

Community Forum Summary October 3, 2017

Over 60 Billings community members came together to discuss proposed Montana budget cuts. A panel of representatives from local agencies shared potential consequences of cuts. Afterwards, the group explored potential solutions and strategies. Participants were given 2 votes to cast for their top choices.

The strongest overall theme that emerged from the event was a need to **increase efficiency**. These strategies received over 50 votes in the following areas.

Increase Collaboration: Included collaboration between non-profit groups as well as non-profits and local and state government. Suggestions included creating ongoing communication channels.

Reduce Duplication: Included increasing efficiency by reducing duplication of services, efforts, and resources. Specific examples included co-location of agencies, shared resources, shared systems, and merging of agencies or state departments.

System Changes: The need to change how the system works included strategies to develop and implement long-term cost saving strategies, reduce waste, and explore new methods such as performance based contracting and strategies to fund firefighting.

Below are results of the solutions generated by the group.

Budget Cuts		
Ideas Generated	Votes	Comments
Reduce Rainy Day Fund Required Amount.	7	The required funding amount could be temporarily lowered to save several millions.
Maintain Current Proposed Cuts.		
Develop Less Painful Cuts.		
Common Application for Assistance.		Reduce duplication of effort by creating a common, shared application for all assistance programs.
Identify Waste and Increase Efficiency.	5	
Merge Childcare Licensing & Childcare Standards Divisions.		
Reduce Government Departments.	8	Reduce duplication and increase efficiency by merging and combining departments that could share resources and costs.
Salary Cuts for all Shared Equally.		Includes all government officials taking an equal pay cut.

Increase Revenue		
Ideas Generated	Votes	Comments
Tobacco Tax.	23	May be a temporary increase – Revenue could be used to develop and implement long term cost saving strategies.

Raise Taxes on the Wealthy.	5	Could include a tax rate increase for persons making \$500,000 or more annually.
Local Options Sales Tax.	5	For Billings specifically.
Propose changes as "Temporary."	1	Seen as a way to gain bipartisan support and adjust to future revenue changes.
Implement participant fees for social services.		Include a sliding scale.
Wine Tax.	3	
Tourism Tax.	7	Increase taxes on tourist related services.
Pop Tax.	2	
Luxury tax on second homes.	7	Would generate revenue from out of state people purchasing vacation homes.

Other		
Ideas Generated	Votes	Comments
More conversations outside of crisis.	2	Increase communication between state government and non-profits.
Reduce duplication of services.	24	
Managed care.		
Peer support services.	1	Can be conducted at a much lower cost.
Create a behavioral health services delivery plan.	1	May be a way to increase efficiency.
Management Services Agreement.		
Business & Social program work together more.		
Increase collaboration.	5	
Telehealth to rural communities.	1	
Universal child assessment.		May reduce duplication of services.
Co-Location of agencies	2	
Data integration.	1	May reduce duplication and increase efficiency if all programs had the same data system rather than paying for separate systems.
Review how we fund firefighting.	3	
Performance based contracting.	1	Payment would be tied to performance and outcomes. May increase efficiency.
Use city funds to develop and implement community cost savings strategies.		
Increase communication between the city and non-profits.		
Address drug use.	2	
Increase community awareness and education of proposed cuts.	2	