



## The University of Denver Strategic Issues Program

As a part of its commitment to serve the public good, the University of Denver regularly convenes a group of citizens to examine an issue of particular importance to the people of Colorado. These groups, called strategic issues panels, reflect the University's belief that, as an independent institution, it is in a unique position to make contributions to the state that has been home to the University since our founding in 1864. In a real sense, these panels affirm the values of informed civil discourse, intellectual freedom, open communication and rigor that guide the University of Denver itself.

### Background

The first DU strategic issues panel was the *Colorado Economic Futures Panel*, convened in 2005 to examine the economic issues facing the State of Colorado. The next year, a panel was organized to study *Colorado's Water Future*. In 2007, another panel undertook a detailed review of *Colorado's Constitution*. This was followed in 2009 by a panel examining the complex topic of *Immigration Reform*. The most recent panel report, *Rethinking Colorado's Government*, released in late 2011, represented a sweeping examination of state government and the fiscal challenges facing Colorado. In each case, reports and recommendations developed by DU panels have received widespread attention and helped shape the public policy dialog.

### Purpose

Whatever the topic, the purpose of all strategic issues panels is to examine a critical public issue and provide independent, non-partisan recommendations to raise the level of public awareness and provide a basis for informed policy discussions.

### Process

Although the topics studied by strategic issues panels vary widely, all panels follow a similar process. Panel members begin by gaining an in-depth understanding of the issue. Over a period of several months they receive presentations on the topic from experts, advocates, public officials and others. Only after examining the topic from a variety of perspectives do panel members begin to discuss the issue. As they consider the subject, members weigh the research and opinions presented and engage in discussions based on the information provided and panel member's own thinking.

Through this process of informed discourse, the panel focuses on developing consensus findings and recommendations on the issue. Strategic issues panels are completely independent, free to develop conclusions that panel members consider appropriate. To assure complete independence of panel deliberations, the entire process is funded by the University.

## Structure

Panels are non-partisan in their orientation and are comprised of 15-20 citizens appointed by the Chancellor of the University of Denver. Panel members are thoughtful citizens drawn from various segments of the Colorado community. Panels often reflect a diversity of perspectives but do not attempt to be representative in a traditional legislative sense. Panels seek practical solutions to issues rather than ideologically-oriented outcomes and operate through a consensus process. The goal is to identify underlying issues, develop findings and create a broad strategy to inform public discourse and the efforts of policy makers.

## Selecting an Issue

After receiving suggestions and input from a number of sources, the Chancellor and director of the program select an issue for the upcoming panel to consider. Typically, the issue chosen will have the following characteristics:

- The issue is of *strategic significance* in terms of public policy and is a matter of fundamental, long-term importance to Coloradans.
- The issue has reached a *critical stage*, where the need to address the matter is clear to policy makers and citizens.
- The issue is timely—there is a general feeling that the time to deal with the matter is approaching, and something needs to be done in the reasonably near future.

## Public Information

Members of the public are invited to observe panel meetings and representatives of the media are encouraged to attend meetings to help raise the visibility and understanding of the issue. To support its public education mission, videos of presentations, interviews with those making presentations and copies of pertinent documents are all available on the Strategic Issues Program website: [www.du.edu/issues](http://www.du.edu/issues).

The panel's final report is widely shared with the general public, the media, public officials, business and community leaders and other interested parties. While the University sponsors strategic issues panels, it does not formally advocate on behalf of panel reports. After the panel's work is complete, individual panel members are free to advocate for report recommendations if they choose.