



Anticipatory Democracy/Futures Commissions

A summary of a model/approach for the CSG State Transformational Initiatives (STI) effort

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Futures commissions, and related efforts to look ahead, typically consider alternatives, develop shared visions, set goals, and set priorities. They can take many forms and can be statewide, focused on one branch, e.g. the judiciary (36 states have had these since the 1990s), or focused on the future of a specific topic.

They typically analyze current trends, develop forecasts and alternative scenarios, and recommendations. Many will develop a shared vision from which to generate audacious goals and strategies. Some link these to budget choices.

These efforts can be critical in giving government greater foresight, more conscious direction setting, and greater capacity to create positive change. They can also be less than effective and at times wasted endeavors.

They are most successful when they have strong leadership support (e.g. governor, chief justice), involve other key stakeholders, including the legislature and media, have public learning and public involvement components. The most involved and those with the highest long term impact have included these factors. They also considered alternative choices in relation to goals and visions, and involved the public in choices or priorities related to the budget across multiple policy areas.

Different personality types, leadership styles, and personality preferences (e.g. MBTI types) affect how well leaders, stakeholders, and the public can support and take part in these efforts.

Like many government reform efforts, evaluation is seldom designed in from the beginning, and most futures commissions have not been systematically or comparatively evaluated for their long term impacts.

There are many emerging internet/web based tools for enhancing futures commissions and public participation generally.

Futures commissions can stimulate imagination and creativity in considering options, track emerging trends and relate these trends to current policies, develop alternative scenarios, inform and involve the public and key stakeholders, and allow the public to link policy options and trends to priority setting for state policies and the budget.

These typically are one-shot activities. Though they could be on-going and many of the functions they involve could be built into decision-making more consistently.

Bottom line for STI: Futures commissions (using various names) can be important tools for Transforming Government. They require a significant commitment of resources for staff or consultants, participant travel, communicating with key stakeholders and the public, as well as attention and support from their sponsor, e.g. the governor and relevant leaders.