

Foresight Leadership Certification Course

Syllabus | Alliance for Innovation

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About the Alliance for Innovation

As a nonprofit organization founded in 1979, the Alliance has spent more than four decades serving those at the forefront of local government with an enhanced capacity to anticipate, adapt and build better communities. The Alliance provides a collaborative environment where professionals can openly exchange ideas, tackle emerging challenges, test new approaches, and learn from peers across the country. Together, our members are exploring the issues shaping the future of local government, including transformative leadership, organizational effectiveness, and strategic foresight. Unlike traditional associations focused on a single profession or discipline, the Alliance brings together the entire local government organization.

Our organization-wide membership model connects city and county managers, public works, finance, human resources, information technology, public safety, planning, utilities, and other departments in one collaborative community. This cross-functional approach fosters broader perspectives, stronger partnerships, and more innovative solutions to today's most complex challenges. The Foresight Leadership for Local Government certification course is available as a member benefit. If you are interested in the course and not a member, please visit our website or contact us directly.

Course Description

Foresight Leadership for Local Government is a four-month certificate program that equips local government professionals with a practical system for facilitating long-term cultural and structural change. Participants learn seven proven methods that can be used independently or together to help organizations address complex, uncertain, and long-term challenges. Designed for leaders who convene people, collaborate across departments, and guide organizational change, the program emphasizes application over theory alone. Participants will facilitate each method within their organization, reflect on the results, and learn from the experiences of a peer cohort. By the end of the program, participants will be prepared to introduce new approaches to creating change, cultivate shared language for navigating uncertainty, and strengthen an organizational culture that anticipates and shapes the future.

What to Expect

The course runs for four months through seven 90-minute, biweekly live sessions on Tuesdays at 11:00 AM Pacific. The first session introduces the cohort, strategic foresight, and the first method. Between sessions, participants will facilitate each method within their organization using the provided guides, slides, and worksheets. They will capture key insights from the experience and bring them back to the cohort for shared reflection and learning. Participants should plan for 90 minutes of live instruction every other week, plus approximately one to two hours between sessions for preparation, facilitation, and reflection. We highly recommend joining with a partner to maximize learning and accountability.

What You Will Learn

Participants will learn how to challenge business-as-usual thinking, expand how their organizations think about the future, and facilitate seven practical foresight methods to:

- Create consensus for long-term change
- Anticipate ripple effects and unintended consequences
- Surface forces driving and resisting change
- Reframe assumptions and stories sustaining outdated approaches
- Distinguish incremental improvements from deeper, structural outcomes
- Turn a preferred future into a practical pathway with milestones and next steps
- Link decisions to the nature of the challenge.

What This Course Includes

- Seven 90-minute live sessions facilitated by experienced AFI staff.
- A complete facilitation toolkit with slides, guides, and worksheets for all seven methods.
- Guided practice and opportunities to ask instructors questions during live sessions.
- A peer learning cohort for sharing experiences, insights, and challenges.
- A Certificate of Completion recognizing the successful application of all seven methods

Who This Course is For

This program is designed for local government professionals who convene people, guide change, or help their organizations navigate complex and uncertain challenges. It is especially relevant for leaders, facilitators, strategists, and members of innovation, performance, organizational development, and cross-departmental teams who:

- Design, convene, or facilitate conversations about change.
- Address challenges where established practices are no longer sufficient.
- Want to prepare their organization for emerging challenges and opportunities.
- Need to build shared language and elevate strategic conversations about change.
- Want practical tools for moving their organization from reacting to anticipating.
- Seek new approaches for creating long-term cultural and structural change.

Course Calendar

8-
Sept

Section 1 Mapping Horizons in Transition: Three Horizons Framework

Live session

Meet the cohort, identify an organizational challenge to explore throughout the program, and develop a shared foundation in strategic foresight. Participants will use Bill Sharpe's Three Horizons Framework to examine how the current system is losing strategic fit, envision a fundamentally different future, and identify innovations that could support the transition.

Method Outcomes:

- Build shared understanding of how long-term change is affecting the viability of the current system.
- Co-create a possible future system that responds to emerging conditions and aspirations.
- Identify promising innovations and near-term actions that could advance the transition.

Assignment:

Facilitate the Three Horizons Framework within your organization and share key results and lessons during the next live session.

22-
Sept

Section 2 Anticipating Change: Futures Wheel

Live session

Debrief lessons from applying the Three Horizons Framework and identify an emerging change affecting participants' organizations. Participants will use the Futures Wheel to explore how that change could generate direct and indirect consequences across the organization and community.

Method Outcomes:

- Anticipate direct, indirect, and unintended consequences of an emerging change.
- Ideate potential impacts across social, technology, economic, environmental, and political domains.
- Identify emerging risks, opportunities, and connections that may otherwise be overlooked.

Assignment

Facilitate a Futures Wheel within your organization and share key results and lessons during the next live session.

6-
Oct

Section 3 Forces Shaping Futures: Futures Triangle

Live session

Debrief lessons from applying the Futures Wheel and examine the forces shaping participants' organizational challenges. Participants will use Sohail Inayatullah's Futures Triangle to map the push of emerging change, the pull of future aspirations, and the weight of historical barriers.

