

The Minnesota REDESIGN aims to improve our state by redesigning government to be more innovative in the delivery of public services.

A Brief History of the REDESIGN

Minnesota county officials embarked on what has been named the Minnesota Redesign in January of 2009. County officials presented over 60 ideas to the Legislature that are the basis of redesigning and restructuring the delivery of public services in Minnesota. It has been and is the hope of county officials that these efforts will create a change culture in which the relationship between the state and counties can be enhanced, innovation encouraged and rewarded, and public policy and program outcomes valued more than inputs.

County officials continue to believe that the current local government service delivery models are not sustainable in the future as times, conditions and citizen expectations change. Citizens demand that government provide services as effectively and efficiently as possible. As a nation, as a state and as communities, we recognize the responsibility to care and protect those most in need, to provide a public infrastructure that moves goods to market and allows citizens to meet their personal and community goals and preserves the vision that we share with our nation's founders.

“Civic laboratories of democracy” was how Thomas Jefferson envisioned local government. He saw a future where local governments would innovate, test, succeed and fail. Minnesota local government officials share that vision and have the ability to redefine Minnesota's service delivery systems and reconstruct how services are delivered. The Redesign heeds the advice of Robert Frost: *“I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.”*

Carl Neu coined the term “re-founders” in describing the need for local government officials to take control of their destinies. It is an easy, well worn path to let things just happen but it requires both local and state leadership to truly change the future in ways that make our state and communities better for our children and our children's children.

MINNESOTA COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Minnesota counties serve a unique dual role in Minnesota's government structure. As a local government, like cities, towns and schools, counties meet needs identified and requested by county residents. For example, counties are responsible for maintaining roads, managing land records, securing public safety, handling solid waste, preserving the environment and much more. It is the duty of county officials to carry out these responsibilities as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Minnesota counties also serve as an administrative arm of the state and provide services on its behalf. The bulk of these state services are delivered under the policy umbrellas of county human services, health, environmental services, and probation services. Counties provide space for the state court system, are the first responders in emergencies and provide those things requested and mandated by the state. Some of these services are funded by the state, some are unfunded, some are entitlements and some are discretionary. Local property taxes are often used to pay for what many believe are state services.



AMC has identified three REDESIGN goals for government and its delivery systems:

GOVERNANCE

Just like governors and legislators, county commissioners sign election certificates and pledge to carry out the laws of the state. It is imperative that county officials be given the authority to make decisions that most affect their counties and communities. Success in governance mean clear responsibilities and outcomes for state and local government; holding state and local officials accountable to their respective constituencies; delivering services at the level of government that can be most effective; and turning the Legislature's focus on outcomes rather than inputs.

TRANSPARENCY

The relationship between the state and counties as well as the governing process must be more transparent. The foundations for successful transparency are trust; implementation of an open decision-making process; government accountability and responsibility; guaranteed public participation; and use of clear and convincing evidence as the basis for policy decisions. State legislators and the state administrators must trust counties to carry out the delivery of services that meet the intended outcomes. It is not acceptable for the state to transfer costs to counties without presenting clear and convincing evidence that the costs are appropriately the responsibility of a county taxpayer.

FLEXIBILITY AND OUTCOMES

State legislators must give local governments the flexibility needed to be innovators. Success in flexibility means that service delivery should be tailored to meet local needs. Policy-makers should focus on outcomes and not solely the management of inputs; and the creation of incentives for innovations and efficiencies. Local government officials are in the best position to understand the unique place that is their community and, given the appropriate tools to do the job, are in the best position to meet the goals, objectives and outcomes envisioned by the state. Maintenance of effort requirements impair county flexibility. Arbitrary decisions by the Legislature and state departments, whether it is an MOE for public libraries, chemical dependency, or mental health, reduce the ability of county boards to make decisions that are in the best interest of their communities, constituents and the people we serve. ■