SHARED SERVICES LEADERSHIP COALITION

Issue Paper on Executive Branch-Legislative Branch Relations
2026 Bipartisan Government Reform Roundtables
U. S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
August 2026

ISSUES / CHALLENGES

1. Executive – Legislative Distance and Reluctance to Engage

The Executive Branch and Congress have historically maintained a persistent distance dealing with government management issues, driven by political caution and institutional habit. The appropriations relationship is transactional and recurring, while the authorizing relationship deals predominantly with policy issues; both processes lack management focus. Accordingly, Executive Branch leaders typically engage Congress on budget matters while keeping authorizers and appropriators at arm's length from day-to-day decision making. Agency responses to Congressional inquiries are often filtered through government affairs offices, resulting in narrow, literal compliance rather than substantive dialogue. This dynamic reflects a broader belief within the Executive Branch that Congress is not a co-equal partner on management issues, limiting opportunities for shared problem-solving.

2. Institutional Attitudes and Risk Aversion

OMB's long-standing institutional posture – evidenced across multiple administrations led by both parties and over many decades – is that the Executive Branch possesses sufficient authority to manage government operations and does not require additional legislative involvement. This contributes to risk aversion among senior officials, who hesitate to engage Congress without political cover, especially when broader policy tensions are present that may or may not be related to management issues. Avoiding pre-legislative discussions increases the likelihood that Congress will enact statutory requirements that are difficult to implement or misaligned with operational realities

3. Collaboration Deficits

Although collaboration is widely recognized as a best practice for "good government" initiatives, it remains underutilized. Early-stage engagement in the legislative process between OMB and Congress is rare, and the lack of up-front engagement by agency implementation leaders can lead to legislation that is harder to implement and prone to downstream misunderstandings. OMB also tends to not clearly demonstrate how the President's Management Agenda aligns with the President's budget, leaving Congress without a coherent picture of management priorities or their fiscal and programmatic implications. Agreement on management priorities between the Executive Branch and Congress (i.e., OMB, OGR and HSGAC) could be a powerful accelerant in addressing the government's management challenges.

4. Historical Precedent and Erosion of Trust

Past bipartisan management reforms, such as GPRA, the CFO Act, Clinger-Cohen, FFATA, the DATA Act, and the MGT Act, have demonstrated that collaboration is possible and can be productive. However, trust and mutual respect have eroded over time. Institutional distrust persists regardless of party control, and comity across the aisle is at an historic low. These conditions make sustained collaboration more difficult and reduce the likelihood of bipartisan champions stepping up to lead management reform initiatives.

5. Congressional Capacity and Structural Issues

Congress has limited institutional capacity on government management issues. Expertise is concentrated in HSGAC and OGR, leaving most Members without deep understanding of federal management challenges. Moreover, there is little political incentive for Members of Congress to champion management reforms since they do not serve the direct interests of major constituencies and produce minimal political payback. Management reform lacks champions, particularly in the Senate, where homeland security issues dominate HSGAC's agenda. Heavy reliance on staff for interbranch negotiation creates opportunities for compromise but distances principals, weakening incentives for sustained collaboration and shared ownership.

OPTIONS

1. Strengthen Direct Engagement

OMB's Management side (the M side) should engage directly and proactively with Congressional leaders and committees without government affairs "chaperoning." Direct dialogue engaged under clear ground rules agreed to by all parties would enable more substantive discussions, reduce misunderstandings, and build trust between career and political leadership across branches.

2. Create Safe, Neutral Forums and Institutionalize Executive – Legislative Branch Dialogue

Establish structured, recurring forums wherein OMB, HSGAC, and OGR leaders can jointly discuss management issues. Biannual meetings between HSGAC/OGR and the President's Management Council (Deputy Secretaries/COOs) could provide a predictable venue for reviewing progress, surfacing challenges, and aligning priorities. The Congressionally chartered National Academy of Public Administration could serve as a neutral convener, offering nonpartisan expertise and a trusted environment for candid dialogue.

3. Align Management Initiatives with Budget Processes

Encourage HSGAC and OGR to develop a set of management initiatives aligned with the President's Management Agenda, and communicate them to budget, appropriations and authorizing committees in both chambers for incorporation into annual budget resolutions and appropriations processes. This alignment would elevate management priorities, create shared ownership, and provide a fiscal framework for implementation. It would also signal to House and Senate leadership the need to consider management issues more seriously during the primary Congressional policy setting and funding processes.

4. Use the Confirmation Process More Strategically

HSGAC can leverage confirmation hearings for PAS nominees at OMB, GSA, and OPM to assess management expertise and secure commitments to ongoing dialogue. Presenting nominees with a common list of priority issues – and requesting regular feedback – would reinforce expectations for collaboration. Maintaining pressure on the Administration to promptly fill key management positions would ensure continuity and reduce gaps in leadership while promoting ongoing dialogue between political appointees and Congressional staff and members.

5. Rebuild Congressional Structure for Management Reform

Congress should consider divesting the government reform portfolio from HSGAC and re-establishing a stand-alone, A-level Governmental Affairs Committee focused exclusively on government management and reform. This structural change would elevate management issues, expand institutional capacity, and create a dedicated venue for sustained oversight and legislative development.

HARD QUESTIONS

Trust

- How to rebuild trust between Congress and the Executive Branch when institutional distrust is persistent and bipartisan?

Incentives and Structure

- How to create meaningful incentives for greater collaboration between the Executive Branch and Congress?
- How should Congress restructure committee jurisdictions to elevate government management to a full-throated A-level priority?
- What incentives or protections would reduce executive branch risk aversion and encourage earlier engagement with Congress?
- What statutory frameworks could provide durable, cross-administration foundations for management reform with horizons longer than four years?

Expertise, Capacity and Priority

- How to improve understanding of management issues across Congress and broaden institutional competence?
- How to expand management expertise beyond HSGAC and OGR to strengthen congressional capacity?

- How to make management reform more compelling, politically salient, and supported by strong champions?

Process and Outcomes

- What mechanisms could ensure sustained bipartisan support for management reform across administrations?
- How can OMB better integrate the President's Management Agenda with the President's budget in ways that are transparent and actionable?
- How can Congress and the Executive Branch jointly define success metrics for government-wide management reforms?
- How can both branches ensure that legislation is designed with realistic implementation pathways and avoids unintended burdens?

RECOMMENDED PARTICIPANTS

SSLC is proud to nominate Advisory Board Members **Dave Mader** and **Robert Shea** to participate in the September 16th roundtable. Both are highly respected thought leaders in the issues discussed in this paper and bring extensive experience from pervious service in the legislative and executive branches of government, including at OMB and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs (pre-HSGAC). Their bios may be found at the links below.

Advisory Board « Shared Services Now **(Dave Mader)**

Advisory Board « Shared Services Now **(Robert Shea)**