NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION:
SUCCESSFUL ONBOARDING FOR A MODERN LEGISLATURE
New Member Orientation (NMO) is a mandatory onboarding program for individuals newly elected to the US House of Representatives. It occurs between Election Day, often the first Tuesday in November of every evenly numbered year, and the start of the succeeding session of Congress on January 3rd. Similar to other legislatures’ introductory training programs, NMO occurs once for Member Elects (MEs) and is the only formal onboarding the legislators receive before taking office regardless of prior political experience.

NMO is hosted by the Committee on House Administration (CHA) in partnership with the House’s institutional offices including the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Architect of the Capitol (AOC), Clerk, House Sergeant at Arms (HSAA), and US Capitol Police (USCP). Formalized in the 1970s to address newly elected legislators’ needs to understand the increasing complexity of congressional operations, NMO has expanded over the decades to include programming on Member roles and responsibilities, House Floor operations, office structure and hiring, budgeting, security, ethics, and more. The schedule traditionally includes auditorium-style presentations of required training such as ethics, financial disclosure, and workplace rights; mixed with 1:1 consultations between Members and institutional support staff to formalize details needed prior to the start of the Congress — like establishing a franked signature, office suite selection and layout, and public website design.

NMO program length has remained consistent since the 1980s, taking place over two non-consecutive weeks in late November and early December immediately following an election. However, recent NMOs have drawn criticism from Members as a program that provided information out of context, seeded polarization of the parties, and — generally — “missed the mark” as an effective onboarding experience. In response, formal efforts have been made to improve NMO. The Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress recommended changes to the orientation program in its 117th Congress Final Report, published in 2022. More recently, the CHA Subcommittee on Modernization has indicated its intent to both implement and expand upon the prior recommendations.

Members of Congress come from all professional backgrounds: state legislators, school board chairs, business owners, stay-at-home parents, teachers, doctors, rodeo announcers, and more. Over the last 25 years, the House has welcomed an average of 81 new Members per Congress.

1 Recommendations 11-16, Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress Final Report, Page 232-234.
POPVOX Foundation believes that a robust, effective onboarding program is essential for newly elected Members to be impactful out of the gate in representing their constituents and to operate effectively within an increasingly complex institution.

NMO not only prepares MEs to take office, it creates an environment to foster bipartisan relationships, deepen understanding of the institution, and create a support network for MEs. At the official NMO, all MEs are provided the same resources regardless of political affiliation or background. Additionally, NMO is a biennial opportunity for the institution to hone its resources in service of a modern Congress, empowering newly elected Members with information, training, and technology to combat the legislature’s pacing problem.² In the spirit of supporting the CHA Subcommittee on Modernization’s efforts to rethink NMO and the full committee’s preparatory work for the upcoming 119th Congress’ program, this report provides an overview of how traditional NMOs have been organized, structured, and hosted, and proposes creative alternatives for how this onboarding experience can be improved.

2  Congress vs. the “Pacing Problem[s]”

NMO: THE STATUS QUO

LEADERSHIP

Contemporary NMOs are hosted by the Chair of the CHA with support of the Ranking Member. CHA’s specific role in hosting NMO is to coordinate the entities involved and be the final authority on all elements, details, and decisions. As the leadership-appointed committee tasked with overseeing the day-to-day operations of the institution, CHA is empowered to successfully fill this role. However, because NMO is a biennial event, it is often not deemed a priority until the months prior to the actual program.

PREPARATION

During NMO preparation, CHA majority staff lead the planning and coordination in partnership with House institutional offices and, at any time, have the authority to include or exclude the CHA minority staff. Typically, only about ten CHA staff are actively engaged in NMO coordination and planning from start to finish and, over the months prior to NMO, the event’s execution becomes a demanding element of staffers’ schedules. Frequent changes in committee leadership and staff mean that it is common for those assigned to plan NMO to be as new to the process as the MEs themselves.
Preparation for NMO typically begins a year prior to Election Day, and ramps up dramatically three months prior to welcoming the MEs to DC. Here is a sample timeline:

**November – December prior to the election**
CHA majority begins initial discussions regarding the cadence of future planning meetings and a generally agreed upon schedule of events. Minority is not often included at this stage.

**March – July**
Planning begins in earnest. Dates, location, and elements of agenda are finalized. Minority staff are included when it is deemed appropriate by the majority. Committee majority and minority declare staff leads for NMO and clearly delineate roles and responsibilities. House Information Resources (HIR) bulk orders ME and aide technology. CAO begins buildout of NMO transition website.

