

DEI Program #3: A national collaboration to advance DEI to improve state and local government transparency and accountability

Challenge: Poor legislation and policies, and violations of state open government laws by government officials, prevent access to public information and lessens accountability in state and local public institutions. Remedies for bad open government laws and practices can be implemented by each branch of government to increase transparency, reduce costs (and friction) and improve public trust.

Solution: Enact open government reforms in state legislative and executive branches in six FOI policy areas. The National Freedom of Information Coalition and its state open government coalition members will facilitate a national collaboration of diverse stakeholders (race, age, gender, sexual identification and professional field proposed through a national collaboration of diverse stakeholders to identify legislative and policy reforms* to advance among state legislative and executive branches. The initiative will contribute to building the next generation of open government and First Amendment advocates. The six policy topics, or academies are:

- Economic Development
- Criminal Justice/Law Enforcement
- Public Record Fees
- Litigation Alternatives
- Technology and Transparency
- Open Government Laws - enforcement and penalties

NFOIC has a unique infrastructure and network to take these recommended reforms and pursue their adoption within the states. Enlisting contributions from diverse, informed stakeholders will improve the process, amplifying their importance and increasing the impact for real change. NFOIC and state coalitions combine a national *(grass-tops) and state-level (grassroots) efforts to pursue reforms.

No other initiative exists on this scale to pursue and secure a public policy shift that will deliver a comprehensive set of open government reforms in model legislation, professional standards and agency practices.

The six policy areas represent long-standing challenges to the FOI community. Using an inclusive approach to bring new and diverse voices into the deliberation, NFOIC will advance four objectives:

1. Improve a national knowledge base of evidence-based research to study state open government and transparency challenges and their solutions.

2. Contribute to building the next generation of open government advocates through diversity, equality and inclusion that is noticeably absent in today's FOI community.
3. Turn a spotlight on deficiencies in state FOI administration, especially on the lack of compliance to state open government laws and their enforcement.
4. Secure adoption of specific reforms in each policy topic that improves and increases access to public information, meetings and officials.

The six academies are structured similarly to a committee or task force. Each will have a chairperson and receive staff support from NFOIC. Participants could range from 12-20. This is a 36-month initiative with an ongoing flow of information sharing, collaboration, campaigns and monitoring. Academy participants may rotate on an annual basis to increase engagement, subject-matter-expertise and ideas building on a body of knowledge for each topic. At least one in-person meeting for each academy will be held during the three year timetable, preferably convening at a university. **Program Impact:**

- **Increased Representation:** Expanded participation from a diverse audience that is noticeably absent in today's FOI community to deliberate and prescribe legislative and policy reforms to improve access/accountability in state/local public institutions.
- **Public Participation:** Provide an avenue and structure for additional citizen participation in this collaborative process beyond the academy members.
- **Train-the-Trainer:** Equip the FOI community with factual responses and counter-arguments to persuade public officials that adopting reforms are feasible, realistic and beneficial to their institutions and to the public.
- **Remedy Oversight:** Secure adoption of reforms from one or more policy areas in states with favorable chances for success.
- **Increased Transparency/Accountability:** Adoption of proposed reforms will open government agencies with increased access to information, meetings and public officials and improve accountability with stricter adherence to open government laws.
- **Program Monitoring:** NFOIC and state coalitions will keep tabs on the results, informing public officials, academy members and the general public, and continue the ongoing work of the policy academies as new challenges arise.

The NFOIC is doubling down on its efforts to help state government transparency groups strengthen laws, improve agency record dissemination practices, and diversify the open-government community. This initiative is part of NFOIC's DEI strategy to diversify the FOI community from its "2020 Vision" strategic plan for improving government transparency at the state and local level at a time when access to public records and institutions is becoming more challenging for journalists, citizens and businesses.

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