



Public Policy: Tools You Can Use

Roles of Congressional Staff Members

Each Member of Congress has staff to assist her or him during a term in office. To be most effective in communicating with Congress, you will want to know the commonly used titles and principal functions of key staff.

Chief of staff or administrative assistant. This staff member reports directly to the Member of Congress and usually has overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcomes of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The chief of staff or administrative assistant (known as the "AA") is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.

Legislative director, legislative counsel, legislative assistant, legislative correspondent. The legislative director (the "LD") is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of issues. Responsibility for legislative analysis is assigned to the counsel or legislative assistants (LAs) who have expertise in specific areas. Depending on the responsibilities and interests of the member, an office may have separate legislative assistants assigned to health, the environment, taxes, etc., as well as legislative correspondents (LCs) who draft letters on pending legislation.

Committee Staff and Fellows. Committee staffers often develop in-depth knowledge about complex legislation and policies. The staff of committees often includes individuals with specialized education and experience called "fellows." They are paid through fellowships sponsored by academic institutions, foundations, or interest groups. Fellows may spend six months to a year working on general committee issues or specific pieces of legislation.

Communications director or press secretary. The communications director's responsibility is to build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the member and constituents and the public. The communications director is expected to know the benefits, demands, and special requirements of both print and electronic media, and how to promote the member's views or position most effectively on specific issues.

Scheduler, appointment secretary, or personal secretary. The scheduler is usually responsible for apportioning a member's time among the many demands of congressional responsibilities and constituent requests. The scheduler may also be responsible for making necessary travel arrangements, arranging speaking engagements and visits to the district, etc. Don't underestimate the importance of this person!

Caseworker. The caseworker usually works in the member's district office with the staff member assigned to help with constituent requests by preparing replies for the member's signature. The caseworker's responsibilities may also include helping resolve problems

presented by constituents that involve federal agencies. There are often several caseworkers in a district office.

Other staff in a congressional office may include an office manager, staff assistant, receptionist, and interns.

Prepared by Brian W. Lindberg from various sources.