

TABLE of CONTENTS

1. [Overview](#)
2. [Case study](#)
3. [Process](#)
 - i. **Ignition**
 - ii. [Inception](#)
 - iii. [Procurement](#)
 - iv. [Delivery](#)
 - v. [Landing](#)
4. [Primers](#)
 - i. [Agile](#)
 - ii. [Lean Startup](#)
 - iii. [Human-Centered Design](#)
 - iv. [Open Innovation](#)
 - v. [Modular contracting](#)
5. [About](#)
6. [Glossary](#)

Ignition

As an agency, it's paramount that you build the right digital acquisitions team and provide them with the right training. Your teams should be cross-functional and have a fundamental understanding of agile, lean, human-centered design, and open innovation. It's important to think of this learning as foundational and continuous. Technology changes fast and your team will have to learn to keep pace with it to maintain the market expertise necessary to make smart digital acquisition decisions.

Activities include:

- Identifying key roles
- Training

At the end of this phase you should have:

- A cross-functional team to work on the digital acquisition

- Identified gaps in skills on the team and a plan to address them
- Provided training and resources to get the team up to speed on the fundamentals of digital

We've created introductory primers on agile, lean, human-centred design, and open innovation to help you and your team become more familiar with those concepts. We've also identified roles and skills that would be helpful to have on your cross-functional teams.

Why build cross-functional teams?

All acquisitions are hard work, but with the right team gathered, it becomes so much easier. Using cross-functional teams will help. A cross-functional team is one that has all of the skills necessary to deliver a small unit of completed value. Cross-functional teams will help your agency make decisions quicker, deliver work sooner and with fewer defects, improve communication flow on projects, and promote knowledge sharing. This has worked across agencies like HHS, USDS, and 18F to improve their digital acquisition capacity.

Some of the key roles for a digital acquisitions team are:

- Acquisition Innovation Advocate (AIA)
- [Architecture / Engineering](#)
- [User Research and Experience Design](#)
- [Product Strategy](#)
- [Acquisition / Procurement](#)
- [Data Management](#)
- [Cybersecurity / Operations](#)
- [Policy and Law](#)
- [Agile Project Management](#)

Some of the skills needed to ensure the best chance of success are:

- Have experience or willingness to participate fully in collaborative, cross-functional teams
- Enjoy decision-making
- Have experience in collaborative problem-solving and thinking in teams

- Be familiar with, or curious about, lean and agile methods
- Be willing to engage and learn
- Be comfortable with periods of ambiguity
- Enjoy delivering on timelines
- Willing to teach, coach, and learn from teammates and peers

You should also look for these types of skills in each role when assembling your cross-functional team.

A special note about cross-functional teams: Individuals can serve in multiple roles depending on their skillset. Your core team should have many of these skills but feel free to pull in extra help from around your agency when necessary to further support your team. Use this as a guide to choosing team members for the digital acquisitions pilots.

Architect / Engineer

- Be familiar with agency alternatives and options for system deployment
- Participate in code review, architecture discussions, and feature prioritization
- Work with other members of the distributed team to identify and solve complex technical, cultural, and organizational issues
- Participate in or lead (as appropriate) an open dialogue with representatives from stakeholder groups in implementing modern development standards, including transparency, user-centered design, and agile methodologies; understand and communicate the “why” of these standards, not just the “what”
- Use usability research, analytics, and other metrics to influence project planning and design
- Deliver projects that are easy to deploy, update, and monitor by ensuring the tooling for this is present early in the project development cycle

User Research and Experience Design

- Create a product user research plan using modern interaction design patterns and best practices, understanding that there are exceptions to

every rule

- Clearly explain user-centered design methods and their value to non-designers, including newcomers to the idea of iterative design
- Collaborate on cross-functional teams using agile or lean sprints while guiding them toward a strategic vision
- Communicate ideas clearly in visual form using wireframes, site maps, flowcharts, storyboards, or other methods to guide development
- Pursue continuing engagement with actual users
- Effectively manage time, whether timelines speed up or hit unexpected slow downs
- Set realistic expectations for recruiting research participants and conducting research clearly and explicitly with collaborators; ask for help before a crisis strikes