**Early November, Election Night**
Declared winners are shipped welcome packets by CHA overnight, inviting them to NMO. MEs are requested to register themselves, spouses, and aides through the NMO Candidate Website prior to arrival and book flights to Washington, DC. Party election scheduling is communicated to CHA by House Leadership leading to last minute NMO schedule adjustments.

**Week following election**
NMO Week One

**January – February of the election year**
CHA majority hosts monthly meetings to determine dates and programming location, and makes initial inquiries regarding institutional offices’ availability to participate and support NMO. List of preferred hotels are narrowed down. Minority leadership is included when deemed appropriate.

**August – October**
Candidate outreach is conducted by the committee along party lines to collect contact information and mailing addresses for all candidates. Institutional support elements are finalized. NMO speakers are invited and panels are finalized. Materials are printed and logistics are finalized. In 2022, it was during this time that the CAO Coach Program was directed to be a key coordinator of the NMO program agenda.

**Sunday immediately following election**
NMO Welcome and Registration Day begins in Washington, DC at the designated NMO hotel, kicking off NMO Week 1.

**Week of Thanksgiving Holiday**
MEs, spouses, and aides return to their districts.

**Week following Thanksgiving holiday**
MEs and aides return to DC for NMO Week 2.

**January 3**
MEs are required to be back in DC to be sworn into the House of Representatives at the convening of the new Congress.
KEY NMO ELEMENTS:

PRE-REGISTRATION

MEs are asked to pre-register online through the NMO Candidate Website, hosted by CAO’s Office of Transition. Information requested includes preference of technology (Mac or PC, iPhone or Android), dietary restrictions, if their spouse plans to attend NMO, and the choice of staff to accompany them (Transition Aide, Designated Aide, or both).

MEMBERS SUPPORT STAFF: TRANSITION AIDES & DESIGNATED AIDES

MEs are allowed two staff to support them in completing the NMO onboarding activities necessary prior to swearing in. These positions include a Transition Aide (TA) (a paid position) and a Designated Aide (DA) (a volunteer position). Individuals chosen to serve as TAs are on-boarded as temporary employees of the CAO, allowing the House to provide them with pay and benefits, as well as provide them with official technology, email accounts, and intranet access. DAs serve on a volunteer basis and are thus unpaid, but their travel, room, and board for NMO is covered by the House. Upon swearing in, a Member holds independent authority to hire their TA and DA on their official staff. If a TA is not hired by their ME, their employment with the House is terminated on January 3rd.

TRAVEL, ROOM, AND BOARD

All MEs and aides are provided travel to and from NMO, as well as any travel costs incurred traveling between NMO official events. MEs and aides are also provided room and board at a designated hotel close to Capitol Hill, with the opportunity for MEs to be accompanied by their spouses to share their room at no additional cost. Although no official NMO programming is traditionally hosted at the hotel, House support offices, including USCP, HSAA, CAO, HIR, and CHA, maintain a consistent presence to support MEs as needed. In addition, in 2022, CHA reserved three Hospitality Suites – a Democratic, Republican, and bipartisan suite – within the hotel to foster ME networking and relationship building. These suites were open for hosting MEs on a casual basis following the conclusion of daily programming.

WELCOME PACKETS AND TECHNOLOGY PACKAGES

Upon arrival at the NMO hotel, MEs are welcomed by the CHA staff of their political affiliation and given onboarding packets that include the program schedule and additional helpful information about the days ahead. Additionally, these packets include pre-configured technology (official phone, laptop, and iPad), according to the ME’s preference as set on the NMO Candidate Website during registration. TAs, due to their employment with the House, are also provided with an official phone and laptop. After initial registration is completed, Members are able to get immediate in-person IT assistance and training by HIR on their newly provided technology.
IN-PERSON PROGRAMMING

Beginning on the Monday of NMO Week One, all MEs and aides are escorted to the Capitol daily for the official orientation programming. Trainings have traditionally included the below topics (and general length of presentation), presented as either a podium presentation with a slide deck or a panel discussion in an auditorium.

**Institutional Overviews:**

- A Member’s Job (60 minutes)
- House Floor & Officer Introduction (90 minutes)
- Constituent Services & Office of General Counsel (30 minutes)

**Running an Office:**

- Office Structure (90 minutes)
- Budgeting (60 minutes)
- Scheduling (60 minutes)
- Hiring a Diverse Workforce (60 minutes)

**Required Trainings**

- Employer Responsibilities (60 minutes)
- Financial Disclosure (60 minutes)
- Workplace Rights (60 minutes)
- Ethics (60 minutes)
- Cybersecurity (30 minutes)

**Resources Overviews**

- Security (90 minutes)
- Key House Websites and Apps (60 minutes)
- Congressional Online Presence (60 minutes)
INDIVIDUALIZED CONSULTATIONS

Each ME is scheduled for three private, in-person consultations during the course of NMO. These include the Member Benefits Briefing, the Office Setup Briefing, and the Office Layout Briefing.

