

Transforming State Governance

Summary of Recommendations



The Colorado
Health Foundation™

A government that is genuinely responsive and accountable to Coloradans is not just a cornerstone of a healthy democracy – it is an essential pathway to a future marked by greater health and well-being for everyone in Colorado. Since 2021, The Colorado Health Foundation (CHF) policy team has connected with more than 150 individual, organizational, and governmental actors to synthesize recommendations for strengthening Colorado’s state legislature and administrative rulemaking practices and procedures. This has resulted in three research reports with over 50 specific recommendations, a report on state procurement and grantmaking practices, and countless moments of connection with people inside and outside of government institutions who want to see democracy thriving in our state.

These conversations highlighted both positive aspects of how Colorado’s legislature and rulemaking entities currently operate and meaningful opportunities to create more inclusive engagement and access to these policymaking processes. A summary of these ideas is included below. Full reports are available at: <https://coloradohealth.org/policy-agenda-transforming-state-governance>.

Suggested Changes to Colorado Legislative Processes

The legislative branch of state government is tasked with passing and modifying laws. In Colorado, the annual legislative session runs for 120 days and covers both the creation of new laws as well as the setting of the state’s budget. Our General Assembly is comprised of 100 members who are elected by the public. The House of Representatives has 65 members who are elected to serve up to four two-year terms and the Colorado Senate has 35 members who are elected to serve up to two four-year terms. Recommendations fall into the following five categories:

Increase public trust through government accountability

- ✓ Improve General Assembly vacancy committee process
- ✓ Restructure SMART Act hearings
- ✓ Enforce Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) requirements
- ✓ Increase media presence at capitol
- ✓ Increase transparency, making it clear who is promoting certain bills

Strengthen public engagement and support

- ✓ Increase use of participatory governance structures, such as citizen’s assemblies
- ✓ Strengthen the caucusing system
- ✓ Clarify and more effectively communicate the scope of legislative and interim committees with the public
- ✓ Capacity building and technical assistance for advocacy organizations
- ✓ Provide childcare, meals and transportation for those testifying
- ✓ Strengthen the pipeline for leadership (staff and policymakers) from community
- ✓ Require community outreach

Strengthen support and resources for legislators

- ✓ Provide additional training and resources for new legislators and staff
- ✓ Encourage policymakers to prioritize shared goals over partisan agendas
- ✓ Increase legislator and legislative staff pay

Support an inclusive environment at the capitol

- ✓ Make remote testimony permanent¹
- ✓ Make the capitol building more accessible and culturally relevant
- ✓ Provide translation and interpretation services

Update processes and procedures

- ✓ Improve scheduling
- ✓ Eliminate the filibuster
- ✓ Increase staffing of Joint Budget Committee
- ✓ Modify/restructure the 120 day legislative calendar
- ✓ Modify/restructure the annual budget cycle
- ✓ Strengthen and enforce existing bill processes
- ✓ Strengthen the Secretary of State Website
- ✓ Modify how demographic and fiscal notes are used
- ✓ Place limits on paid lobbyists
- ✓ Require equity impact analysis for all bills
- ✓ Revise campaign finance laws

¹Although remote testimony is now an [ongoing feature](#) in the General Assembly, CHF chose to retain it on this list to (a) highlight and celebrate implemented reforms and (b) maintain a focus on ensuring that remote options as [regulated](#) are as accessible and transparent as possible.

Suggested Changes to Colorado Rulemaking Processes

Administrative rulemaking is one of the most consequential – and complex – policymaking processes in Colorado. Whereas legislation often provides a broad outline for a particular policy, rulemaking is where the specific contours of that policy truly take shape. In Colorado, rulemaking occurs across a broad range of state boards and commissions. No two processes are exactly the same, and experiences largely depend on the composition and practices of individual boards and state agencies. Recommendations fall into the following four categories:

Implement consistent standards across rulemaking entities

- ✔ Increase accessibility and consistency of rulemaking entities
- ✔ Create centralized, independent coordinating bodies to support public access and standardized practices to rulemaking
- ✔ Increase transparency and consistency across agencies, department and task forces
- ✔ Strengthen rulemaking standardization and equitable engagement through improved statutory guidance

Improve operation of boards

- ✔ Provide additional training and support for board members
- ✔ Increase independence of boards
- ✔ Diversify boards' membership and improve operation of boards
- ✔ Consolidate boards
- ✔ Standardize formats and procedures across boards

Increase public trust through government accountability

- ✔ Better enforce existing public meeting law requirements
- ✔ Increase accountability between branches and levels of government
- ✔ Reform state procurement process

Strengthen public engagement and support

- ✔ Provide translation services
- ✔ Education, training and outreach for the public on rulemaking
- ✔ Increase support for nonprofits to navigate rulemaking processes
- ✔ Improve community engagement and equity work
- ✔ Require intentional outreach to communities impacted by rulemaking

Considerations

These recommendations invite further exploration of meaningful changes to a range of policymaking processes. They also present an opportunity: To transform these processes into ones explicitly designed to include and benefit all Coloradans, especially those who have historically had less power and privilege in spaces where policy decisions are made. While all these recommendations have the potential for transformational change if enacted, how each change is implemented will be equally important to ensure meaningful reform. CHF is committed to supporting change in Colorado's governing institutions that will bring our state closer to a future where all Coloradans can access and influence the policy decisions that impact their lives. We welcome further conversation, engagement and partnership around the ideas raised during these interviews.

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