

Suggested Projects: White House Innovation Fellows
9 - A Social Planetarium/Observatory System: How Federal Data Can
Educate and Empower at the State and Local Level.
A Washington, DC Prototype.

I [suggest building] a Social Planetarium/Observatory System so that visual displays of federal data can empower planning by citizens and public officials at the state and local level. Map-based and Rosling-type (www.gapminder.gov) dynamic graphics will display local societal trends, locations of social problems, and alternative scenarios and forecasts for desktop access or combined large displays in specialized planning rooms where public officials and civic working groups can meet.

My vision is that a new (localizable) Social Planetarium/Observatory System, with federal data, also will be a foundation for a new civic education in our nation's high schools. Students - just arriving at the age of citizenship - can study their local area and state and can think about alternative futures and civic investments. Environmental data and local displays can be linked to science curricula. Federal data, utopian literature and research + thinking assignments (e.g., "What are the Top 10 Quality of Life Improvements Options for Our City?") can empower high school students to begin to think like citizens of a democracy.

To focus the project: Federal responsibility makes the District of Columbia an ideal site for a prototype of what federal data can do for citizens and the quality of life. [The DC Government has an Office of Planning that already uses Census Data and there is a regional planning commission (www.mncpcc.org) that could be enrolled to help with data ideas and first-step priorities.] A planning team also might engage dialogue with the Washington Post: It could use the new visual displays for annual citizen-oriented special issues that display (e.g., by neighborhood) the trends, problems, and discussion of plans for the coming year.

An exciting State-of-Art prototype in our Capitol will create opportunities for the private sector to contract with state and local governments nationwide to build Social Planetarium/Observatory Systems for their needs.

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