The Member Benefits Briefing is a consultation provided by the House Office of Payroll and Benefits to the ME and spouse regarding the specific employment benefits, salary, and insurance options provided to those elected to the House.

The Office Setup Briefing is a robust collection of service representatives who directly support a ME depending on their specific district. This briefing includes individuals from multiple support offices internal and external to the House and is the only time during NMO when the ME is provided information regarding the establishment of their district offices. TAs and DAs are strongly encouraged to attend this meeting.

The Office Layout Briefing is scheduled during the final days of NMO following the Member DC Suite Selection Lottery. Once a ME has chosen their specific office location through the lottery, this briefing provides the ME with the ability to meet with the CAO furnishings department and the AOC to finalize the layout of a ME’s office. The support entities then ensure that offices are turn-key ready for when the Member is sworn in on January 3rd. TAs and DAs are strongly encouraged to attend this briefing and spouses often join to contribute their design preferences.

NEW MEMBER AMBASSADORS

CHA Republican staff have traditionally organized an additional support program through which CHA committee staff are individually assigned to a small set of Republican MEs to act as additional attaches throughout the NMO process. This creates a “white glove experience” for MEs by which they have a direct point of contact to ask questions about the institution, keep track of what tasks need to be completed, and get assistance with any other questions that may arise throughout the MEs’ time in DC. Although a similar program hasn’t been organized on the Democratic side of the committee in recent congresses, the CAO’s Customer Advocates have stepped up during recent NMOs to aid MEs across the aisle in a similar fashion both during NMO and through their entire term in Congress, offering a long-term support solution that outlasts the New Member Ambassador Program.
The NMO experience is a ME’s first taste of what it is like to work with – and in – the US House of Representatives. MEs are typically younger than current Members and bring diverse backgrounds and expectations of the resources available to them. Increasingly, MEs expect technology and tools that match, at minimum, what is available to them in the private sector and in their personal lives. This also includes an expectation that information will be presented in modern formats and that they will be supported by high levels of customer service and institutional support.

Beyond the MEs’ personal experiences, NMO has an outsized impact on their effectiveness as well. As with all new employee orientations, the onboarding process and training presented within can set MEs up to hit the ground running once sworn in if it is effective in teaching them the legislative process, building their teams, and establishing their networks of influence. If NMO can be reimagined to be more impactful, newly elected legislators may be more effective in representing and assisting their constituents out of the gate.

What follows is a menu of options for how NMO can be revitalized for the 21st century congress.

### Menu

- Institutionalize NMO
- Streamline Required Programming and Increase Optional Learning Opportunities
- Increase Networking Opportunities During Previously Unstructured Time
- Rotational Group Presentation Model
- Rethinking NMO Week Two
- Mid-Term Orientation Programming
- Use Technology to Increase Information Retention and Accessibility
- Programming to Place Service in Context
- Member-Driven Programming
- Include Bipartisan Policy Programming
NEW APPROACHES TO NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION

INSTITUTIONALIZE NMO

Status Quo

CHA majority manages the planning and coordination of NMO. Although efforts are often made to ensure elements of NMO are agreed upon across party lines, a nonpartisan approach can never truly be counted upon since the decision is at the discretion of the Chair. Additionally, due to routine changes in leadership, the professional staff on the committee suffer the same retention challenges of turnover as any committee, resulting in a lack of institutional knowledge. Often, the staff planning NMO are as new to the program as the MEs they are supporting.

New Approach

CHA should explore an approach where NMO would be hosted by the House Officers at the direction of CHA. The program’s purpose can be reimagined to be an introduction of the support entities to their customers, complemented by specific information on MEs’ duties and authorities to help them hit the ground running on day one of the new congress. All programming should be bipartisan and the quality should be continually improved through robust participant surveys and feedback sessions. By House Officers taking a more direct role in NMO planning from the onset, greater institutional knowledge can be retained throughout the House, rather than solely within CHA. The Committee can continue to play the essential role of coordinating all the entities involved in NMO, but the programming provided by each entity should be left to the discretion of the entity. For example, regarding programming focused on establishing an office, hiring a team, etc., the CAO has built a strong foundation to take the leading role in designing these onboarding courses with an effective and nonpartisan approach. With its Customer Advocates, Coaches, House HR, Office of Transition, and more, the CAO is equipped to address these aspects of NMO, far beyond what the small team on CHA is capable of, to ensure all MEs are set up for success.
STREAMLINE REQUIRED PROGRAMMING AND INCREASE OPTIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Status Quo

