

# Innovation Team

## **MassHousing**

Management Innovation: Internal Operations

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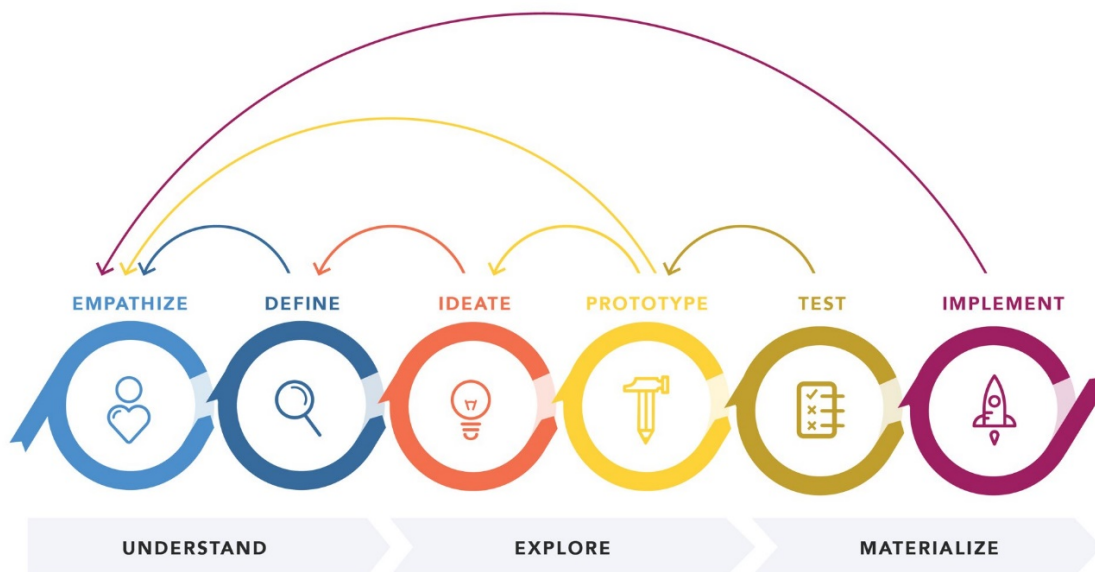
**Overview**

The MassHousing Innovation Team was created in 2019 with the addition of two Policy Innovation Associate positions. The roles were created to report to MassHousing’s Executive Director and to work on special projects and tasks across the Agency. In one year, the Innovation Team has helped to foster an internal dialogue at the Agency around broader housing policy topics and has explored new collaborations among Agency staff.

The Innovation Team is comprised of two Policy Innovation Associates. The two Associates use their diverse background in public policy, urban planning, community engagement and legislative advocacy to support MassHousing departments including Planning and Programs, Government Affairs, Rental, Homeownership, Corporate Communications and Human Resources. This support can vary from developing new programs and policy, consulting on events and special communications, and representing the Agency through external partnerships and engagement.

**MassHousing Innovation Team Approach**

The Policy Innovation Team is an inter-disciplinary and inter-departmental team dedicated to using policy research, analysis, and recommendations to expand affordable housing in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The team utilizes and encourages the use of a design thinking methodology in their work and within the Agency. Design thinking is an approach that considers the intersections of technology feasibility, economic viability, and human desirability in policy development and problem solving. The approach uses a cyclic model to show how ideas can evolve as they are developed and are informed by research, engagement and analysis.



**Impact**

The inter-departmental and inter-disciplinary nature of the team allows for a level of flexibility that would be difficult to achieve if they were dedicated to one specific division. The Associates often work collaboratively with staff in different business lines providing support on a variety of issues. In one example, the Innovation Team's research and policy strategy development assisted in the creation of two MassHousing programs to support low- and moderate-income households attain homeownership. The Innovation Team staffed a multi-agency advisory committee dedicated to addressing the racial homeownership gap in Massachusetts. Through this committee, the team worked to understand the factors that contribute to the disparity and collectively assisted in developing strategies to mitigate some of these factors. The research and analysis produced by the committee was used to inform the development and implementation of MassHousing's Commonwealth Builder and Workforce Advantage programs.

The team also leads and supports projects and initiatives with external organizations and stakeholders. These partnerships may involve local and state government agencies, municipal governments and non-profit organizations. These partnerships allow MassHousing to have a greater role in policies that support the organization's mission. One initiative that has had considerable success involves developing a framework to support local governments and identify municipal owned land for housing development. Through this framework, three municipalities have begun the process of disposing of publicly owned land for mixed-income development. As the framework and process becomes more refined, the Innovation Team will have proof of concept that can be replicated by other municipalities, helping to increase the rate of new housing development throughout the state.

It is a strategic goal of the Innovation Team to promote the use of design thinking within MassHousing. To achieve this goal, the team facilitates monthly office hours inviting staff to engage with the policy Associates and discuss opportunities for innovation and collaboration. The office hours were held in different locations for the convenience of staff in different departments (in our current remote work environment – these are zoom meetings.) The sessions include a brief overview of the Innovation Team's methodology, project pipeline and peer ideation. These sessions allow staff to share their ideas for innovations specific to an area of work, whether it be internal operations or customer based. The ideas are then shared with the Executive Leadership Team for consideration and follow-up. The Executive Leadership Team helps to refine the direction of the Innovation Team's efforts and then drives the work and focus for selected outcomes going forward. To increase capacity, the team also engaged a part-time graduate school fellow for the fall and spring semester to support projects in the research phase.

The goal of the Innovation Team is to help make the work of MassHousing's staff more impactful. The reality is that in the day-to-day function of a fast-paced Agency, key staff in the business lines don't always have the luxury of additional time to pursue new ideas for improved workflow or broader housing policy considerations beyond MassHousing's existing programs. The Innovation Team provides this additional support and helps to pursue creative, new ways of thinking about existing programs or suggesting the potential for an expanded reach of the Agency's work in Massachusetts.