

# redesigning the policymaking process

## Aim

We believe government has the power and capability to transform society—improving people’s lives with life-saving and life-empowering services created by informed and innovative public policy.

However, public policies often fail to achieve the desired or optimal effects envisioned by policymakers; prohibitive costs arise, public opinion lags, or unintended consequences plague progress. There are simply too many contingencies for policymakers to resolve before passing sweeping legislation.

Governments need a new approach to crafting public policy that reduces risks, unknowns, and variables while improving impact, quality, and accuracy.

## Beyond the experience layer

Government interacts with people at three levels. At the most personal, individual citizens have discrete experiences like riding the train to work, serving on jury duty, or working with teachers to ensure a quality education for their children. One level higher, groups of individuals benefit from programs that exist to deliver specific, concrete goods and services for people. At the highest level, government guides societal advancement—using policies to incentivize certain behaviors that contribute to large-scale social transformations.

<i>Interaction</i>	<i>Scope</i>	<i>Example</i>
<b>Experience</b>	Individual	Casting a ballot
<b>Service or Program</b>	Group	Federal Election Commission
<b>Policy</b>	Society	Voting Rights Act of 1965

Most often, citizens notice the bad experiences or poorly-run organizations that they encounter

because there are immediate, tangible, and direct consequences. Rarely, however, are the consequences of bad policy noticed quickly or apparently, even though they can be the most harmful to individuals, groups, and society. Furthermore, policies almost always underpin subar experiences.

Poorly-crafted public policy can exacerbate social tensions, stress economic markets, or marginalize groups of people. Overtime, these hardships can breed distrust among citizens, and evolve into something more insidious: a crisis of confidence in government. When public trust erodes, government cannot make decisive progress on social or economic issues to help advance our society.

## Creating Transformational Policies

Objective Subject has worked over the last ten years to create quality, valuable, human-centric experiences. Our most interesting and fulfilling work has been in the civic sector: bolstering the City of Oakland’s public perception with a refreshed visual identity system, supporting wellness programs for the NYC Department of Education, or helping Boston parents choose the best public school for their child’s needs with a new digital tool.

Through this work, we’ve observed that designers are often called in at the implementation stage of a project, rather than at the conceptualization stage. This is a missed opportunity to improve results. Designers naturally want to question why things are done one way or another, and try a variety of implementation patterns to test and confirm hypotheses. We know the value of this approach when designing digital products and tools and think it can yield dramatically improved outcomes for society when applied to the policymaking process.

## The Future of Policymaking

We want to leverage the design process—assessing, ideating, prototyping, and testing—to ensure that government’s strategy for achieving a desired outcome actually helps achieve that outcome.

Around the world, many ‘policy design’ studios or labs, both within governments ([PolicyLab](#) in the UK, [MindLab](#) in Denmark, [Sitra](#) in Finland) and external to ([Demos Helsinki](#) also in Finland, [Kennisland](#) in the Netherlands) are already doing this with promising success.

We want to do the same for American society. To do this, Objective Subject is growing its multidisciplinary team to draw from diverse and important perspectives often underutilized in the policymaking process, including: designers, experience architects, user researchers, issue experts, and others. We are also creating a network of partners who are similarly invested in this vision.

### Partners

Objective Subject will help optimize public policies by partnering with key stakeholders who shape local, state, and federal policy in the US, including: policymakers and government leaders, foundations, businesses, nonprofits, and advocacy organizations.

To help create these partnerships, we are seeking support from organizations that can provide insight, guidance, and resources.



### *Case in Point* Finland’s Use of Design Thinking to Implement Universal Basic Income

Finland’s national unemployment rate is nearly 9%, meaning about 75,000 Finns collect unemployment insurance every month. Current policy set by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health stipulates that unemployed Finns can have no other source of income in order to remain eligible for unemployment benefits. The government wondered: Does this policy disincentivize Finns from seeking out employment opportunities by making them risk their existing benefits?

Working with policy experts, designers, citizens, and others, the Prime Minister’s office partnered with [Demos Helsinki](#) to launch an experimental program to test if the concept of “basic income” could serve as a better tool to help meet the financial needs of unemployed Finns while still encouraging them to seek work. They carved space in legislation to allow testing, across different villages, a range of variables (amount, frequency, eligibility) allowing proper testing of a policy before its nationwide implementation.

The program, dubbed “[The Finnish Experiment](#),” runs until 2019. A multidisciplinary team will then review findings, make programmatic alterations, and likely run another iteration, moving closer with each phase to the policy objective of empowering Finns to contribute to society at various stages of employment.