

Parent page: <http://joinlincoln.org/papers> (should include an item here)

Title: “Doing Business with Congress: A Primer on Information Technology Acquisitions in the Legislative Branch”

Short blurb: A guide for vendors, civic hackers and public interest technologists on building tech for Congress.

Date: December 20, 2018

—

Summary:

Of the three branches of the federal government, Congress is the most responsive to the American people. On a daily basis, congressional offices hear from constituents, industry groups, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders across a broad range of issues. While digital tools have lowered barriers to communication with our elected representatives, Congress’s information technology (IT) infrastructure and staffing have failed to keep up with the new influx of information. The Members and Committees that oversee the governance of IT often have other priorities and limited technical depth. Opaque and fragmented rules also make it difficult for prospective vendors to do business, or for public interest technologists and civic hackers to meaningfully contribute.

This paper gives an overview of the governance structure, technical policies, and acquisitions processes for information technology infrastructure in Congress. The first section offers a brief history of the adoption of electronic communications and information technology in Congress. The second section provides an overview of the governance structure for information technology in the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and other legislative branch entities. The third and final section provides an overview of technology acquisitions categories and procurement processes in each chamber. At the end of this paper, you will also find appendices listing information relevant to technology acquisitions that, in most cases, is not otherwise publicly available.

Our goal with this paper is twofold. First, we wanted to provide a resource for prospective vendors and civic hackers to help them navigate the structures and procedures involved in working with Congress. Second, we wanted to identify opportunities for reform that will help create a better functioning Congress that can leverage modern tools to serve the needs of the American people.

In this paper you’ll learn:

- How information technology is handled in different parts of the legislative branch

- About the policies and procedures for information technology acquisitions in the House and Senate
- What Congress can do to improve its information technology infrastructure and vendor ecosystem

—

Header image: <https://historycms2.house.gov/assets/15032398435.jpeg>