NMO has evolved into a two-week long event of full-day programming. Although Week One is often highly attended, by the middle of Week Two, ME attendance declines as other activities (such as interviewing staff for hire, finding an apartment in DC, and unofficial business opportunities) begin to take priority. Certain presentations and tasks presented at NMO are required of MEs to complete prior to being sworn in and CHA has worked with institutional partners to distribute these essential elements throughout the weeks with the hope of driving consistent attendance across all programming. This has led to MEs struggling to prioritize what programming they need to attend versus which sections are optional, resulting in an overall feeling of wasted time due to inefficient scheduling.

New Approach

NMO programming should be condensed into fewer days with required programming prioritized first. Once essential training is completed, MEs should be given license to attend sessions based on personal preference or have staff attend in their place. Through breakout sessions, rotational small-group briefings, and other creative formats, these self-selected programs can be designed to adjust to audience size to foster networking and optimize attendee experience. For example, if only 15 MEs decide to attend a session on “How to Hire A Chief of Staff,” the attendees could be gathered into a small group environment to allow the conversation to be hosted as a roundtable that not only provides the MEs with information but fosters opportunities for them to get to know each other as well.
INCREASE NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES DURING PREVIOUSLY UNSTRUCTURED TIME

**Status Quo**

NMO formal programming has often begun at 8:30 AM at the Capitol, leaving Members to hurriedly grab a buffet breakfast at the hotel between 7-8 AM prior to boarding buses to the Hill. Unsurprisingly, breakfast is usually skipped — resulting in wasted food and taxpayer dollars — and the first presentations of the day struggle with a low-energy audience that, likely, retains little of the information presented.

**New Approach**

Days should begin with a scene-setting discussion that encourages relationship building, while preserving MEs ability to have a meal. Daily programming should be reimagined to begin with an 8:30 AM breakfast keynote speaker at the hotel. Breakfast tables can have assigned seating for MEs and their spouses that rotates daily to increase networking across regions and party lines. To set the tone for the day, keynotes can be presented by Members of Congress, potentially joined by their spouses, on topics that are conversational, inclusive, and engaging. For example, each morning can feature a bipartisan duo of Members and their spouses that discuss items such as living and working in DC, what I wish I knew then that I know now, and how to be effective in Congress, followed by Q&A. Programming such as this could break down partisan perspectives and provide a mentorship-based environment between more senior Members and the new freshman class. Post breakfast, all MEs can be escorted to the buses to depart to the Capitol for the remainder of the day’s NMO programming.
Status Quo

Traditionally over the two weeks of NMO, MEs are scheduled to attend programming from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM daily. Excluding the Intro to the Floor presentation hosted in the House Chamber, all orientation presentations are held in an auditorium within the Capitol. Though this traditional style ensures all MEs are presented with the same information at the same time, it fosters little to no audience participation and presents few opportunities for individuals to ask questions or engage with the speakers.

New Approach

For particular presentations, the House should consider alternating the format to increase networking and engagement opportunities. Instead of all presentations taking place in the auditorium, a format in which MEs are gathered in smaller groups across a series of rooms through which the speakers rotate could be an impactful change to increasing retention and engagement. For example, if 80 MEs were participating in NMO, four rooms near the auditorium could be identified and twenty MEs could be assigned to each room. The presenter in each room could share their information in a more conversational setting and be able to directly engage with their audience instead of simply speaking to them, allowing presentations to be more interactive and substantive. The presenters would rotate rooms, leading MEs to spend substantial time with the same breakout group fostering the opportunity for networking and relationship building. This rotational group presentation model, which has been successfully piloted by the CAO Advocates and Coaches during regional fly-ins across the country, could be employed for half of a day’s programming to break up the routine of sitting in the auditorium. Should the format be utilized more than once, the membership of each breakout room can change to allow for additional networking opportunities.
RETHINKING NMO WEEK TWO

Status Quo

The two-week format of NMO has become a default scheduling tactic to account for the large number of tasks MEs need to complete prior to swearing in. Week One is often focused on orientation presentations and Week Two is more flexible with 1:1 consultations, the room lottery, and the challenges of faltering attendance as MEs are drawn toward other priorities including hiring staff, meeting with party leadership, caucus elections, finalizing their personal accommodations in DC, and performing unofficial duties.

