



How to Structure an EFFECTIVE SPACE COMMITTEE

BY ANN FORMAN

Space committees can be an important decision-making body on university campuses, helping to generate consensus among senior leaders and shape space management policies. However, they often fail to drive better space decision making, typically because institutions struggle to pinpoint the right membership and ensure that the right conversations take place.

Space committees are most likely to stall when the institution fails to properly scope the issues in the committee's purview. While many institutions are most concerned with selecting the right membership for their space committee, assembling the right group is important but not sufficient to guarantee a committee's success. Institutions must also ensure that the requests the committee reviews are relevant to members.

Institutions can keep space committees on track by creating a tiered review process to vet requests and send the most important ones to a senior space committee for review. Our research has revealed three successful space committee models.



OPTION 1: THE GATEKEEPER MODEL

The first option for creating a tiered space-request resolution process is to appoint a single person, or gatekeeper, to review all space requests before they go to the space committee. The gatekeeper vets each request, approving small projects and sending certain requests to the space committee for further review. Pennsylvania State University and Brown University both utilize the gatekeeper model, each using a different person to fill the role.

Two Facilities Committee Models

At Penn State, the facilities director serves as the gatekeeper, vetting the viability and cost of every space request. Brown uses an associate provost to screen space requests against academic priorities. In both models, the space committee only receives requests that pass the gatekeeper's screening process. This protects the committee's time and ensures that senior-level members focus on the most important space decisions.

OPTION 2: BICAMERAL SPACE COMMITTEE

The second option for establishing a tiered space-request resolution process is to establish a bicameral space committee. In this model, a junior space committee reviews all space requests, approving routine requests and small projects, and only sends the most important decisions to the senior committee.



At Boston University, the more junior sub-SPACE (Space Planning and Capital Expenditures) committee is an eight-person group composed of a mix of facilities employees and assistant vice presidents. It meets biweekly, independently considering and deciding on projects under \$1 million. For more expensive or complex projects,



requests are augmented with cost estimates and alternative solutions before being sent to the senior SPACE committee, composed of the president and five vice and senior vice presidents, for review.

Because of the junior committee's scoping work, the senior SPACE committee is able to meet less frequently and resolve issues faster. While the bicameral model requires more people than the gatekeeper option, the junior committee is able to as-

sume more administrative responsibilities from the senior committee, further protecting the time of senior leaders.

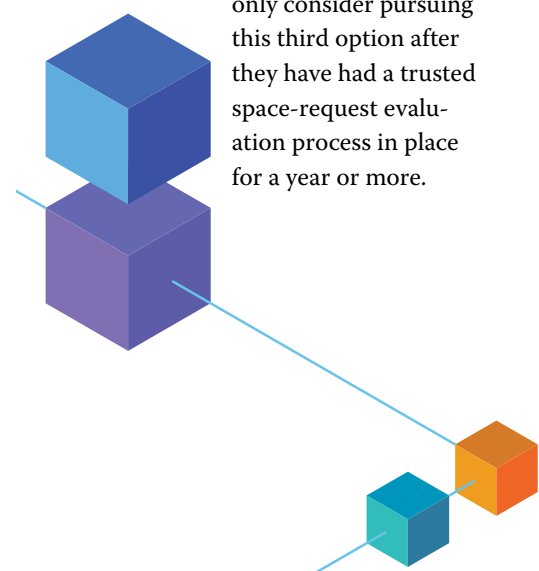
OPTION 3: EMAIL-ONLY RENOVATION COMMITTEE

The final option for establishing a tiered space-request resolution process is establishing an email-only committee. In this model, committee members review, discuss, and vote on requests via email, decreasing the time commitment by building-in flexibility. For example, Florida International University (FIU) uses an email-only space committee to review all incoming space requests, ranging from temporary art installations to major space renovations. Once the office of space management reviews a request to ensure it is appropriately scoped and makes a recommendation, it is sent via email to the entire committee. All members review it by an agreed-upon deadline or appoint a proxy to review it in their absence. Final votes are submitted via email, and the project is either approved or denied.

Beyond the efficiency of the email-only committee, FIU has found that requiring faculty, departments, and colleges to seek approval for all changes made to any campus space has led to a decreased sense of ownership over space. Instead, faculty and staff are beginning to view it more as a central resource that belongs to the university itself.

Importantly, FIU's email-only committee was the natural evolution of a highly successful, well-established in-person committee. Institutions should

only consider pursuing this third option after they have had a trusted space-request evaluation process in place for a year or more.



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By clearly laying out the path of a space request from the initial request to approval, UMBC ensures that everyone on campus understands how space decisions are made.

SOLIDIFYING THE SPACE REQUEST PROCESS

No matter which committee structure you use, clarifying the decision-making process is crucial for success. When people don't understand how the process works, they are more likely to use informal channels and circumvent the space committee. Institutions like the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) have published formal flowcharts outlining their space-request decision-making process. By clearly laying out the path of a space request from the initial request to approval, UMBC

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While Facilities leaders should steer their campus toward a committee structure that meets the unique needs, personalities, and culture of their institution, these models shed light to how to overcome three common missteps. First, avoid overburdening the committee with every single space request by filtering them before they are formally considered. Second, only ask senior leaders to weigh in on requests that truly require their input. And finally, aim for a deliberation process that is as efficient as possible. Adopting one of the models outlined here—and avoiding the concomitant governance misstep—can help rebuild and reenergize the space governance process. ☺

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