

## **Career Opportunities on Capitol Hill (Congressional Offices and Committees)**

Capitol Hill offers a wide range of exciting and demanding employment opportunities. Employment on the Hill generally refers to positions available in one of the 535 Congressional offices (100 Senate and 435 House of Representatives) or 300 committees and subcommittees. Most committees are divided into majority and minority staffs that perform several different functions including, research and subject specialists that conduct legislative research, draft bills, and follow upcoming legislation, ombudsmen that respond to constituent inquiries, handle general administration, or promote the public image (and future election) of their representative, and committee staff that support the legislative process, by drafting legislation, preparing background reports, arranging for expert testimony, and serving as the liaison between Congress and the administration on policy matters.

Congressional staffers perform a variety of different functions, so there are opportunities for persons with varying interests and capabilities. All Congressional offices need the administrative support personnel as well as public relations staff who may respond to constituent issues and/or promote the elected officer's public image. Many Maxwell graduates seek positions as issue specialists, working in the legislative area, conducting research, preparing background reports, drafting bills, following legislation and arranging for expert testimony.

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

There is no "typical" career path on Capitol Hill. With elections every two or six years and with only ten of the current Senators having 25 years or more service, very few staffers are able to spend an entire career working for one member of congress. Many congressional staffers use their congressional positions as stepping-stones to the executive branch, private sector, think tanks, and nonprofit organizations. Since turnover is so common on the Hill, there are opportunities for promotion on both personal and committee staffs.

The high turnover rate provides numerous opportunities for enterprising job seekers. Staff size varies considerably and networking is often the key to securing a position, as many openings are highly competitive and are not always advertised. An internship with a Member of Congress also provides an excellent opportunity to build contacts and show interest in public service. A good time to look for a position, particularly on the House side, is just after an election.

Some of the more common entry-level positions include:

- Receptionist/Staff Assistant – Serves as the main point of contact for the office, which involves routing incoming calls, distributing messages and mail to staffers, and handling constituent requests. Average salaries range in the mid to upper \$20's.
- Legislative Correspondent – Drafts responses to a member's mail and deals with a range of constituent requests and inquiries concerning legislation and national policy. Average salaries range in the mid to upper \$20's.
- Legislative Assistant – Briefs the Member on a number of issues, helps draft legislation, writes position papers and addresses constituent inquiries. In some offices, Legislative Assistants may handle five or six different issues. Average salaries range from the lower \$30's to the mid \$40's.

- Press Secretary/Communications Director – Acts as the key link between the Member of Congress and the media, directs publicity by issuing press releases, radio and TV spots, speeches, etc. Average salaries range from the mid \$40's in the House to the lower 60's in the Senate.
- Legislative Director – Heads the legislative staff, updates the Member on the status of bills in Congress, and maintains close contact with a number of constituencies, including other Hill staffers and lobbyists. Salaries range from the \$50's in the House to the \$80's in the Senate.
- Administrative Assistant/Chief of Staff – Oversees the operation of the entire office, both in Washington and in the area represented by the Senator's or Representative's home state. Individuals in this position generally have at least 10 years of experience working in Congress. Average salaries range from the \$80's in the House to over \$100,000 in the Senate.

### **Qualifications Necessary/Application Procedures to Enter Field**

Entry-level positions require a bachelor's degree while a master's is necessary for advancement. Substantive knowledge in areas relevant to a member's committee work and a demonstrated understanding of the legislative process can be helpful in securing a position. Strong written communication skills are essential, and it's important to be able to write concisely and precisely. Oral communication and interpersonal skills are also important in handling constituent problems, meeting with lobbyists and interest groups and dealing with the media. The pace of most congressional offices requires high energy, commitment and flexibility.

### **Sample Employers**

- Senate Foreign Relations Committee, <http://foreign.senate.gov/>
- Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, [intelligence.senate.gov](http://intelligence.senate.gov)
- House Committee on International Relations, [www.house.gov/international\\_relations](http://www.house.gov/international_relations)
- House Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, <http://www.csce.gov/>
- Congressional Research Service, [www.loc.gov/crsinfo](http://www.loc.gov/crsinfo)
- Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)
- Members' Offices, [thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov)

### **Demand and Future Challenges of Profession**

Entry-level positions are highly competitive and many jobs on Capitol Hill are unadvertised. Inquiries directed to the offices of your home congressional representatives (particularly if you share their party affiliation) can be helpful, as can a Capitol Hill internship. Most congressional staffers will readily admit that networking is frequently the key to securing a position on the Hill. Post-election is a good time to look for a job on the House side. While campaign staffers may fill some positions, newly elected representatives need to staff the Washington office quickly.

### **Resources For More Information**

#### **Placement Offices**

House of Representatives Human Resources Office  
 263 Cannon House Office Building  
 Independence and South Capitol Streets, SE

Washington, DC 20515  
Resume Referral Service (202) 266-6731  
Job Line (202) 225-2450  
[www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)

Senate  
142 Hart Senate Office Building  
Placement Office  
2nd & Constitution Ave., NE Washington, DC 20510  
(202) 224-9167  
Listings available for pick up each Tuesday.  
[www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)

Congressional Management Foundation  
513 Capitol Court NE, Suite 100  
Washington, DC 20002  
(202) 546-0100  
\* Publishes an annual survey of House of Representatives' staff job descriptions and salaries.

### **Directories**

Congressional Yellow Pages / Government Affairs Yellow Book, Leadership Directories Inc (2003)  
Congressional Quarterly's Washington Information Directory  
Congressional Staff Directory in Congress: The Staff Perspective, Congressional Management Foundation

### **Publications** (in career library)

An Insider's Guide to Political Jobs in Washington, William T. Endicott, John Wiley and Sons (2003)  
Career Opportunities in Politics, Government and Activism, Joan Axelrod-Contrada, Facts on File (2003)  
Federal Jobs: The Ultimate Guide, 3rd edition, Dana Morgan and Robert Goldenkoff, Arco Publications (2002)

### **Other Publications**

- *The Almanac of American Government Jobs and Careers*, Ronald L. Krannich and Caryl Rae Krannich, Woodbridge, VA: Impact Press (October 1991)
- *The Complete Guide to Public Employment*, Ronald L. Krannich and Caryl Rae Krannich, Manassas, VA: Impact Publications (July 1994)
- *House Actions Report*, C/O Kinko's on Capitol Hill, 317 Pennsylvania Ave., SE, Washington, DC 20007, (202) 547-0421
- *Roll Call*, 909 2nd St., NE, Washington, DC, (202) 289-4900, <http://www.rollcall.com>
- *Opportunities in Public Affairs*, (301) 571-0102, <http://www.brubach.com>
- *The Book of U.S. Government Jobs: Where They Are, What's Available and How to Get One, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition*, by Dennis v. Damp, Brookhaven Press, 2005.

### **Field Specific Information**

Congressional employees must be U.S. citizens.