New Approach

The House should consider a new approach to Week Two that focuses programming on addressing the more acute ME training needs based on prior experience and future intentions in the House. Rather than scheduling presentations intended for the entire ME audience, breakout sessions could be scheduled for MEs to self-select what they need assistance with. This could not only be viewed as more helpful for MEs who are seeking additional training, but it could help inform the House of what training would be beneficial to support institutionally throughout MEs first term in Congress and beyond. It could also address unique challenges posed by Members from different regions. For example, region-based sessions that discuss travel best practices would vary greatly for Members of the West Coast, Alaska, and Hawaii, than for those from the Mid-Atlantic region. Here are a few examples of potential breakout sessions:

~ Walking Tour of a Member’s Path Throughout the Capitol (taught by CHA Chair or Ranking Member and HSAA)
~ House Floor Procedures, Scripts, and People to Know (taught by House Clerk, Parliamentarian, and former Floor Directors)
~ The Actual Legislative Process, from Legislative Counsel to the Rules Committee (taught by House Clerk, Legislative Counsel, and former Floor Directors)
~ How to Have Influence as a Freshman (taught by panel of sophomore Members who were influential as freshmen)
~ Master Class in Getting the Most out of a Day (taught by former Chiefs, LDs, and Schedulers)
~ District Office Delays: How to Streamline Service to Your Constituents Out of the Gate (taught by CAO Customer Advocates, Coaches, and District Directors)
~ Effective Social Media Usage (taught by communications directors)
~ Building Bridges Across the Aisle: Examples of the Successful Bipartisanship Necessary for Progress (taught by Members who have found success across the aisle)
~ Building an Effective Brand and Communicating DC Wins (taught by leadership communications directors)
~ Travel Tips and Tricks For Members of Every Region (taught by current Members or schedulers divided by region)
~ Office Resource Allocation Across DC and Your District: How to Make the Most of your MRA (taught by CAO Coaches)
~ It Takes Two to Tango: Lessons on Partnering with the Senate (taught by House and Senate member duo)
~ Member, Family, and Staff Security (taught by HSAA and USCP)
~ Utilizing House Technology to Maximize Staff Capacity: The Best Tools Available for Your Team (taught by House Digital Services)
**MID-TERM ORIENTATION PROGRAMMING**

**Status Quo**

NMO is well-recognized as an overwhelming experience during which vital information is presented to MEs but fails to be fully understood due to the audience’s lack of contextual knowledge of the institution’s innerworkings. MEs are put in a situation where they have experts in front of them willing to answer questions, but they simply don’t know what to ask. This is an inherent disadvantage of hosting a comprehensive orientation program prior to an elected official’s initial term in a legislature but one that is hard to avoid. MEs need onboarding, but they also need the ability to return to the information presented to ask more specific questions that may arise at a later date. The House doesn’t have an ongoing orientation program to fulfill this need.

**New Approach**

The House should consider hosting an abbreviated, repeated orientation program, as recommended by the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress\(^3\), for freshman Members, their chiefs of staff, district directors, and legislative directors at the start of their second year in Congress. Not only would this provide an opportunity for Members to get assistance and ask questions directly related to knowledge areas they are struggling with, it could also provide special-election winners with an NMO experience. It could be hosted on the Capitol campus over a weekend between two session weeks, and due to Members already being established in DC, it would not require the hotel, room and board, or shuttle elements.  

See page 20 for a sample Mid-Term NMO Programming schedule.

---

USE TECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE INFORMATION RETENTION & ACCESSIBILITY

Status Quo

To assist in completing necessary tasks during NMO, MEs are provided with access to the NMO Candidate Website prior to attending NMO, and the New Member Website from NMO Week One through their swearing in on January 3rd. Although the creation, design, and overall functionality of the websites are a notable modernization accomplishment for the House, there are further improvements that could be made to further aid MEs during and after their orientation experience.

Additionally, MEs are presented with hours-worth of lectures on the complicated support structure that is available for them as Representatives. The House hosts over 18 support entities and sub-offices, each with its unique programs, missions, and structures, that are at the service of each Member’s office. Although information on each of these entities is presented at NMO, retaining that knowledge – let alone understanding how all these entities work together – is a challenge.

The NMO Handbook is an additional resource that has missed its intended mark of providing MEs and their staff with the information they need to hit the ground running. In past years, partisan versions of handbooks for how Congress works have been published, as well as ones by institutional offices. In 2022, for the 118th Class’s NMO in which CAO Coaches played a key role, CHA majority and the Coaches partnered together to create a multi-hundred page handbook to complement NMO programming. Though this was another notable accomplishment of the House working to increase awareness of the support it offers for MEs and their staff, it was a heavy product, reminiscent of a textbook, that few MEs found the time to open.

