

Finding a Job on Capitol Hill



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FINDING A JOB ON CAPITOL HILL

Capitol Hill, more commonly known as “The Hill”, is the name given to the few blocks immediately surrounding the U.S. Capitol building. This area encompasses the Senate and House office buildings, the U.S. Supreme Court, and the Library of Congress. Within the House and Senate alone there are over 15,000 positions within individual Members' offices, committees, and administrative offices. The annual turnover rate creates many opportunities for employment, particularly at the entry level. However, competition for positions is high, so developing an effective job search plan is imperative. This guide provides insight into Congressional staff duties, job searching methods, and resources useful in formulating that plan to connect you to Hill employment.

INSIDE THE CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE

The type of work performed in Congressional offices on Capitol Hill can be divided into two areas: administrative and legislative. The following information explains the types of positions available as well as basic responsibilities involved. The number of positions and the descriptions may differ depending upon the side of the Capitol (House or Senate) and the seniority of the Member.

ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS:

Chief of Staff / Administrative Assistant (AA): Oversees the operation of the entire office, both in Washington and the district represented by the congressman, and often coordinates several projects in the district; usually the most influential position, often representing the Member at events or meetings when he or she is not available; usually responsible for hiring personnel for the office.

Office Manager: Oversees the daily operation of the office which may include maintaining supplies, handling office accounts, and supervising clerical staff.

Scheduler: Arranges the Member's schedule, both in Washington and the district, which may include handling all travel arrangements and reservations.

Systems Manager: Handles the computer operations for the office by maintaining the office data base and providing technical assistance.

Receptionist / Staff Assistant: Serves as the main point of contact for the office which involves answering and routing incoming calls, distributing messages and mail to staffers, and handling constituent requests for documents, publications and congressional tours.

Press Secretary / Director of Communications: Serves as the office's voice for all press outlets which involves writing speeches, news releases, and position articles, as well as arranging meetings between the Member and district editors and reporters.

Assistant Press Secretary: Assists the press secretary in all of his or her duties; more common in the Senate.

LEGISLATIVE POSITIONS:

Legislative Director (LD): Heads the legislative staff; monitors the status of bills in Congress and keeps the Member updated; drafts legislation initiated by the Member; maintains close contact with a number of constituencies including other Hill staffers, lobbyists, and people in the home district.

Legislative Assistant (LA): Collaborates with the LD in legislative matters. Handles a number of issue areas about which he/she briefs the Member, helps draft legislation, answers constituent inquiries, and writes position papers for the Member.

Legislative Correspondent (LC): Researches issues in order to answer constituent legislative correspondence.

DISTRICT STAFF:

In addition to an office on Capitol Hill, all congressional representatives maintain at least one office within the district they represent. Within the district office, the number of positions and the responsibilities may differ, but all staff work with constituents in the district rather than on legislation on a national level. Some of the positions in a district office include:

District Manager: Responsible for the operations of the office. May involve representing the Member at local events and meetings in addition to supervising district staff and directing district projects.

Caseworker: Represents the Member by handling cases for individual constituents. May include interacting with government agencies on the constituent's behalf and letting the Member know of any issues that arise that might be incorporated into legislative matters happening in Washington. Usually more than one per office.

Office Manager: In charge of the general upkeep of the office as well as budgetary duties.

INTERNS:

Found in both the Washington and district offices. The number hired depends, once again, on the needs of the office. Interns may participate in any number of activities including writing letters to constituents, researching issues, assisting with mass mailings, answering phones and running errands. Most internships are unpaid, but regardless of whether or not an internship is paid, it is an excellent means of learning about the operations of a Congressional office, and it becomes a valuable asset during the Hill job search.

GETTING STARTED

With 535 Members of Congress and numerous Congressional Committees, it is helpful to develop a job search plan to make the task a bit easier. The following suggestions and considerations should help you develop a plan that suits your needs.

1. **Contact your two Senators and Representative first.** Many Members give preference to applicants from their own state, and more importantly from their own district. Even if there are no current openings in these offices, the staff might be able to provide suggestions of other offices to contact.

2. **Research the Members.** Consider factors such as the Member's political ideology, voting record, and committees of which he/she is a member. It may be difficult to work for someone who does not share your political views, so doing research in the beginning will allow you to target accordingly. Resources such as *The Almanac of American Politics*, *The Congressional Quarterly*, *Roll Call* (the twice weekly newspaper of Capitol Hill), and *The Hill* (another weekly Hill publication) can provide much of this background information.

3. **Visit the offices** you have identified as potential places you would like to work. Call ahead to find out who has the authority to hire and address your cover letter to that individual. Put your cover letter and resume in a sealed envelope with that person's name on it to ensure that it reaches him/her. Dress professionally. Ask about employment possibilities, and if there are no openings, ask if they can recommend anyone else to talk with in other offices where positions may be available. Be sure to refer to the person who recommended them when you contact these referrals.

4. **Emphasize any political experience** including internships, student government, campaign work, etc. when developing your resume. Also highlight any leadership experiences and writing skills. It is not recommended to include your political affiliation on your resume. It is assumed that you will apply to offices of Members whose ideology is similar to your own, and therefore, political affiliation is not necessary.

