

Forces shaping states

BY KEON S. CHI

State leaders and others at the start of the millennium are asking, "What are the major forces that are likely to shape the future of state government?" While this is a loaded and difficult question, trends in the past two decades point to five such forces: federalism, public-private interactions, technology, public participation and state leaders.

Federalism. Federalism is a formidable force in shaping the role and responsibility of state governments. The states' public policy depends upon the changing nature of federal-state-local relations.

To shape federalism, state leaders need to continue their campaigns for federal actions designed to strengthen the standing of the states in the federal system, such as the Federalism Accountability Act and the Federalism Act of 1999.

It also is important to continue the work of the federalism summits held in 1995 and 1997 by representatives of CSG and other major state leadership organizations. These meetings were designed to improve the partnership equilibrium of federal and state governments. The principles adopted by the summits included calling on Congress to justify its constitutional authority to act on bills, as well as to limit and clarify federal pre-emption of state laws and federal regulations on states, streamline block-grant funding and simplify financial reporting requirements.

Public-private interactions. Relations with the private sector will have a considerable impact on the future of the states, especially in administration and management.

Public-private interactions at the state level during the past 20 years have grown in three areas: government-restructuring and cost-control studies, planning and management, and alternative service delivery. Many task forces on state government reorganization have included private-sector representatives to identify cost-reduction measures patterned after private-sector practices. Most states also have established public-private partnership projects aimed at strategic planning and benchmarking, economic development and management improvement. Privatization remains the most prominent and controversial area for public-private alliances. The extent of government services that are contracted to private vendors is likely to shape future state operations.

Technology. Technology already is shaping state government operations. State governments need information technology to operate effectively. Electronic democracy and electronic government are creating new dimensions in government and raising new questions and problems. The technology applications most widely available to state

agencies in recent years have included cellular phones, e-mail, the Internet, paging and voice mail. States have launched major initiatives in automation, emergency management, fleet management, procurement reform and telecommunications. Many states now use computers in their legislative chambers and courts. Technology is a formidable force in all branches of state government.

Public participation. The future of states depends on how the public participates in the workings of state government.

In light of relatively lower levels of public confidence and trust in state policy-makers, the public could either shun participation or seek to shape policy through statewide

campaigns for voter initiatives where allowed. Recent campaigns have targeted taxation, education, lobbying and campaign finance, and legislative term limits.

The public also could help shape state legislative processes by directly accessing activity in legislative chambers through Internet and other technology applications, bypassing traditional media coverage. The extent of public participation can be a determining factor in improving state government management.

State leaders. Finally, elected and appointed state leaders have the authority and resources to shape the future of the states in many, if not all, policy and program areas. They are and should be the key movers and shakers of state government. While the national government has an impact on states, state leaders have a considerable amount of flexibility and discretion under the U.S. Constitution. They have a vast amount of reserved powers to exercise, ranging from the power to streamline government structures to reforming educational systems. Leadership and management styles can make a difference in the way the states are run. State leaders and managers need to initiate or replicate innovations on a continuing basis to meet the challenges of the future.



The future of states is a work in progress.

Keon S. Chi is a senior fellow in CSG's Center for Leadership, Innovation and Policy.