New Approach

With the continued advancement of AI technology, the House should consider some initial adaptation of this emerging technology to streamline MEs’ abilities to access the information they need. For example, information provided on the NMO websites and within the NMO Handbook can be used to customize a chatbot with which MEs and their aides can interact. Instead of searching the website or through a large binder to find the answer to a specific question, individuals can simply ask the chatbot for the information and the chatbot can use the opportunity to not only answer the question, but also connect the ME to resources that might be useful.

Additionally, there are numerous tasks a ME must complete on a variety of deadlines throughout the months leading up to their swearing in. AI can be utilized to produce reports to highlight which MEs are at risk of missing a deadline, draft and send notifications to the ME and their aides about the upcoming deadline, and provide information and support to assist the ME in completing the task on time.

Lastly, AI should be considered for use during NMO as an information summation and newsletter tool. For example, AI can be used to record and transcribe each day’s presentations, provide summaries of every presentation with key takeaways, and produce a newsletter that is sent to all NMO participants each evening as a recap. If a breakout session model is pursued, AI summation tools can be employed to circulate notes on what was discussed in the presentations for MEs who were unable to attend.
PROGRAMMING TO PLACE SERVICE IN CONTEXT

Status Quo

NMO programming has traditionally included presentations on the day-to-day functionality of being a Member of Congress, but has lacked an essential element of a successful onboarding: answering the question of why it – service in Congress – is important. This scene-setting discussion is fundamental to an individual’s understanding of the responsibilities and duties now expected of them upon winning their election.

Campaigning for a seat in Congress and finding oneself in the position of power as a newly elected Member of the US House of Representatives are very different perspectives. The contrast in perspectives of how Congress operates from within its walls versus what is depicted in the media is similarly stark. With the wide array of backgrounds, and motivations for running for office, all MEs should be provided with an understanding of the weight of this responsibility and a reality check of the institution they are now a part of.

New Approach

Beyond the nuts and bolts of how to run an office, the orientation to be a Member of Congress should include an overview of the role, responsibilities, unique challenges, and opportunities presented. Not all individuals who run for Congress are constitutional scholars, American political historians, or prior local or state legislators. However, they now all find themselves – just days after their election – on the same playing field preparing to be active participants in Congress. To address this humbling, intimidating situation, NMO should begin with a scene-setting experience that places the ME’s upcoming service in context and lays a foundation upon which the rest of NMO can be built upon.

Congress, particularly the House, is undergoing an unprecedented chapter of partisanship, instability, and ineffectiveness. Many individuals who will run for office will no doubt campaign on promises to be part of a solution to “fix Washington,” a similar message to those expressed by the Members who came before them. The gravity of the responsibility put upon each ME cannot be understated. A nonpartisan presentation should be hosted by an inspiring duo of former Members to assist the MEs in understanding how their impending freshmen terms fit in the broader context of American history. The presentation can be aided by discussions on the historic actions of the House in times of need, the effects of certain procedural stalemates or disagreements, and an overview of what the House must accomplish to keep the nation functioning, provided by speakers from the Capitol Historical Society or House Historian. Through these scene-setting conversations, MEs can gain a sense of institutional self-awareness and a new perspective that emphasizes the need for all the people in the room to work together. This conversation can also empower MEs to approach the chamber with new eyes to seek opportunities for institutional improvement. By onboarding MEs to be part of the House versus an actor having to navigate it as a set system, MEs could be invited to continually recommend improvements that improve the health of the legislature.

---

4 Recommendation 118, Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress Final Report, Page 103.
MEMBER-DRIVEN PROGRAMMING

Status Quo

In the programming of recent NMOs, current and former Members of Congress have played a limited role in the onboarding of the MEs. Only two panels over the two weeks have involved current Members, the topics being a variety of: “If I knew then...” and “Ask me anything.” As a result, NMO programming and presentations are largely staff-designed, driven, and led, missing the opportunity for MEs to learn and network with the individuals who will be their peers as Representatives in Congress. Unfortunately, little to no official programming is focused on building those networks or creating mentorship opportunities.

New Approach

Although elements of NMO need to be led by institutional staff and House officers, an expansion of NMO programming that fosters Member-to-ME mentorship opportunities should be explored to allow for a crowd-sourced orientation. For example, an afternoon of NMO that overlaps with 1:1 consultations can be reserved for Member-led breakout sections into which MEs can self-select to attend. Organizers of NMO can reach out to a bipartisan, diverse group of Members and invite them to play a role in the upcoming NMO. The invitation can include the ability for the Member to speak on a pre-selected topic or submit ideas for other lessons they wish to teach their incoming peers.

