

# GOVERNING's Outlook in the States and Localities: Part 1

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**GOVERNING magazine** held its annual **Outlook in the States and Localities** conference on February 2-3, 2010. The conference, which took place at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. brought together both the public and private sectors as a thorough outlook of what is to come in 2010 was provided by a series of guest speakers who covered everything from the fiscal forecast to political races to watch. As a proponent of shared ideas and expert insight into the state and local arena, GOVERNING's 2010 Outlook, though bleak, still offered a plethora of opportunity for all industries working within current economic boundaries.

Day One of the conference began with City and County Concerns amidst a post-stimulus reality. Speakers for the first panel included Don Borut, Executive Director of the National League of Cities; Chris Hoene, Research Director of the National League of Cities; Larry Naake, Executive Director of the National Association of Counties; with moderator, e.Republic's Todd Sander.

A bleak picture was painted as localities were described by Chris Hoene to be heading into the eye of the storm. Hoene expanded his metaphor as he discussed the current budget shortfalls states and localities are facing and their remedies thus far which include layoffs and furloughs, the delay or cancellation of major projects, and even a revisiting of employee pensions and benefits. Hoene called for the need of transformational government, which Don Borut echoed as he discussed stimulus funds, and though helpful as they have been for states and localities, are scheduled to run out leaving local government entities to alleviate their own tension. Borut proposed a transformational government in which localities consolidate functionality and even the possibility of down-sizing and allowing citizens to take over functions governments once provided. The sole county representative on the panel, Larry Naake agreed with both Hoene and Borut's transformational ideas and highlighted issues like healthcare reform and immigration reform that must be addressed at the Federal level in order to alleviate the burden on counties. All three gentlemen, though pointing out a rather morbid time frame – anywhere from two to five years – for local recovery, concluded that in the midst of a tumultuous storm, opportunity can be found in the local governments' need to innovate and continue to provide their services with fewer resources.

Following City and County Concerns, was the Local Leadership Forum. Headlining the Forum were leaders Jon Dickinson, a Senior Policy Advisor to Mayor Bloomberg's Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability in New York City; Bill Schrier, Seattle's Chief Technology Officer; David Smith, County Manager of Maricopa County in Arizona; A.C. Wharton, Mayor of the City of Memphis; with Todd Sander once again as acting moderator.

Unlike the daunting concerns of the city and county panel before them, the leaders in the leadership forum took the opportunity to discuss current innovative initiatives taking place in their home localities, as well as providing their stance on the state and local environment. The leaders stressed the need for local governments to seize the opportunity found within the present crisis. Transformation was once again the word of the hour as the leaders shared their views on the need for government to reevaluate the services they currently provide and develop new methods of providing those services with reduced means. Mayor Wharton stressed that though it will be a good two to five years before states and localities are free of the burden of recession, localities should still plan and function as though recovery may arrive sooner. Bill Schrier took the opportunity of the forum to share his idea as to how a local government can perform the same services at limited cost: broadband. According to Schrier, advancing and expanding the sharing of information is the key for increased functionality in government as it opens doorways for constituents to provide the possible tools and information for government to run efficiently.

Following the Leadership Forum, conference participants were invited to join one of four roundtable discussions in the areas of Fiscal Forecast, Technology Trends, Sustainability Challenges, and Regional Initiatives. Within the Technology Trends Roundtable, led by Seattle Chief Technology Officer, Bill Schrier, participants were asked to provide a technological government need, as well as an innovation. Themes were revisited as participants discussed the need for government to consolidate in order to increase functionality and efficiency. Innovative remedies that were mentioned include business intelligence and project management tools, enterprise technology tools, and the more recent trend of cloud computing. Another innovative practice that was brought up in the Roundtable consisted of the notion of larger shared services, such as a Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS) shared amongst multiple states.

As the first day of GOVERNING's Outlook drew to a close, it appeared the only ray of sunshine in the murky 2010 forecast is the notion of transformation, from which opportunity may arise.