Common Cents

New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute Blog

Citizens Offer Ideas to Improve State Government

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During June the New Hampshire Governor's Commission on Innovation, Efficiency, and Transparency in State Government invited citizens to share their views on how to improve state government through a series of public forums held around the state. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that the state budget itself was a popular topic of discussion.

Established in May 2013 by executive order, the Commission is tasked with identifying opportunities for state government to save taxpayer dollars through increased innovation and improved efficiency. Additionally, the Commission is charged with suggesting methods to increase transparency in government communication and measure effectiveness of state agencies.

The Commission contracted with NH Listens to conduct a series of six public forums designed to gather citizen feedback on how the state is doing in these areas and suggestions for improvement. Additional forums were held for state employees and vendors. Staff at NH Listens compiled the collective feedback from these sessions and uncovered key themes, which were summarized in a preliminary report released on September 25.

When it comes to allocating state budget resources, the report notes, "A frequent concern among groups was that New Hampshire state government is penny wise but pound foolish. This applied to various ways that the state did not consider a long-term vision for spending." The report continues, "In sum, the issue at hand was balancing limited resources and funds with ensuring that services and products will endure over time; in other words, finding a way to balance short-term expenses and long-term goals."

Participants suggested that the state's outdated technology systems present a significant barrier to effective communication. The report notes that "inefficient systems

lead to barriers in accessing and responding to information." In addition to improved access to user-friendly information, participants also voiced a need for more context and explanation to help individuals understand the information.

Communication around the state budget was identified as an opportunity for improvement. Specifically, citizens felt the state could do a better job helping them understand how the budget process works, where resources come from, and how spending priorities are determined.

The need to invest in upgrading the state's technology systems is a theme that runs throughout many of the report findings. Yet for New Hampshire to move forward in this area, some innovative thinking will surely be required.

The Commission is expected to deliver its final report to the Governor in November. With this input in hand, policymakers will next debate how best to implement the recommendations.