

Best Practices in Building Systems (BPiBS)

BPiBS is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research project focused on improving how housing and building systems function.

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When the Outcome Isn't a Deliverable: Planning Beyond the Fiscal Year

by *Elisabeth Girgis-McEwen*

Every year, as March rolls in, the same pattern shows up in the federal service. Budgets wrap up. Projects speed up. Teams rush to progress. The deadlines are real, and the cycle is predictable enough to feel almost routine. That rhythm works when you are producing something clear and countable, like a report, a tool, or a dataset. Waterfall planning sequences deliverables: Phase 1 in Q2 and Phase 2 by fiscal year-end.

Housing is different. Its impact unfolds over years, not quarters. Policy changes, new practices, and new construction methods take time to show up in people's lives, and those timelines rarely match fiscal ones. The BPiBS work around mobilising housing knowledge (listening, relating, and sharing knowledge) extends across multiple funding cycles. Our [January gathering](#) mattered, yet still no single meeting can reshape how society understands housing or how people are supported. Listening with openness, as with [KIND](#), and integrating it relies on time, trust, and attention. The tools we develop, including [CIV](#), also require careful and ethical development instead of being rushed to meet a deadline.

As the March pattern reemerges, I've been reflecting. Tasks naturally expand in project work. A webinar becomes multi-session. A report grows to be more comprehensive or reworked for a context change. Each shift makes sense on its own. When everything expands at once and the deadline stays fixed, pressure builds quickly for everyone involved.

Strong projects create space for learning while the work continues. The challenge is that integration requires moments of pause. Without them, insight remains scattered and tacit. The next stage inherits activity without coherence. In the late 2010s, the federal government tweaked an indicator for many executives on management of their planned financial profile, and importantly allowed adjustments in September and December. It was a form of pause and encouraged conversations within their management teams. As a research effort, we're

fortunate BPiBS includes time for synthesis so momentum is not entirely directed toward production. We explore different views of what is emerging, how to translate it across disciplines and roles, and adjust. At the same time, there are moments when the work moves into completion mode out of necessity. When that pattern repeats, it helps for teams to acknowledge the trade-offs. When activity dominates, a few common challenges tend to show up.

- **Communication of existing work.** In the rush to do more, there is a risk of failing to articulate the value of what already exists or been created. Insights, tools, and small wins remain unused because of lack capacity (time or energy) to translating them for different audiences.
- **Pattern recognition.** Urgency narrow attention and risks tunnel vision. We miss opportunities to notice what's working, what's repeating and what our own data can tell us.
- **Human sustainability.** Prior to joining this work, I've observed excellent researchers working harder but feeling disconnected from larger problems they're trying to solve. Torn, their energy approaches exhaustion. They become unwell after major deadlines, or step back sooner than expected. The January gathering conversations reminded me this observation is not exclusive to researchers. Those human reactions signal that the pace is not sustainable.

The structural pressures of fiscal cycles will continue. Even so, practitioners across the system have choices about how to sequence work, where to use capacity, and what timeline to plan for. My recent shift from full-time researcher into a role with more public service responsibilities opened up budget room. It allowed welcoming new contributors, including [Isiah](#), Tim, [Charlene](#) and [Helen](#), with fresh ideas and energy! Facilitating a scholarship for a colleague met an immediate need while building long-term capability. These decisions happened during funding uncertainty. We're not pretending we're exempt from the tension we're living. Individually our intentions are to be caring.

If you are navigating your own year-end cycle, consider:

- What have you already accomplished that needs communication time, not more production?
- Which deliverables could be sequenced across funding cycles?
- Where could we invest in people and capacity now to enable better work next year?

These decisions shape how the work carries forward. In BPiBS, the focus is not a single product. As the work aims to strengthen housing systems, paying attention and caring for the people who make that work possible becomes a strategic part of the work itself. The long stays view present, even when timelines tighten or change.

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