

2026 NCSL LEGISLATIVE SUMMIT

Championing Development-Based Governance in Your State

Help Shape the Next Shift in Governance

An invitation to join a founding legislative cohort for Development-Based Coherence

Public systems often share responsibility for the same people and outcomes, yet they operate through separate policies, funding streams, committees, agencies, and timelines. The result is not necessarily a lack of effort. It is often a lack of coherence.

Development-Based Coherence offers legislators a practical way to examine how those systems can work together around the conditions people need to develop, learn, contribute, and flourish. It shifts the conversation from adding another isolated program to strengthening the operating architecture surrounding the policies and investments states already have.

Rethink Learning is looking for a founding cross-state cohort of legislators and policy leaders to explore this approach, test its usefulness against real state priorities, and help shape a practical legislative practice for building coherence across government.

THIS IS NOT ANOTHER INITIATIVE

It is an opportunity to improve how existing initiatives, policies, systems, and investments work together.

The opportunity

Founding participants would not be joining a finished program or endorsing a predetermined policy agenda. They would help refine an emerging framework, identify where it has practical value, and inform the tools, language, learning experiences, and state-level applications that should come next.

The central proposition

Development-Based Governance is the broader approach; Development-Based Coherence is the practical condition created when policy, agencies, funding, accountability, and legislative work are aligned around shared developmental priorities.

What Participation Could Look Like

A low-burden invitation to learn, apply, and help shape the work

Participation would begin with learning rather than obligation. Cohort members would be invited into periodic cross-state conversations that introduce the Development-Based Governance framework, examine why fragmentation persists, and explore the distinct role legislators can play in building coherence across committees, agencies, budgets, and accountability structures.

A state priority as the point of entry

Each participant could identify one issue, population, policy challenge, or developmental condition that matters in their state. The starting point might be early childhood, literacy, chronic absenteeism, special education, behavioral health, postsecondary transitions, workforce development, reentry, youth justice, rural access, or another concern already commanding legislative attention. The cohort would not prescribe the priority. It would offer a way to see the priority more completely.

Practical application rather than abstract discussion

Participants would use the framework to ask which developmental condition is most consequential, where weakness in that condition appears across public systems, which policies and resources already touch it, and where committee jurisdiction, agency responsibility, funding, or accountability become fragmented. The purpose is to identify what can be aligned before something new is created.

A peer community with room for different roles

Some members may wish to test the framework quietly with staff or colleagues. Others may become conveners, committee champions, sponsors of coherence-building language, or connectors to executive-branch partners. The cohort should accommodate these different levels of readiness while creating a shared place for legislators to learn from one another across states.

What the first commitment is—and is not

The first commitment is simply to explore whether this approach can help a state ask better questions, align what already exists, and strengthen how public systems work together. Participation would not initially require sponsoring legislation, creating a new agency or program, making a public endorsement, committing state funds, or accepting a fixed policy platform.

What founding members could help shape

As the work develops, cohort members could review practical legislative tools, test state-specific coherence maps, suggest useful committee and staff resources, inform model findings or intent language, and help determine what a durable national legislative learning network should offer. Their value would come not only from participation, but from helping ensure the approach is credible and usable in the real conditions of legislative work.

From Learning to Application

A possible cohort pathway—adapted with founding participants

01

Orient

An introductory session would establish the core ideas of Development-Based Governance and Development-Based Coherence. Participants would examine why well-intended policies remain disconnected, how developmental conditions cross policy categories, and why coherence is a legislative leadership responsibility.

02

Explore

Participants would bring forward a state priority and examine it through a developmental lens. The cohort would map the people, systems, committees, funding streams, and accountability structures already connected to it, then identify where shared responsibility lacks coordination.

03

Apply

Using practical questions and mapping, participants would identify where policy architecture could be strengthened. Opportunities might include aligning legislation, clarifying ownership, coordinating reporting, connecting appropriations to developmental aims, or creating a more coherent pathway across agencies.

04

Teach and Shape

Participants would refine teaching tools, committee experiences, legislative templates, and state applications while developing the capacity to explain, convene, and apply the approach with others.

The Development-Based Governance Teaching Tool

A core cohort resource would be a practical, nonpartisan teaching tool built around a legislative or policy case. It would trace a state problem from the developmental condition at stake through the public systems in which its consequences become visible, then surface the committees, agencies, funding streams, accountability requirements, and constituencies that must be considered for more coherent legislation.

Designed for adaptation, the tool could support an individual legislator and staff team, a committee briefing, a joint session of related committees, a caucus learning conversation, or a cross-agency convening. Each use would move participants from diagnosing fragmentation to determining what alignment, ownership, sequencing, and accountability require in practice.

Committee workshop option

A participating legislator could invite Rethink Learning to facilitate a Development-Based Governance workshop for a committee or legislative team. Using a state-relevant issue, the workshop would help members see where siloed processes limit effectiveness, identify the systems and stakeholders implicated, and consider how legislation can advance both a policy objective and a more effective governing architecture.

Potential Next Steps

Multiple entry points—one shared opportunity to strengthen governance

The cohort would allow legislators to move at a pace that fits their role, state context, and level of interest. A Summit conversation would therefore open several possible next steps rather than create an immediate obligation.

Continue the conversation. Receive the brief, join an introductory call, and learn more about the framework and the proposed founding cohort.

Explore a state priority. Identify an issue that may benefit from a Development-Based Coherence analysis and participate in an initial mapping or strategy conversation.

Invite a committee or legislative team. Arrange a briefing or workshop that applies the teaching tool to a state-relevant issue and helps members examine how policy, systems, and investments could work together more coherently.

Help shape the founding cohort. Participate in early design conversations about cohort cadence, learning topics, practical tools, state applications, and the supports legislators would find most valuable.

Serve as a state champion. When appropriate, help introduce the framework to colleagues, staff, committee leaders, or executive-branch partners and create a pathway for deeper state engagement.

What success could make possible

Over time, the cohort could generate a practical body of legislative tools, state examples, model language, committee workshops, peer learning opportunities, and Development-Based Governance applications. The larger goal is a new legislative practice: one that helps states move from fragmented programs toward coherent governance organized around human development.

An opportunity to help build what comes next

Imagine helping shape an emerging approach to legislative leadership—one designed to make policies, public systems, and investments more capable of producing the outcomes states intend.

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Development-Based Governance begins with a different question:

What developmental condition must be strengthened next—
and how must government work differently to strengthen it?

Thank you in advance for your consideration!