Method Outcomes:

- Identify the trends and emerging conditions pushing the organization toward change.
- Clarify the aspirations and images of the future pulling the organization forward.
- Surface the structures, assumptions, and past commitments holding change back.
- Synthesize these forces to identify tensions and opportunities for action.

Assignment: Facilitate a Futures Triangle within your organization and share key results and lessons during the next live session.

20-
Oct

Section 4 Transformation through Story: Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)

Live session Debrief lessons from applying the Futures Triangle and explore why outdated approaches persist even when conditions change. Participants will use Sohail Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis to examine the visible problem, systemic causes, underlying worldviews, and stories that shape how their organization understands and responds to a challenge.

Method Outcomes:

- Examine a complex challenge across the four layers of Causal Layered Analysis.
- Uncover the assumptions, worldviews, and stories sustaining the current system.
- Reframe the challenge at each layer to construct a coherent, alternative future.
- Generate new approaches that would be difficult to sustain within the organization's existing frame.

Assignment: Facilitate Causal Layered Analysis within your organization and share key results and lessons during the next live session.

3-
Nov

Section 5 Creating Alternatives: Change Progression Scenario Method

Live Session: Debrief lessons from applying Causal Layered Analysis and examine how deeply an organization may need to change in response to shifting conditions. Participants will develop No Change, Marginal Change, Adaptive Change, and Radical Change scenarios to distinguish genuine transformation from improvements that preserve the current system.

Outcomes:

- Articulate the long-term consequences of maintaining, incrementally improving, adapting, or fundamentally transforming the current system.
- Identify the structural, cultural, and strategic requirements for moving between levels of change.
- Select and make the case for a preferred level of change.

Assignment: Facilitate the Change Progression Scenario Method within your organization and share key results and lessons during the next live session.

17-
Nov

Section 6 Leading from the Future: Backcasting

Live Session: Debrief lessons from applying the Change Progression Scenario Method and translate a preferred future into an actionable pathway. Participants will work backward from their desired future to identify the conditions, milestones, and decisions required to connect that future to the present.

Outcomes:

- Identify preconditions, milestone sequencing, and actions for realizing a preferred future.

Assignment: Facilitate a backcasting process within your organization and share key results and lessons during the next live session.

1-
Dec

Section 7 Decision-Making in Complexity: Cynefin Framework

Live Session: Debrief lessons from applying backcasting and examine how different parts of a future pathway require different approaches to action. Participants will break their milestones into specific decisions, barriers, and actions, then use Dave

Snowden's Cynefin Framework to determine when to apply established practices, consult expertise or experiment and learn.

- Outcomes:**
- Recognize clear, complicated, complex, and chaotic conditions.
 - Distinguish challenges that can be planned and analyzed from those that require experimentation and learning.
 - Identify where treating a complex challenge as complicated could undermine implementation.

Assignment: Facilitate a Cynefin mapping process within your organization to strengthen the implementation of your preferred future, then share key results and lessons with the online learning community.

8-
Dec

Section 8 Sustaining Change Through Leadership Support

Live Session: Debrief lessons from applying the Cynefin Framework and reflect on the complete foresight journey. Each participant will deliver a five-minute presentation highlighting how they applied the methods, what they learned, and how they plan to continue using foresight within their organization. Executive sponsors will be invited to hear participants' reflections and discuss opportunities to support continued application.

- Outcomes:**
- Synthesize key insights from applying the seven foresight methods.
 - Communicate how the course strengthened the participant's approach to facilitating change.
 - Identify opportunities to apply the methods to future organizational challenges.
 - Clarify how executive sponsors can support continued foresight practice and broader organizational adoption.

Completion: Participants who complete the program requirements will receive their Certificate of Completion.

Costs

Pricing

\$4,000 – Standard

Course completion by nonmembers will be receive AFI membership at 75% of their annual dues.

Free – AFI Members (2 seats per cohort)

Discounts

10% Discount for AFI Members (for additional registrations)

What to Know

How to Register

AFI members may register for their seats [through this form](#). Email with questions about training dates, availability, and others needs by contacting hausonle@transformgov.org.

The Commitment

Each participant should identify an executive sponsor from the city manager's office, such as the city manager, assistant city manager, or deputy city manager. Executive sponsors are committing to attend a portion of the final session to hear participants share their key takeaways and reflections. Participants of the same

organization can share a sponsor.

Participants should expect a total commitment of approximately 18 to 25 hours across the four-month program. The time required may vary depending on the scale and format of each organizational application. The program requires approximately 2.5 to 3.5 hours during each two-week course cycle:

- 90 minutes for each live online session, on Tuesdays at 11am PT / 2pm ET.
- 60 to 120 minutes to prepare for, facilitate, and reflect on applying the method within your organization.

The Technology Platforms

- **Circle**
AFI uses an online platform called Circle to host an online community and distribute course contents. All the course materials and event links will be made available through the Circle platform, which can be accessed at circle.transformgov.org. Participants can also use this platform to upload their application outputs, message the instructor and chat with other participants.
- **Zoom**
All live sessions will be hosted through Zoom. Participants will need a stable internet connection to participate.
- **Miro**
AFI uses the online whiteboard, Miro, for collaborative activities during online sessions. Participants will be provided with links to Miro boards for each session and account registration with Miro is not required. Participants are, however, encouraged to [familiarize themselves with Miro](#) prior to starting the course.