Sources Sought: Committee Scheduling Solutions

The Office of the Clerk of the United States House of Representatives seeks information on technical solutions to improve House committee scheduling tasks. The Clerk is looking for a range of information on current and future available solutions, including, but not limited to, commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) products, technical solutions used is similar scenarios and other relevant technologies that will enable improved scheduling processes for committee staff including the integration and data exchange with relevant House organizations and systems.

Background

The House has three types of committees: standing, select, and joint (see "Additional Resources" below for more information on committees). Currently, in the 117th Congress, the U.S. House has a total of 29 committees, of which 20 are standing committees, five (5) are select committees, and four (4) are joint committees. There are 105 subcommittees, including the "Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis". In 2021, 1,131 committee meetings and 1,030 committee votes have been posted to the Committee Repository (https://docs.house.gov/Committee). This is higher than 2020, where 739 meetings and 232 votes were published.

The size of each committee is determined at the beginning of each Congress by House leaders who set the number of committees and subcommittees, their size, and the ratio of majority to minority members on each panel. House members are typically limited to service on two committees and four subcommittees, with exceptions for certain committees. House Rules allow for all 435 Representatives, the four (4) delegates from American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Northern Mariana Islands, as well as the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico to be appointed to serve on House committees.

As part of a comprehensive set of recommendations, the Committee on the Modernization of Congress recommends that the House "create a common committee calendar portal so that committees can have visibility into other committee activities and potential committee member conflicts" (116th recommendation 94, see "Additional Resources" below). The Clerk is seeking information on possible technical solutions in support of this recommendation. The Committee's Final Report (see "Additional Resources" below) describes the recommendation as --

> In 1974, the House Select Committee on Committees (Bolling Committee) recommended the establishment of a computerized scheduling system for committees and subcommittees. This recommendation was adopted at the start of the 97th Congress and remains in effect today. However, this system is only being used to announce the date and time of hearings and meetings, rather than to check for conflicting meetings to correctly select a time with the least [number] of conflicts for Members. From 1981-1992 use of this system to reduce scheduling conflicts was mandatory but the requirement was stricken from House Rules in 1992. JCOC recommended the use of this system to reduce scheduling conflicts.

The Committee recommends creation of a common committee calendar portal so that committees can have visibility into other committee activities and potential committee member conflicts. While Congressional staff already has access to the date and time of other Committee meetings, it is not readily available how many of their Members would be conflicted were they to schedule their committee meeting in conflict with another committee meeting. An internal portal that tracks Member obligations based on their committee assignment would help committees schedule their meetings when most of their Members are available.

Current challenges and constraints around scheduling committee meetings

There are three basic types of meetings a Committee can hold – Hearing, Markup, and Business (or general). Meetings can be held in the Capitol complex in Washington, D.C. or elsewhere in the United States or its territories. House and Committee rules, traditions, and practices govern when a committee can meet. These official committee meetings must conform to House rules, including rules and standards associated with advanced notice and what information must be made available before and after the meetings. Traditionally, all meetings were held in-person, but since the start of COVID-related staffing changes and the Speaker's announced policy (for both the 116th and 117th Congresses), committees can conduct meetings online using a variety of hosting platforms, in-person, and in a combined, or hybrid, format.

Scheduling committee meetings can be difficult and time consuming because there are multiple schedules that must be prepared and managed for Members and staff. These include:

- the dates and times for activity in the House (commonly referred to as the Floor schedule)
- the schedules for each committee and subcommittee, and their staffs, and
- the schedules for individual Members and their staff

The published House schedule often includes designated "committee work" days; however, given the competing demands for Member and committee time slots, designating these days does not always alleviate scheduling burdens. With increased remote work and the demands on time, an online collaborative solution is needed to help Members and staff in selecting the best possible dates and times to hold committee meetings.

Any technical solution should allow for coordination and collaboration with staff across the House to support the meeting itself. Scheduling a meeting typically requires coordination between:

- multiple Member offices to ensure that the Committee members will be available to meet
- Committee staff who need to support the meeting, as well as staff who are coordinating schedules for any potential outside witnesses
- House officers and officials (typically CAO and Clerk staff) to coordinate room reservations, video, transcription, and audio services, as well as other support before, during and after the meeting

Sometimes, the scheduling of a potential meeting is sensitive. In these cases, the scheduling activities still require collaboration between multiple individuals across offices and organizations, but the meeting preparation details must be limited to a specific group of people. This small group of people can change from meeting to meeting. To support this, any solution should support the rapid creation of ad hoc

groups for collaboration and provide sufficient access control and visibility to limit dissemination of these details to the selected group.

Objectives for a common committee scheduling tool

To meet the intent of the Committee's recommendation, and to improve technology adoption by the House, the Clerk is seeking information on technical solutions for improving the committee scheduling processes. To meet this goal the Clerk seeks information on tools that will allow for better collaboration between all committees and provide increased visibility into scheduling activities between the different stakeholders who are responsible for scheduling committee meetings. These tools must assist staff in coordinating scheduling, including any changes, and must not attempt to take away the autonomy that this staff requires to do their jobs. That is, any proposed tool or architecture must assist rather than attempt to fully automate these activities.

