



The Alliance was founded to create an information and learning network for the thousands of change agents -- people in or close to government -- who are struggling to improve the public sector's performance. In the 1990s, a vibrant movement to "reinvent government" has grown up. But it is a movement without a central nervous system.

There is no network through which people can get the information they need to move forward. The pioneers -- whether appointed or elected, federal state or local -- seldom know where to turn for good information. They don't know who had done before what they are attempting to do; who has expertise in the area; who the best consultants are; or even what to read.

David Osborne discovered the need as soon as *Reinventing Government* was published, in 1992. In early 1993, Osborne joined with columnist Neal Peirce, National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) President R. Scott Fosler, and Barbara Dyer of the Council of Governors' Policy Advisers to create such a network, as a project of the National Academy. In its inaugural year, the Alliance formed a distinguished advisory board, which includes members of the U.S. Senate, federal officials, governors, county commissioners, mayors, city managers, labor union presidents, non-profit and business leaders, and scholars.

The Alliance welcomes reformers of all backgrounds. Some members of its evolving network operate at high levels of federal, state or local government; some serve in legislatures, city or county councils; others are in key staff positions; still others work deep in the bureaucracy but thirst for examples of positive change they can use to influence administrators and policy makers.

The Alliance sees itself as a network, not a membership organization. Its strategy is to align itself with other organizations and help them strengthen the quality of their work on reinvention. Information services are as often wholesaled through other institutions as they are retailed directly through the Alliance.

Most members of the network share a general list of "reinvention" goals. For example, many of them are struggling to:

- Empower communities to solve their own problems by pushing ownership and control of public services out of the bureaucracy, into the community.

- Open government services to competition among potential providers --public agencies, private firms, and not-for-profit organizations.
- Make service providers more responsive to their "customers," particularly by giving customers a choice of competing providers.
- Find ways (including up-to-date information technology tools) by which governments can communicate more effectively with their customers -- whether businesses, universities, non-profits or the public at large -- and then obtain feedback, just as successful businesses do.
- Give service providers freedom to carry out their responsibilities as they see fit -- but then hold them, corporate-style, strictly accountable for the results.
- Deregulate government internally, creating personnel, budget and procurement systems that are less rigid and rule-bound, in order to free employees from the red tape that so often strangles their initiative.
- Thin bureaucratic levels and flatten hierarchies.
- Use market rather than administrative mechanisms to solve societal problems, when possible.

The goal of the Alliance is to be market-oriented, chiefly dependent on subscriptions, fees, sales and corporate sponsorships for its revenues. In our start-up period, we have raised seed capital from corporations, individuals and foundations. Among the corporate supporters have been Anderson Consulting, AT&T, Robert W. Baird & Co., Inc., Dennis Trading Group, General Electric, Goldman, Sachs and Co., IBM, NYNEX, and Xerox. Philanthropic support has included grants from the ARCO Foundation, the Aspen Institute, the Carnegie Corporation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the Jerome Kohlberg Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Rockefeller Foundation.

The Alliance business plan is built around five strategic objectives. Our goals are to:

- establish a learning network;
- create practical tools for change;
- synthesize what practitioners are learning through experience and publish the results through our network;
- educate current and future public leaders about the paradigm shift underway in government today; and

- help the media and public understand this paradigm shift.

In its first two years, the Alliance has concentrated on the first two of these objectives.

### **OBJECTIVE ONE: *The Public Innovator Learning Network***

The Alliance's most important objective is to establish a national learning network of government reformers. Our approach is to create an infrastructure that helps people learn from each other and ensures a constant flow of reliable, high-quality information. Because people learn in a variety of ways, we are developing a range of products, accessible through both low- and high-tech means.

We launched our first product, *The Public Innovator*, in March 1994. It is a twice monthly news bulletin about public sector reinvention, developed through intensive editorial board consultation, surveys and a focus group. Its purpose is to give civic reformers a steady diet of information they can use: brief field reports on cutting-edge innovations and important trends, complete with names, phone numbers and fax numbers readers can call to get more information.