These Member-led presentations can be scheduled as breakout sessions during a day of NMO or sprinkled in throughout programming to increase the diversity of presentations. By pursuing this approach, NMO gains an element of being Member-driven and led, which could greatly increase its effectiveness and applicability for newly elected legislators.
INCLUDE BIPARTISAN POLICY PROGRAMMING

Status Quo

CHA’s approach to NMO programming has focused on the operational elements of being a Member of Congress, establishing an office, and understanding the institutional support entities and resources available to each office (both in DC and the district). No policy-focused briefings have been part of the House’s ME onboarding in the past. Rather, the only Legislative branch-hosted policy education provided to newly elected Members is hosted by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) during a 4-day long New Member Seminar which has traditionally occurred in January following an election. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and attendance issues in 2023, the last two CRS New Member Seminars were canceled, resulting in two classes of Members who received neither bipartisan policy updates prior to serving in Congress nor an introduction to the expertise available to them through CRS.

New Approach

With the widely varied backgrounds and expertise of individuals who are elected to Congress, providing MEs with bipartisan policy briefings should be an essential element of NMO. Although CRS may not be able to fully host New Member Seminar for the MEs prior to their swearing in, the House should explore ways to build in a day of bipartisan policy briefings as part of the traditional NMO calendar, with a particular focus on policy topics the House is likely to address in the first months of the new Congress. This not only would build a foundation of Members’ understanding of CRS’ service to Congress, it would also provide MEs with a preview of the New Member Seminar and why they should attend.

In addition to policy programming, the Committee on House Administration should direct CRS to compile a Member Manual for the Executive Branch that includes an overview of the jurisdiction, leadership, key rule-making authority, organizational structure, and key contact information for each executive branch agency. Every agency's legislative affairs office maintains a “101” slide deck presentation that includes this information, but it is rarely made available to Members. By CRS compiling this information into one resource that can be provided to each ME during NMO, the House’s institutional knowledge on the executive branch will continue to be developed, improving understanding, and increasing the opportunity for effective oversight.
In 2024, Election Day will occur on Tuesday, November 5. This results in two full calendar weeks between the week of the election (Nov. 3-9) and the week of the Thanksgiving holiday (Nov. 24-30).

The following sample calendar welcomes MEs to DC for NMO the weekend immediately following the election for 10 consecutive days of programming. Although the quick turnaround between the election and NMO registration day puts immense pressure on the institution and CHA to coordinate travel details for MEs and aides over a very short period of time, this approach allows MEs to immediately feel supported by the House and begin their orientation as soon as possible.

Additionally, by hosting NMO in short order post-election, limited alternative orientation programming is able to be scheduled by various caucuses prior to the official onboarding. For example, in 2022 a partisan caucus organized a pre-NMO orientation during which MEs were presented with a partisan perspective of the institution and its operations. Although caucuses are able to host events, the effects of these partisan orientation activities on the MEs who participated were immediately realized. There is potential that an increase in similar programming could take root if a full week is available between the election and NMO Week One. As such, hosting NMO Week One immediately following the election minimizes the likelihood of alternative orientation programming taking place.

It should be noted that the following calendar includes Party Meetings for illustrative purposes. It is recognized that these events are often finalized last minute and thus are only placed to showcase how they could be utilized during a time that allows for minimum wasted time for other MEs.
# DETAILED SAMPLE CALENDAR

**NOVEMBER 2024**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUN</th>
<th>MON</th>
<th>TUES</th>
<th>WED</th>
<th>THUR</th>
<th>FRI</th>
<th>SAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>ELECTION DAY</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FLY IN DAY**

- **Breakfast at hotel:** Make the Most of This Time (MP)
- Welcome
- Placing Service in Context (MP)
- Overview of the Week & Tasks
- Meet the Officers, Intro to House Floor
- Office Structure, Hiring (MP)
- DC Office Lottery & Layout Meetings

**Breakfast at hotel:** How to Run an Effective Office, Hiring Lessons (MP)

**Cyber Security**

- MRA Budgeting
- Member Security in DC and the District
- Employer Responsibilities
- Ethics
- Stock Act & Financial Disclosure

**Rotational Room Model**

- MRA Budgeting
- Member Security in DC and the District
- Employer Responsibilities
- Ethics
- Stock Act & Financial Disclosure

**CRS/GAO Policy Camp**

- Personal Budgeting
- Member Security in DC and the District
- Employer Responsibilities
- Ethics
- Stock Act & Financial Disclosure