The Clerk is seeking a broad range of information. The simple intent behind this recommendation is to provide tools for committees' staff to view how many of their committee members are already scheduled in other committee or subcommittee meetings. However, the Clerk and her staff know that solutions may range from simple to complex. A simple solution might be a tool that allows all committee staff to view how many of their committee members are already scheduled in announced committee or subcommittee meetings that have been posted on the Committee Repository (docs.house.gov). A complex solution would allow for a comprehensive view of potential unannounced meetings, proposed or provisional schedules, multiple scheduling scenarios and beyond.

To meet the intent of the recommendation, the Clerk has laid out the following objectives—

1. *Provide improved visibility into Member and committee schedules*. Allow staff to see schedules relevant to Member availability and committee schedules. This would include provisional schedules for committees and Members. The scheduling system should also be aware of committee membership so that any change in a committee schedule will be reflected in the relevant Member schedules. In many cases this may mean de-cluttering the view of other scheduling activities so staff can focus on finding availability for committee activities.
2. *Provide improved communications specific to committee scheduling activities*. Staff need a view of scheduling activities focused on committee meetings. While communications and collaboration must interoperate with existing tools, it is also important to allow staff to focus on committee scheduling activities and collaborate with just the people needed to accomplish that task. Adding more email threads between large groups of staff with disparate roles will not improve the ability of staff to track committee scheduling activities. In addition to time constraints the schedule system must account for the location of Members to organize virtual, in-person, or hybrid meetings.
3. *Provide the ability to prioritize activities and time slots so the impact and trade-offs can be reviewed*. Simply showing open times is insufficient. In most cases all scheduling activities require tradeoffs and re-prioritizing of a Member's time to balance multiple activities. Many committee meetings are scheduled knowing that there are conflicts or partial conflicts with some Members and other committees or subcommittees. Knowing which Members must be present and which Members wish to prioritize a specific meeting is important. These tradeoffs often change and evolve rapidly based on current events and the House schedule. An improved system must help Members and staff juggle these priorities and adapt to changes.

4. *Provide integrations with existing systems for collecting committee information and disseminating committee information through existing publishing channels.* Official committee meetings must conform to House rules, including rules associated with advanced notice, witness documents, meeting type and agendas. One of the key requirements for most official meetings is to publish the relevant meeting information and documents on docs.house.gov, a Clerk-managed portal for committee activities and documents. Any proposed solution must interoperate with docs.house.gov. The House uses Office 365 as its enterprise office automation platform and most Member offices and Clerk staff rely heavily on Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft Teams for email, calendars, virtual meetings and related collaboration. Any technical solution should be able to interoperate with Office 365 and should be able to integrate with other systems through APIs and similar data exchange.

Scope of information

This request for information (RFI) seeks information and input from industry, academia, other legislative bodies, civil society organizations, and advocates on how to meet the objectives outlined above. This may include descriptions or case studies of scheduling systems used in other legislative bodies, existing COTS solutions that either support similar scheduling and coordination tasks or can be adapted for that purpose, general systems designs or architectural patterns applicable to the problem, or existing solutions in the House that could be generalized or adapted across all Committees.

All responses to this RFI need to clearly indicate their relationship to existing scheduling tasks and the stated goals. Any proposed solution or architecture needs to specifically address House Committee scheduling tasks and the goals described above. The Clerk is attempting to understand the range of existing solutions, COTS products and technical solutions that could be applied to existing practice and systems. The Clerk is not attempting to evaluate House or Committee practice, rules, or procedures around scheduling.

Systems integration is critical for all House solutions, and especially for all systems managed by the Clerk. The Clerk is responsible for accurate and timely reporting of House activities to our data partners and to the public. Adding additional systems to the Clerk's technology portfolio without the ability to easily integrate the new application into existing systems increases the workload of existing staff and increases the likelihood of error and delays. Additionally, any system that cannot be easily adapted to Committee Member and staff workflows and Committee rules changes likewise increases the likelihood of errors and omissions.

Ultimately, any solution must improve the ability of all staff involved in the scheduling of meetings to do their jobs efficiently. This means that ease of use and alignment with current tools and processes is key to any solution. All House staff are used to working under intense pressure with rapidly shifting priorities and workloads. The Clerk seeks to provide tools that will improve their workload and ease their collaboration.

Submission requirements

Responders may submit a report of no more than five (5) pages containing a description of an existing or potential system or discussion of an aspect of Committee scheduling discussed above. Responders may additionally submit a single page overview or outline of the content of their report (cover page). The

summary may include text, diagrams, and other images as appropriate to convey the main ideas contained in your submitted material. Responders may also include a cover letter in their submission.

Additional resources

To learn more about committees in the House you can refer to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) report "Committee Types and Roles" at https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RS/98-241.

You can read more about The Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress and their recommendations at https://modernizecongress.house.gov/. The "RECOMMENDATIONS" section lists the Committee's recommendations for both the 116th and 117th Congresses. The Committee's Final Report for the 116th Congress (H.Rept.116-562) can be found on congress.gov and cited as follows:

"H. Rept. 116-562 - THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS, H.Rept.116-562, 116th Cong. (2021), https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/116th-congress/house-report/562/1."

Current committee activities can be tracked on the Committee Repository at docs.house.gov. This resource is managed by the Clerk to publish information about meetings, witnesses and associated committee work for the public.

Current committee membership is available on the Clerk's website (clerk.house.gov). The Official Alphabetical List of Members includes committee member information: https://clerk.house.gov/committee_info/oal.pdf