*The Public Innovator* draws lessons from the experiences -- successes and failures -- of the many men and women who are pioneering new approaches to politics, governance, and public management. Its kiosk lets people know about training opportunities, new books, conferences, videos, and software. Some articles also update readers on critical national developments that will influence the potential for reinvention in the field.

We have tried to create a publication that itself represents innovation -- concise, tightly edited articles, a highly professional and readable layout, a touch of humor even on serious topics, information on how to make direct contact with the innovators featured, mechanisms for reader feedback, and distribution by fax as well as by mail (depending upon the subscriber's choice).

The Alliance continuously seeks to improve both *The Innovator's* content and business processes. The editorial team, which includes David Osborne, Neal Peirce, Governing Editor and Publisher Peter Harkness, and journalists Jonathan Rowe and Kathleen Sylvester, works closely with Editor Neal Johnson. Alliance staff members stay close to readers through random sample phone calls and informal surveys. We began formal surveys this year to get more systematic feedback.

***The Learning Network:*** Working with IBM as our technical partner, the Alliance is developing a data base of promising practices, lessons learned, tools, and tips on what to read and who to contact. ***The Learning Network*** will also provide a connecting point for innovators who wish to share their wisdom and seek advice from practitioners, consultants, academics and other experts. We will sponsor on-line clinics with experts on particular issues, forums in which people can exchange information, a bulletin board, and related services.

*The Learning Network* covers a full range of topics -- from citizen engagement to customer service, from work force development to community development, from procurement reform to performance measurement. For each topic, the Alliance works with experts and practitioners to develop issue overviews, glossaries of terms, cases, contact people, book reviews and annotated bibliographies. To build the data base, cooperative arrangements are being developed with the Kennedy School of Government/Ford Foundation Innovations Awards Program, the Reason Foundation, the National Civic League, The AFL/CIO, Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, and others.

This on-line capacity should provide the core of an indispensable learning environment for people working to improve government. Building the information system with state-of-the-art technology provides the flexibility to create new electronic services as people become more adept at operating on-line. For example, our core technology allows us to convene electronic forums, through which practitioners working on the same problems can find one another and share what they have learned -- without our having to act as middle-man.

*The Learning Network* went on line on the Web in June of 1995. Since that time, the number of "hits" has grown from several hundred a week to more than 3,000 a week. The topic areas most popular with browsers are procurement, competitive government, performance measurement, business process reengineering and the U.S. Conference of Mayors' best practice case studies.

## **OBJECTIVE TWO: Create Tools For Change**

We believe that the reinventing government movement also needs a concerted effort to break through some of the obstacles that have halted progress in so many organizations. For example, traditional line-item budget systems have hampered many creative efforts to reinvent human services. Traditional civil service systems have stymied effort after effort to create more entrepreneurial public organizations. And traditional animosity between labor and management has made impossible many initiatives to improve public services.

We attack these roadblocks by creating what we call "Design Labs," which bring teams of people who have already solved these problems together to compile the lessons they have learned, work out "prototypes," test them in the field, and publish the results. We then encourage other public innovators to use these new tools in their own organizations.

The Alliance initiated several Design Labs in its first years.

- **Investment Budgeting:** This lab produced a manual entitled *Deciding For Investment*, which presents concepts and "how-to" advice for those who want to go beyond performance-based budgeting to estimate the return-on-investment of alternative spending patterns.
- **Creating High Performing Public Sector Organizations:** In this lab, the Alliance is developing a manual that will help guide public sector reformers through the maze of potential change

strategies. It will help them clarify what changes are needed, define their path, and determine which tools would best help them accomplish their task. The Design Team drafted the manual, field tested it with practitioners, and refined it. It will be published by Jossey-Bass in 1996.