**Breakout Sessions**

- Diverse Hiring
- Scheduling Master Class
- Key House Websites & Apps
- Mission Driven Office
- Building Bridges Across the Aisle
- Navigating District Office Delays

**Breakout Session**

- Breakout Session: lettuce 201
- Regional Travel Tips
- Effective Social Media Usage
- Getting the Most Out of Your MRA Utilizing Technology to Maximize Capacity
- Partnering with the Senate

**END OF NMO**

**CRS/GAO Policy Camp**

- Personal Budgeting
- Member Security in DC and the District
- Employer Responsibilities
- Ethics
- Stock Act & Financial Disclosure

**The Real Legislative Process**

- District Office Services and Casework
- Workplace Rights
- Member & Staff Support Benefits
- Congressional Online Presence

**Key**

- (MP): Member Panel
- ~ Breakout Session
- [Not official NMO activity]
SAMPLE MID-TERM NMO PROGRAMMING

FRIDAY

[After last votes]

~ Registration
~ Welcome & Overview of the Weekend
~ MRA Review & Q&A
~ Member Security in DC and the District
~ Reintroduction to the House Officers over dinner

SUNDAY

[No morning programming]

~ The Real Legislative Process
~ Member & Staff Support Benefits
~ Scheduling Master Class
~ Congressional Online Presence & Communications Standards Commission

[No organized dinner]

SATURDAY

~ Breakfast: Keynote by Class R & D Presidents
~ Establishing Strong District Offices
~ The Power of Casework
~ Cybersecurity: Common Threats and Best Practices

[IT assistance, Lunch]

~ STOCK Act, Financial Disclosure Review, and Help Desk
~ AOC & CAO Helpdesks: From Picture Hanging to Telecom

[No organized dinner]

MONDAY

~ Breakfast: Improving Office Culture & Being a Mission-Driven Office
~ Key House Websites & Apps
~ Policy Support Office Review (GAO, CRS, etc.)

[Payroll Office Q&A, Lunch]

[Return to session]
Steps Toward a Modern New Member Orientation: Recommendations

Institutionalize and Streamline Programming

~ At the direction of CHA, House Officers should be considered the key hosts of NMO and be responsible for coordinating nonpartisan programming for all MEs.
~ Required orientation training should be prioritized at the onset of NMO and clearly designated for MEs.
~ NMO should be condensed to take place over fewer days, ideally over consecutive weeks immediately following Election Day.

Rethinking Programming

~ Breakout sessions and rotational presentation formats should be explored to foster increased audience engagement and empower attendees to select which programming they consider most valuable to attend.
~ Formal breakfast programming should be pursued to increase networking opportunities, early-day programming effectiveness, and mentorship between Members of Congress, MEs, and spouses.
~ CRS and GAO should be invited to NMO to host nonpartisan policy programming, ideally as breakout sessions, to allow attendees to select which sessions they would most benefit from.
~ CHA should direct CRS to compile and maintain a Member Manual to the Executive Branch resource document that provides key background and organizational information on each legislative branch agency.
~ NMO should include programming that places ME’s responsibilities as a Representative in context. This programming should provide a historical background to the Chamber’s role and emphasize all Members’ abilities to contribute to the health of the institution.
~ Current and former Members of Congress should be invited to participate in NMO as panelist participants or breakout session leaders. CHA should explore opportunities through which Members could recommend topics that should be taught at NMO and volunteer to lead those discussions.

Ongoing Orientation

~ House Officers, at the direction of CHA, should host a mid-term, condensed NMO program following ME’s first year in Congress.

Leveraging Technology

~ The CAO, in partnership with CHA, should explore employing AI technology to improve the NMO Website’s user experience and ME’s ability to easily access information. This could include creation of an NMO Website Chatbot and end-of-day AI-generated program summaries for attendees.
CONCLUSION

The House hosts one of the world’s leading legislature orientation programs. To remain effective, however, the approach, design, and execution of NMO should be consistently reviewed and improved upon by not only CHA, but the House as an institution. By exploring creative new approaches to institutionalize elements of the NMO planning process, increase diversity of how information is presented and retained, foster involvement and mentorship by senior Members, and ensure MEs get their coffee in the morning served with a side of wisdom, NMO can remain the gold standard of a legislator’s onboarding experience.

ABOUT POPVOX FOUNDATION

POPVOX Foundation is a 501c(3) non-profit organization that works to inform and empower people and make government work better for everyone. This includes reimagining the concept of civic infrastructure, and providing new ways for government to share information and engage the public, with an emphasis on diverse participation and rebuilding public trust. Its work focuses on government capacity, engagement, and innovation. Learn more at popvox.org.