

## **Career Opportunities in Associations**

There are over 135,000 nonprofit membership organizations worldwide. Associations are grouped under the headings of professional associations (existing to serve the interests of a professional group), trade associations (serving business interests), or groups of individuals with a common interest (such as philanthropic and charitable associations). The majority of associations in the US are headquartered in Washington, DC, New York, or Chicago. Associations serve to share up-to-date information about their professions, solve occupational problems and share solutions. It is often the mission of these groups to advance the special interests of the profession or group and educate members and the public about the profession or group and their interests. Many of these organizations set professional standards, establish product safety and quality standards and provide research on the profession/industry. Staff are often asked to gather and analyze data, advocate for and mobilize to meet social and economic needs, serve as a communications link between members and government, and assist members with understanding and complying with new laws and regulations

### **Career Paths and Entry Salaries**

Many associations are involved in the domestic and international arenas, partly due to an expansion of organization memberships to include non-US members, and partly due to an upsurge in opportunities for entering new overseas markets. As a result, associations are hiring full-time personnel who are skilled in international operations, knowledgeable about geographic regions and cultural distinctions. Duties can range from developing new chapters or affiliates outside the United States, to marketing the organization's products and services internationally.

In a trade association, you may be asked to plan trade missions to U.S. regions or foreign countries, or to develop reports on the market potential of your members' products or message. In addition, you may organize a group of members to participate in overseas trade shows or help recruit domestic or overseas exhibitors to the association's exposition in the United States. In a professional society, you may be asked to work with the organization's overseas counterpart to co-sponsor a technical or educational meeting. You may also be involved in translating the organization's publications into one or more languages, or developing an international certification program.

Entry-level positions and salaries are based on education, experience, geographic location, size, and the budget of the association. The salary range for people with graduate degrees in public policy, international affairs, business, economics, political science, or law, who serve as analysts, policy specialists, management, and government affairs assistants, is between \$30,000 and \$50,000. Finding a job in an association is the same as finding a job in any other career. The American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) suggests job seekers network, contact ASAE people in their geographic area, browse trade publications and directories, consider interning at an association, or join an association to locate employment opportunities.

Government affairs specialists will spend a considerable amount of time monitoring government activities to identify public policy that could affect members; therefore, they should have a solid understanding of government procedures and an intimate knowledge of key issues surrounding the association's profession or industry. Association staff may, from time to time, testify before congressional committees. Students often end up working either on national legislation in an advisory or advocacy role, or on standards, policy and treaty

obligations through international organizations. Additional duties may include: arranging conventions, meetings and seminars; functioning as sales and marketing staff; fulfilling roles in finance, government relations, publishing, fundraising, public speaking; and working with an association's board of directors.

### **Qualifications Necessary**

Students wishing to work for associations will need to have good coordinating and planning skills, excellent communication skills, the ability to manage people, and at least a basic knowledge of financial management. In addition, because of the nature of the work and the interpersonal skills required, it is necessary to possess public relations skills, the ability to work on a team, the ability to communicate well to a group and explain complex issues in simple terms. International associations or those that support international organizations may require proficiency in a second language and experience working or studying in other cultures. Because of the amount of correspondence conducted by associations, excellent writing skills are a must.

### **Sample Employers**

Associations can be found for most sectors, professions and industries including manufacturing, religion, education, foundations, trade, health, environment, corrections, and public management. Browsing the websites of a range of professional, trade, charitable and philanthropic associations will provide additional information on the scope of association activities and missions. The following cross-section of associations may be a good place to start:

### **Associations**

- American Council on Education, [www.acenet.edu](http://www.acenet.edu)
- American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), [www.asaenet.org](http://www.asaenet.org)
- Association of Southeast Asian Nations, [www.aseansec.org/](http://www.aseansec.org/)
- Council on Foundations, [www.cof.org](http://www.cof.org)
- Environmental Defense Fund, <http://www.edf.org>
- International City Managers Association, [www.icma.org](http://www.icma.org)
- National Academy of Sciences, [www.nas.edu/](http://www.nas.edu/)
- National Association of Manufacturers, [www.nam.org](http://www.nam.org)
- United Nations Association, [www.unausa.org/](http://www.unausa.org/)
- US Chamber of Commerce, [www.uschamber.org/](http://www.uschamber.org/)

### **Resources For More Information**

#### ***Internet Resources***

- *Encyclopedia of Associations*  
<http://library.dialog.com/bluesheets/pdf/bl0114.pdf>  
The *Encyclopedia of Associations* is a comprehensive source of detailed information on over 135,000 nonprofit membership organizations worldwide. The Encyclopedia of Associations database provides addresses and descriptions of professional societies, trade associations, labor unions, cultural and religious organizations, fan clubs, and other groups of all types.

ASAE monthly magazine available through any of the ASAE web, email or phone sources.

- *Association Trends* <http://www.associationtrends.com/> Weekly newspaper by Martineau Corporation. Phone 301-652-8666.
- *Associations on the Net*, <http://www.ipl.org/div/aon/> Internet Public Library
- *FITA Directory of International Trade Associations in North America*, <http://fita.org/members.html>, Federation of International Trade Associations
- *USAE – The Weekly Newspaper of Associations, CVB’s and Hotels* <http://www.usaenews.com/index.php>

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