5. **Try a combination of the following methods**, in addition to contacting individual offices:

Job Banks: The Senate Placement Office is a resume referral service which matches qualified candidates with positions based on the information provided by candidates on their applications. This office publishes a weekly job bulletin to inform candidates of current openings. The House of Representatives operates a similar service, but utilizes a jobline to announce openings.

Other Job Listings: *Roll Call* and *The Hill*, the newspapers of The Hill, have classified sections with Hill jobs. *House Action Reports* (a publication of Congressional Quarterly) also publishes a job bulletin which is available at the Capitol Hill Kinko's.

College Alumni: Check out the Alumni Career Network in the Career Services Office or attend a local alumni event sponsored by the Alumni Association in order to identify CUA alums working on the Hill. They can offer advice about your job search and answer any questions you might have about working on the Hill. And if they know of an opening in their office or elsewhere, they might offer that information as well.

Personal Contacts: Build your own network of potential Hill contacts. Try any family, friends from high school or college, friends of friends, professors, etc. to see if they either work on the Hill or know someone who does. Knowing someone to personally recommend you for a position enhances your credibility. In addition, maintaining a good relationship with these people increases the likelihood of them contacting you when they learn of new openings.

Internships: The best way to build contacts on the Hill is to work as an intern. This opportunity provides valuable insight into the nature of work in a Congressional office, and it allows you to demonstrate your abilities to those whose personal recommendation will be particularly useful. Not only will you establish your own contacts through an internship, but you can also capitalize on the networks of those for whom you work.

Campaign Work: With the frequency of congressional elections and your proximity to candidates in Washington, the opportunity to volunteer for a campaign is great. Opportunities exist with individual candidates as well as with political party campaign organizations such as the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee or the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, among others. Campaign work introduces you to a different side of life on Capitol Hill, and provides you with political experience for your resume.

Utilizing a combination of the resources and methods above will provide you with the best results. Being persistent and continually following up with your contacts and those with whom you have interviewed is an absolute necessity.

INTERVIEWING

Once you have done all of your research, applied for jobs and the interviews start, follow the tips below to maximize your experience and to show that you can represent that Member.

- Research the Member and his/her congressional district prior to the interview. Find information such as stances on issues, committee assignments, the size of the district, and number of district offices.
- Dress professionally, even if the interview is for an internship! Your first impression is important, and the interviewer is looking to see how well you can represent the office to other staff, constituents and lobbyists.
- Stress experiences that demonstrate the following skills: leadership, initiative, communication (oral and written), the ability to work under pressure, computer proficiency, and the ability to handle multiple tasks simultaneously.
- Ask questions. This shows initiative and allows you to find out additional information about the office. Items may include work environment, specific responsibilities, and Member's issues.

Finally, a prompt thank-you note should **always** follow an interview, preferably mailed the same day of your meeting while your name and face are still fresh in the interviewer's mind. Sending the note reaffirms your interest in the position, reinforces how your skills and qualifications match the office's needs, and allows you to mention any information that was not discussed during the interview that might be of interest to the employer.

RESOURCES FOR HILL EMPLOYMENT

House of Representatives Human Resources Office

263 Cannon House Office Building
Independence and South Capitol Streets, SE
Washington, DC 20515
Resume Referral Service -- (202) 226-6731
Job Line -- (202) 225-2450
<http://www.house.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

Roll Call

909 2nd St., NE
Washington, DC
(202) 289-4900
<http://www.rollcall.com>

Senate Placement Office

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

House Action Reports

c/o Kinko's on Capitol Hill
317 Pennsylvania Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20007
(202) 547-0421
· Listings available each Tuesday; mostly House positions; if interning, your office may also receive these

Opportunities in Public Affairs

P.O. Box 34949
Bethesda, MD 20827
(301) 571-0102

Democratic National Committee

430 South Capitol St., SE
Washington, DC 20003
(202) 963-8000

Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee

430 South Capitol St., SE
Washington, DC 20003
(202) 224-2447

Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee

430 South Capitol St., SE
Washington, DC 20003
(202) 863-1500

Republican National Committee

310 1st St., SE
Washington, DC 20003
(202) 863-8500

National Republican Senatorial Committee

425 2nd St., NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 675-6000

National Republican Congressional Committee

320 1st St., SE
Washington, DC 20003
(202) 479-7000

The following offices maintain job listings for other legislative branch offices:

The Library of Congress

Room 107 Madison Building
Washington, DC 20540
(202) 707-5627
Job Line (202) 707-4315
<http://www.loc.gov>

General Accounting Office

441 G St., NW, Room 1193
Washington, DC 20548
(202) 512-4500
Job Line (800) WORKGAO

Congressional Research Service

Administrative Services
Room 208 Madison Building
Washington, DC 20540-7110
(202) 707-8803
Job Line (202) 707-4315
<http://www.loc.gov>

Government Printing Office

732 North Capitol St., NW
Room #C 106
Washington, DC 20401
(202) 512-1198

CAREER SERVICES OFFICE RESOURCES:

- **Resume and cover letter assistance**--have these reviewed by a staff member
- **Alumni Career Network**--check this for Alumni to contact for information and advice on your job search
- **Washington Information Directory**--includes complete information on Members of Congress including committee assignments and key staff; also contains information on political party organizations
- **Internship listings**--check the Congressional binder
- **Mock interviews**--practice interviewing with a staff member
- **Student User Area**--computers available to use for on-line research about the Hill