one another.

5. A few of the Long Beach i-team members, including myself, visited the LA i-team at LA City College as part of a public engagement campaign led by IDEO.
Immediately after Bloomberg’s visit, the i-team convened for a long brainstorming session to rethink our initiatives. The meeting was led by me, our Industrial Designer Harrison, and our Cultural Anthropologist Holly.

We decided it would be helpful to start at the beginning with step one of the Bloomberg Playbook. We began to question whether our current priority of “economic development” should be re-stated as “economic opportunity,” a subtle, yet critical, distinction.

It was important to keep in mind who our end users would be and the challenges that faced them. Once we started to list some of the challenges, we then were able to compile a list of possible contributing issues, followed by the metrics (measurable units) we would use to evaluate progress, and the target (specific goal) we would want to achieve within a certain time frame. It was a helpful exercise that started off really well. But as the meeting went on, we began to hit some stumbling blocks and walls in our thinking and eventually ended the session feeling unsure if we had actually made any progress.

Later that day Harrison, Holly, and I had a more informal brainstorming session during which we experienced a breakthrough. We shifted how we approached economic opportunity, focusing our attention on areas of extreme poverty and high unemployment, as opposed to primarily thinking of ways we might attract high-tech industry and support entrepreneurs. This train of thought led us to exploring a new potential initiative that we called “opportunity zones.”
Holly proceeded to flesh out an outline of our research methodology, describing opportunity zones as:

* A concept inspired by the rich traditions of urban ethnography and tactical urbanism, both of which seek to better understand the inner workings of urban life and inspire positive social change.

The goal of this initiative is to identify high poverty neighborhoods using select criteria, and to partner with community members and stakeholders in the area to understand neighborhood challenges and craft collaborative, intentional pilot projects. 3-4 sites will be identified based initially on the following criteria but will evolve based on findings from previous site exploration.

Based on our criteria, we decided to start with a neighborhood known as the Anaheim Corridor, a dense area that contains roughly 7 percent of Long Beach’s total population. This neighborhood has a mix of residential and commercial zones, and is home to a large population of immigrants, including the largest population of Cambodians outside of Cambodia.

We decided to start off our preliminary research by doing a quick site visit of the area, documenting the physical environment and meeting with representatives of the United Cambodian Community. What stood out immediately after surveying the area was the alarming number of vacant lots and storefronts.
Upon returning from our site visit, we immediately compiled all of the photographic documentation and relevant data we had and posted everything up on the wall. We conducted another informal brainstorming session in which we discussed our initial observations and impressions of what we had seen and heard. We then proceed- ed to define contributing issues, metrics, targets, and users, which Holly later drafted in a preliminary research document.

We then discussed what our next steps should be. We decided that it was important to contact community leaders to connect us with local residents and small business owners so that we might conduct more in-depth observational research and interviews.

Unfortunately, my Fellowship came to an end before we were able to move on to the next phase of our research.

1. Print-outs of data pertaining to the demographics of the area and photographs we had taken during our site visit.

2-3. Brainstorming session in which we discuss observations and define objectives on the white board.

CONCLUSION: PERSONAL INSIGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS ABOUT MY FELLOWSHIP

The physical layout and design of a workspace can play a crucial role in a team’s ability to function as a cohesive unit.

- The i-team was spread out onto three separate floors of city hall.
- Most of us were in cubicles embedded in the middle of other departments, like HR, the City Manager’s office, and IT.
- It felt like we were working in silos, out of the loop and disconnected from our teammates’ day-to-day activities.
- I was always conscious of the fact that our conversations were audible to surrounding departments, which sometimes made it difficult to have frank, open discussions or lively debates and brainstorming sessions.
- Having a weekly staff meeting in the boardroom was not always ideal. The environment felt stiff, formal, and stuffy. It seemed to impact team dynamics and conversation in subtle ways.

The i-team desperately needs a dedicated communal space, which would encourage better collaboration, creativity, and teamwork.

- It should feel relaxed, safe, informal, and completely separate from other departments.
- It should allow for spontaneous collisions and conversations between teammates, which can spark innovative, and even unconventional, lines of thinking.
- Socializing can be productive: seemingly unrelated, personal conversations can lead to making unexpected connections and epiphanies with regards to work-related issues.
- There needs to be dedicated wall space where everyone can continually add notes, ideas, research, photos, drawings, etc. for both brainstorming and inspiration.

Lack of resources/options in city hall forced us to be more creative in ways of getting around the limitations of our workspace.

- We tried to have spontaneous Starbucks runs with anyone who was free, which allowed us to quickly catch up in a casual way outside a government setting.
- We started to schedule meetings at local restaurants/cafes/library for informal brainstorming sessions.
- Our director John gave us permission to start converting his office into a semi-communal space, where the group could meet and talk privately when John wasn’t using his office.

Other i-teams are a valuable resource.

- On-site visits are extremely helpful if possible, but Skype meetings and phone calls are also a good way of staying connected.
- Some sort of exchange program could be beneficial, where i-team members temporarily swap places with one another to see what can be learned from other cities.
- A lot can be learned from hearing about each other’s successes and failures.
- It was also really great to have all of the designers from each i-team participate in regular Skype sessions as a group, to share the challenges and issues unique to being the only “creative” on a team.

It’s important to speak up, even if you feel out of your depth.

- It’s always good for government to hear the perspective of outsiders and laymen.
- Asking seemingly stupid or obvious questions is helpful because it sometimes challenges what people think is self-evident but might not actually be so.

The i-team should participate in more hands-on workshops and training as a whole group.

- Simply reading about the Bloomberg process and other Human-Centered Design methodologies is not necessarily enough preparation.
- Many of the steps outlined in these research methods are completely new for some members of i-teams and require lots of practice and guidance from experts, such as best practices and techniques for observational research, conducting effective interviews, generating insights and ideas as a group, prototyping, implementation, etc.
- The researchers (i.e. Cultural Anthropologist) and designers should take lead on guiding this process, but it’s not realistic to expect that they can properly “train” the whole team, which is why workshops are really the best option. These workshops should ideally be conducted at the formation of an i-team, but are still quite valuable even late in the game.

Project managers should be freed up to do what they do best: manage projects.

- Much of their time is spent gathering, reading, and organizing massive amounts of data and literature reviews.
- The i-team should use part of their funding to hire research assistants, interns, etc. to do most of the time-consuming legwork.
- Trying to meet lots of rigid time lines and goals can interfere with the natural flow of the research process, making people feel rushed or stressed when they are running behind schedule.
- Preparing for and conducting stock-takes with the mayor, where we update him on our progress, occurred too frequently and took time away from our research process.
I want to thank all of my amazing colleagues and friends on the Long Beach Innovation Team. Their work ethic and dedication were an inspiration to me daily and they truly made me feel like a valued member of the team.

I also want to thank my mentor Mari Nakano for all of her support and invaluable insight. Our conversations were one of the highlights of my Fellowship and really helped me get through some of the challenges I experienced.

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