

“Building relationships for the betterment of Missouri’s citizens”



State of Missouri Leadership Academy

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Building relationships for the betterment of Missouri's citizens

Problem Statement:

In the past, poor collaboration between the Executive and Legislative branches have complicated the ability to best serve the citizens of Missouri. Challenges, such as lack of communication and mutual understanding, have resulted in poor working relationships between the branches. Unfortunately, the consequences are strained relationships and negative impacts on the services to the citizens of Missouri.

Our project addresses a **first step approach** regarding how to create opportunities that will allow the two branches to connect and improve the working relationships and collaboration.

At first glance, we noted some significant challenges that hinder the prospective improvement of how State government does business. These challenges include lack of time, logistics, and buy-in.

Upon researching how to address the challenges, we noted there are limited opportunities for the branches to connect. Without these opportunities, a good working relationship will never be created. We have decision makers working with decision makers five months of the year. Without good working relationships between the decision makers, we are not really working towards what is best for the citizens of Missouri. Our proposal would be a **first step approach** that could be expanded on at a later time when we prove this is a value added benefit for all involved.

Recommendation:

Create an opportunity for the Executive Branch to meet with the incoming Legislators and allow time to share information about the 17 different Executive departments. Start with a time for “listening to hear” versus the “listening to respond”. This intentional differentiation is to help stay negative results that occur in first interactions when individuals are truly not listening to the information being provided.

During the development of our proposal, we solicited feedback from several key team members. We developed surveys for the Legislative Liaisons, Department Directors, Freshmen Legislators, and the Senior Legislators. The surveys were narrowed down in order to determine if a similar process is already established, is there buy-in from the group, did they believe there would be value added, and any feedback they felt would be helpful. Positive results from the surveys indicated there is a need and it would benefit all parties involved. Below we have included highlights from some of survey results but the full survey results can be provided upon request.

The team researched and noted that in the 2004 legislative session, Senate Bill 717 sponsored by Senator Doyle Childers was introduced to establish a Legislative Academy. The Academy would have been designed to educate members of the General Assembly about the organization and operation of the State government, appropriations and other aspects of the Legislative and Executive branches. This proposal would have amended section 21.183, RSMo. which already established the Freshman Orientation for Legislature.

With the creation of Legislative Academy, we would initiate the first steps toward a better working relationship – breaking the silence and providing a time to introduce legislators to state agencies and build lasting relationships that foster the goal of helping Missouri and Missourians prosper - the chance to say “Hi” and say “Hi, again”.

Our proposal would allow each of the Executive Departments to discuss missions, scope of concerns, constituent issues, and brief budget overview for their departments during lunch and breakfast periods of the Freshmen Orientation. These would be brief 20 minute discussions that could expand to specific one-on-one times for relationship building. This could include Capitol talks, facility/office tours, district/region tours and Legislative Open House.

During the week of Freshmen Orientation, the Executive Departments would also have informational booths set up around the rotunda of the Missouri Capitol for anyone who wanted additional information on the departments.

Proposed outcomes:

- Forging connections between the branches would eliminate faceless, nameless adversaries and create a better atmosphere when working towards important resolutions.
- Creating a time to actively “listen to hear” versus “listen to respond”.
- Leverage the connections to become more effective and agile policymakers, which leads to common ground and easier legislative sessions. This could benefit both branches, a win – win scenario.
- Change the status quo or “this is how we have always done it” mantra and also, eliminate some of the redundant information.

Conclusion:

There is a need to create opportunities for the Executive Departments to provide information on how they operate, current constituent issues, important needs, and accomplishments. Create possibilities that start conversations between the branches, **a first step approach**. Through future Quarterly Pulse type surveys, we would focus on what is working and shown to have value added. Last, realize this is the starting point and foundation to build on for future possibilities, maybe even projects for future capstones.

Survey Results:

Legislative Liaisons:

Do you feel the Legislature overall could benefit from an enhanced knowledge of the Executive branch, specifically a better core understanding of Departments?

“Enhanced knowledge of how departments function would assist in policy making that purports to change in the status quo.”

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“I feel there are legislators who would benefit from additional education on the various state agencies. The scope of state government is very broad. It is difficult to grasp all the functions and services performed by the state. Anyone working within state government would benefit from more educational opportunities.”

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“Educating legislators on the role and operations of Departments allows for a more collaborative approach to interactions that currently tend towards adversarial. This may lead to legislators looking into issues further when faced with a constituent concern rather than making a quick decision based on incomplete information.”

Executive Department Directors (comments or suggestions)

“My reflection is that the major issues we encounter with legislators is a lack of trust and the need to build relationships, prove ourselves trustworthy on constituency responses and follow-through on promised materials and responses. Such a program could go a long way toward beginning that relationship development. When came to state government, one of my biggest surprises was that the state departments really are not relied upon by legislators as subject matter experts and information shared if often viewed skeptically.”

Freshmen Legislators:

Do you feel that as a first-year Legislator you could benefit from an enhanced knowledge of the Executive branch, specifically a better core understanding of the Departments (structure, purview, mission, role, etc.)?

“It would help further build relationships and understand the inside workings of the various departments”

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“It would be helpful to know not only points of contact, but also how the department are set-up as well as how things work from an internal perspective”

Senior Legislators:

Do you feel that the Legislature overall could benefit from an enhanced knowledge of the Executive branch, specifically a better core understanding of the Departments (structure, purview, mission, role, etc.)?

We so often have to rely on the Legislative Liaison to know these divisions intimately. When you have turnover, which happens regularly, they have to go back and get up to speed and then report back.

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There should be a semi-annual meeting with legislators and their staff with state departments. This meeting could last 4-8 hours. The department could ensure the Legislative body has a good understanding of what the department does for the state and its citizens. This would be a great chance to learn of updates in the department, a chance to meet the director & the liaison. This could also be a chance to talk to legislators about what needs to be updated in statute to make things better for citizens. This could also be an opportunity for legislators to voice their concerns with the department.