

Increasing Public Access to Legislative Sessions

THE PROBLEM

When the Legislature is in session, New Mexicans are left in the dark.

Unless they are watching proceedings in real time, the public has no way to know the up-to-date fate of bills they care about. The earliest they can learn whether a committee approved, rejected, or tabled a bill is 24 hours later, by which point the bill may already have moved to the next committee.

Even those who make the effort to attend a hearing or watch online so they can speak on a bill still face uncertainty. Bills are shifted to different days, committee meetings are canceled, and amendments are added, often without any public notice. Simply showing up doesn't guarantee that the discussion they came for will happen. This is especially frustrating for people who drive for hours across the state to ensure their voices will be heard.

A functioning democracy depends on the public's ability to observe and participate in government. People cannot do that if they don't know where, when, or how to get involved and speak their mind.

THE PROPOSAL

These problems are interwoven into the daily schedule needed to keep the fast-paced Legislature on track. Fixing them will require thoughtful, evidence-based solutions that can earn the support of legislative leadership. Achieving that will take a coordinated coalition of individuals and organizations working together.

THE PLAN

While there is clear evidence that these problems exist, most of it is anecdotal. Verifiable conclusions require real data collection and analysis. That's why coalition partners plan to gather data during the 2026 Legislative session and survey lawmakers afterward. The path forward includes:

1. **Collect objective and subjective data from the public** during the 2026 legislative session. Subjective data will include interviews with members of the public regarding their experiences navigating legislative logistics. Objective data points will include:
 - a. Frequency with which committee agendas meet the 24-hour posting deadline
 - b. Number of committee meetings that are cancelled
 - c. Reasons agendas are changed during committee meetings
 - d. Timing and handling of amendments to bills
2. **Share preliminary data findings with Legislative leadership** in the hopes of gaining their support for continued data collection and possible changes to Senate and House Rules
3. **Conduct a survey of legislators** aimed at identifying practical solutions that would improve public participation in the legislative process
4. **Work with lawmakers willing to pilot proposed solutions** in their committees during the 2027 session, ensuring detailed records are kept on how each approach functions in practice.
5. **Determine what additional data** to collect during the 2027 session, with the goal of expanding and refining the information gathered in 2026
6. **Host work sessions with legislators** who are engaged on the issue and discuss next steps
7. **Present solutions to Legislative leadership** and, if applicable, suggest improvements be added to official Senate and House Rules.

PUBLIC ACCESS ISSUES

- No online record of a bill's current status following a committee hearing
- No online notice when a committee meeting has been cancelled or the time has changed
- No online notice when a committee in session reschedules a bill to a different day
- No online notice when last-minute amendments to bills are added
- No record of bills that have been tabled or withdrawn
- No online notice when a committee in session changes the order of bills to be heard that day
- No final, accurate committee agendas
- No written record of committee discussions
- No committee meeting minutes
- No method for allowing in-person attendees to speak on a bill that has been moved to a different day

COALITION PARTNERS

- New Mexico Foundation for Open Government
- New Mexico Environmental Law Center
- Common Cause