- **The Oregon Option:** In December 1994, leaders from Oregon and Washington, D.C. signed a memorandum of understanding committing federal, state and local governments to test a results-driven approach to federalism. The Alliance was the catalyst for this important experiment and is working closely with local, state and federal officials as the process unfolds. The key question being addressed is whether multiple levels of government can align themselves in order to achieve results that matter to the public. The basic mechanism is a contract between the federal, state, and local governments, in which the state and localities commit to achieving particular results, over five years, in exchange for greater flexibility in the use of federal money. This lab will develop a prototype of the kind of intergovernmental partnership required to move beyond block grants to a new, results-oriented contract.
- **Contracting With Nonprofits Organizations (under development):** The Alliance has developed a proposal to work with government officials and nonprofit organizations to determine effective approaches to results-driven contracting. Government relies increasingly on community-based nonprofit organizations to deliver social services. Nonprofit service providers are generally more in tune with communities, more flexible, and less expensive than direct government service providers. However, if government is going to become more accountable to the citizens for measurable results, what implications does this have for nonprofits? How can our governments eliminate the red tape with which they so often suffocate nonprofit providers and replace it with a performance-based contract? How can we extend to the nonprofit world the kind of accountability-for-flexibility tradeoff the Oregon Option is pioneering? How can the public sector empower community organizations to heal their communities without debilitating them with rules and drowning them in paperwork?

### **OBJECTIVE THREE: Synthesize Knowledge Gained in the Field**

Our third strategic objective is to synthesize the lessons being learned by practitioners of reinventing government in the field and distribute that knowledge as widely as possible. We have done some of this through our design labs, our Learning Network, and occasional special issues of *The Public Innovator*. We have plans to go beyond that, however. Our proposed strategy has three elements. The first is to identify the best material in the field and make it easily accessible to our market. The second is to identify gaps that need to be filled. The third is to fill those gaps by producing Alliance papers and articles and encouraging others to produce syntheses. We will launch these efforts when our distribution infrastructure (the *Public Innovator*, the Learning Network, and our direct mail lists) reaches enough practitioners to ensure that our synthesis products achieve a wide readership. Plans include:

- **The "Whole Reinventor's" Catalog**

We hope to develop an annotated mail order catalog (in both hard copy and on-line versions) of the best publications, software, tapes and videos on making government work. Many organizations produce valuable publications that are not easily found in bookstores or libraries. This catalog would help reinventors find those gems. It would also help the Alliance identify where the gaps in information are so that we can help fill them.

- **Identify and Fill Gaps** The next step would be to identify gaps in what is already available and begin to fill them. Possible approaches include commissioning papers and articles; developing an awards program for scholarly papers written for practitioners; developing a resident scholar program; and working with graduate schools to create a joint public policy and journalism practicum focused on training scholars to write for practitioners and the popular media.

#### **OBJECTIVE FOUR: Educate Current and Future Public Leaders**

In the coming years we intend to design education and hands-on training programs to help current and future public leaders learn new approaches to governing. The target is to initiate our on-line seminar series (discussed in an earlier section) in the 1996 fiscal year. The colloquium and study tours are being considered for fiscal year 1997. Plans include:

- **Annual Colloquium**

The Alliance plans to convene an annual three-day colloquium on reinventing government. The colloquium would allow hundreds of reformers to gather in small group workshops and seminars. Ideally, this would take place on a college campus with ample facilities for small group sessions and large meetings.

- **Reinventing Government Study Tours**

People learn the most through experience. When they are exploring new models, it is enormously helpful to visit examples, so they can see, touch, and smell the new reality. The Alliance plans to develop study tours for groups of practitioners, who will visit reinvention sites in the public and private sectors. Groups will have representation from labor and management; elected and career officials; local, state, federal, and non-government participants.

#### **OBJECTIVE FIVE: Communicate With the Public and the Media**

The Alliance is attempting to promote better public understanding of government reform by seeking more thoughtful and thorough media coverage. The primary goal is to become a valuable source for reporters and broadcasters throughout media markets. In addition, *The Public Innovator* frequently prints articles on promising alternatives to the traditional media.

For more information on the Alliance contact:

Kathy Keely  
Alliance for Redesigning Government  
1120 G St., N.W. Suite 850  
Washington, D.C. 20005

(202)347-3190, fax (202) 347-3252

---

[ [Alliance home page](#) | [What's new](#) | [Clinics](#) | [PI](#) | [Calendar](#) | [Institute](#) ]

The Alliance for Redesigning Government

Send comments or questions to the [Alliance Webmaster](#)

Last updated: February 20, 1997