Product Strategy

- Build meaningful relationships with clients and help them understand user-centered, iterative approach to understanding the problem and building the solution
- Ensure that the team is solving the right problem and not just a symptom of a problem
- Make sure the vendors and the customers are fully engaged members of the team
- Manage expectations with stakeholders
- Use evidence (user research, analytics, and other metrics) to make product decisions, ask “why” a lot, and recognize the difference between “we can’t do that because of bureaucracy” and “we can’t do that because of the law.”
- Practice lean and agile as an implementation philosophy approach and apply user-centered design methods to ensure we’re building the right product.
- Work with other teams, the agency, and partner organizations to ensure compliance with federal regulations such as Authority to Operate, the Paperwork Reduction Act, and Section 508

Acquisition / Procurement

- Work with the Integrated Project Team to develop contracting vehicles that work well with agile development practices
- Be knowledgeable about innovative and modular contracting practices, the FAR, the TechFAR, the Digital Service Playbook, related documents, and agile acquisition guidance
- Be willing to adopt, deploy, and manage innovative and modular contracting alternatives within the agency
- Experience using agile acquisitions or innovative acquisition principles is a plus
- Be trained as a CO, COR, or FAI-PM. FAI-PM/IT or DITAP background is a plus

Data Management

- Participate in code review, architecture discussions, and feature prioritization
- Review designs for ability to securely store and manage the type, volume, and velocity of data to be collected
- Apply API design and deployment (as needed) to ensure that the project will successfully interoperate with other projects
- Advise team on methods for interacting with, and testing interfaces to, existing data stores
- Work with Security Office to ensure that the product conforms to Agency requirements, and to ensure that the product can be meaningfully tested and easily certified

Cybersecurity / Operations

- Work with Security Officers to ensure that the product conforms to Agency requirements, and to ensure that the product can be meaningfully tested and easily certified
- Participate in code review, architecture discussions, and feature prioritization

- Be knowledgeable about possible delivery platforms, and the requirements for deployment, testing, and monitoring on the selected platforms
- Deliver projects that are easy to deploy, update, and monitor by ensuring the tooling for this is present early in the project development cycle

Policy and Law

- Be knowledgeable about innovative and modular contracting practices, the FAR, and the TechFAR
- Well versed in Federal Appropriations Law and able to advise in agile acquisitions
- Knowledgeable about agency-specific regulations
- Be committed to using appropriate contracting approaches that will work well with agile development practices
- Be willing to advise contracting and product managers in their interactions with vendors in order to minimize problems
- Available and committed to working in a team/collaborative environment in order to maximize communications and minimize delays while completing a contracting cycle

Agile Project Management

- Establish a shared vision and understanding across the team; ensure all members of the team have a shared understanding of the project's objectives and goals
- Actively engage with the team at large: take part in cross-project and cross-domain conversation, skill- and knowledge-sharing, and working groups
- Make sure the vendor and the customers are fully engaged members of the team
- Brief stakeholders—up, down, and sideways—about the progress of the pilot

- Determine the size, skills, and roles necessary for a team to deliver the solution for the project, and then help identify those team members
- Focus team efforts toward current goals and priorities
- Revisit and revise project direction based on the outcome of experiments and user-based learning
- Manage QA and testing to make sure the team is building to the right level of quality; establish the bar for quality and the definition of done

Once you have decided on a team, you'll need to determine which areas they could use extra training on.

Team collaboration

For this process to work, it's important that you move together as a team to move the pilot forward. Here are some ground rules that we have found help with team work:

- **Keep the project first.** Push your personal ego and pride to the side and always make decisions based on what would be best for the project.
- **Be open and transparent.** Each team member should understand the process and how decisions are made within the team. Keeping everyone informed and providing mechanisms to integrate new ideas will help improve team dynamics.
- **Overcommunicate.** First, the team should agree on the best way to facilitate communication and second, the team should follow it. The aim here is clarity. By over communicating, the team will be able to push the project forward whether they are in the room together or working asynchronously.
- **Meet with a purpose.** Time is always of the essence so be sure to have a clear agenda and desired outcomes for meetings.
- **Create a safe space for ideas.** Do not be afraid as a team to try something new, and be willing to listen to new approaches to solve the problems in front of you.
- **Appreciate candor.** Allowing space for team members to speak directly about what is working and what is not working will help speed up the workflow.

- **Value other disciplines.** Each team member will bring something valuable to the team based on their experience and expertise.

