

Congressional Member Organizations (CMOs) and Informal Member Groups

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In addition to party organizations and committees, Members of the House and Senate often participate in informal Member organizations. Hundreds of informal Member organizations—which are commonly referred to as caucuses, working groups, or task forces—have typically existed in each recent session of Congress. In this Insight, these groups are collectively described as *informal Member organizations* to avoid confusion with official party caucuses. Additional information can be found in CRS Report R40683, *Congressional Member Organizations (CMOs) and Informal Member Groups: Their Purpose and Activities, History, and Formation*.

Informal Member organizations are formed for a variety of reasons, usually associated with Members' policy objectives or representational considerations. These groups can enable Members to raise awareness about a particular topic and exchange information or ideas with colleagues (within or across chambers). At times, some groups may share legislative or representational interests with the House or Senate at large, certain party leaders, or particular committees. Yet Member organizations can also create forums for differing viewpoints, new subjects or policy alternatives, or more particular constituent concerns.

House Informal Member Organizations

House regulations broadly pertaining to individual Members' activities (including those found in the [House Ethics Manual](#); [Members' Congressional Handbook](#); and [Rules of the House](#), including [House Rule XXIII: the House Code of Official Conduct](#)) generally apply to Members' participation with informal Member organizations, and certain additional regulations issued by the Committee on House Administration (CHA) may also apply. A House group may be eligible [to register with CHA](#) as a Congressional Member Organization (CMO), provided that it has at least one House Member as an officer and meets other requirements (see the [CHA website](#) and [Members' Congressional Handbook](#)). Official CMO status enables House Members to use some [limited personal office and House resources](#) in support of CMO legislative activities, but official resources cannot be used directly to fund a CMO as an independent entity. A CMO is considered [an extension of the individual offices](#) of participating Members. Members may, for example, have personal office staff perform CMO-related work and utilize internal communications or a section of a Member's website for CMO issues. A CMO, however, has no separate corporate or legal identity; is not an employing authority; and cannot be assigned separate office space,

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send franked mail, or use official funds to print or pay for stationery. Although Members may use personal funds to support a CMO, a CMO cannot receive funding from outside groups or individuals.

Some CMOs may be designated as *Eligible Congressional Member Organizations* (ECMOs), enabling Members to transfer personal office funds for salaries and expenses for employees working on behalf of an ECMO to a dedicated House account administered by the ECMO. To seek status as an *ECMO in the 118th Congress*, a group must have been a registered CMO in the preceding Congress, with shared employees from at least 30 House Member offices; register as a CMO in the 118th Congress; designate a single House Member as administrator of the group; and have at least three House employees assigned to perform some ECMO work.

Senate Informal Member Organizations

Informal groups of Senators are collectively subject to the same regulations applicable to Senators as individuals, as indicated in the *Senate Ethics Manual*, *Rules of the Senate*, and the *Senate Code of Official Conduct*. Further guidance may be available to Senators from the Senate *Committee on Ethics* and *Committee on Rules and Administration*. Separate regulations expressly recognizing these groups and prescribing their operations have never been implemented in the Senate.

Select Considerations for Starting a Member Organization

This section provides some considerations that may be of interest to House Members or Senators who are thinking about forming an informal Member organization. As discussed in the “House Informal Member Organizations” section above, CHA provides additional guidelines for House groups identified as CMOs.

- **How to define the group’s objective and its purpose.** What issue(s) will it address? Some groups focus on a specific policy topic; economic sector or industry; or an issue of personal interest. Groups can also reflect district, state, or regional interests, or seek to address the interests of a broad national constituency.
- **Identifying “core” Members who could help lead and support the organization.** Preliminary discussions and informal meetings with these Members could be used to determine the structure of a group, its objectives, and activities.
- **How a group might relate to existing congressional institutions.** This may include party caucus or conference groups; committees or subcommittees; and existing informal Member organizations. The Committee on House Administration *lists registered CMOs*, and other groups may be identified through Member websites or “Dear Colleague” letters. Group organizers may wish to consult with party, committee, or existing group leaders to avoid the appearance of rivalry or duplication.
- **Identifying likely group membership.** Informal Member organizations can determine their own eligibility criteria for membership. Membership may be open to all interested Members, or it may be limited to invitees only. A group can decide, for example, whether it will be open to one party only or both parties; whether its membership will be limited to one chamber or be bicameral; if it should be exclusive to a particular region or states; or if shared issue interests should be the basis for membership.
- **Seek necessary guidance and information.** House groups may consult with the *Committee on House Administration* and *Committee on Ethics* about applicable

- guidelines and regulations. Senate groups may consult with the [Committee on Rules and Administration](#) and [Select Committee on Ethics](#).
- **When and how to announce the formation of a group.** Members often circulate a “Dear Colleague” letter to introduce and describe a new group, and these letters may also be used to invite other interested Members to join. Press releases, statements on the floor or in the *Congressional Record*, or other communications are also sometimes used to publicize a new group and its activities.

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