

# Working in politics

If you elect to pursue a career in politics, you'll need to learn more about your options. Here's a good place to start.

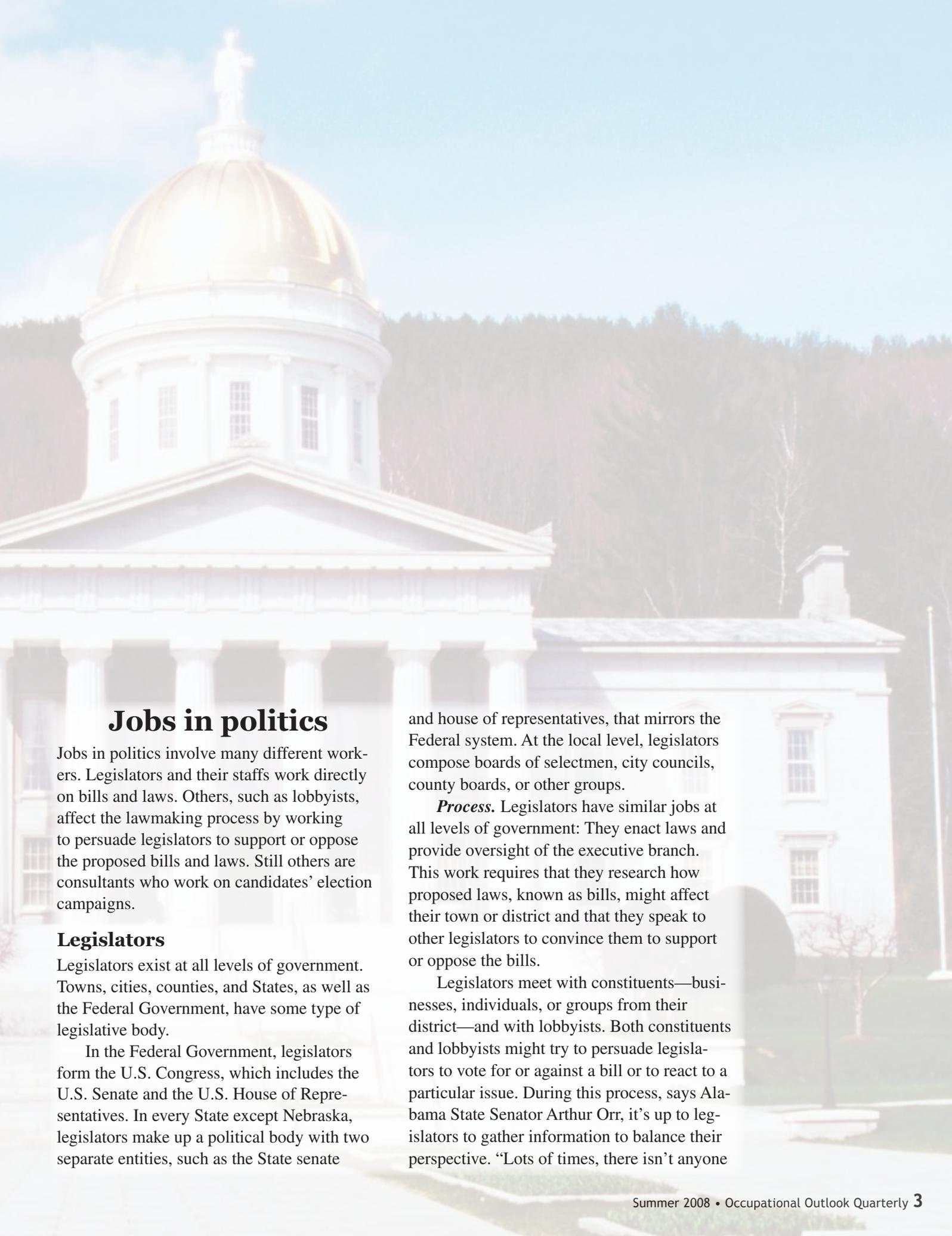
by  
Colleen D.  
Teixeira

**M**any children dream of being President of the United States, drawn to the idea of leading the country. However, the President is only one of many workers who help shape our Nation through politics.

Jobs in politics exist at all levels of government: local, State, and Federal. Although the President is our most prominent official, many others—some elected, some not—help to create policy. In addition to legislators and their assistants, some workers lobby public officials and others help to elect candidates.

Read on to learn about jobs in politics. You'll find out about the work of legislators, staffs of legislators, lobbyists, and consultants. There's also information about earnings, followed by descriptions of the ups and downs of working in politics. After reading some suggestions for getting into politics, you'll find additional information about these careers.

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## Jobs in politics

Jobs in politics involve many different workers. Legislators and their staffs work directly on bills and laws. Others, such as lobbyists, affect the lawmaking process by working to persuade legislators to support or oppose the proposed bills and laws. Still others are consultants who work on candidates' election campaigns.

### Legislators

Legislators exist at all levels of government. Towns, cities, counties, and States, as well as the Federal Government, have some type of legislative body.

In the Federal Government, legislators form the U.S. Congress, which includes the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives. In every State except Nebraska, legislators make up a political body with two separate entities, such as the State senate

and house of representatives, that mirrors the Federal system. At the local level, legislators compose boards of selectmen, city councils, county boards, or other groups.

**Process.** Legislators have similar jobs at all levels of government: They enact laws and provide oversight of the executive branch. This work requires that they research how proposed laws, known as bills, might affect their town or district and that they speak to other legislators to convince them to support or oppose the bills.

Legislators meet with constituents—businesses, individuals, or groups from their district—and with lobbyists. Both constituents and lobbyists might try to persuade legislators to vote for or against a bill or to react to a particular issue. During this process, says Alabama State Senator Arthur Orr, it's up to legislators to gather information to balance their perspective. "Lots of times, there isn't anyone

making alternative arguments about a bill's merits or shortcomings," he says. "Those situations require that legislators educate themselves about the opposition arguments so they can make educated decisions."

In larger cities and at the Federal and State levels, a bill starts in a committee made up of legislators. During committee meetings and hearings, legislators may make remarks or ask questions of the bill's advocates and opponents. They may also propose amendments to the bill.

**Issues.** The way that bills are passed is similar at every level of government, but the issues vary. At the Federal level, Congress may work on both international and domestic matters. At the State level, legislators might deal with bills related to providing money for schools, roads, and public services; they also might try to pass bills to attract businesses and industries to the State. At the local level, aldermen and city councilors work on issues such as traffic-light placement and noise ordinances.

Although legislative issues vary by government level, some—such as education, public health, or transportation—overlap. For example, Congress may allocate education

funds for colleges and universities. State legislators may require statewide education exams or might distribute funding among school districts. At the local level, officials might determine teacher salaries and the specific curriculum taught in the district.

**Other tasks.** Legislators are responsible to their constituents. In some cases, this responsibility includes helping constituents to resolve problems or to locate the government resources, such as social services, that can assist them. Legislators also need to communicate with their constituents about how these parties might be affected by the bills being discussed and the laws being passed, and they must respond to constituents' letters, e-mails, and phone calls.

Responding directly to constituents may be most prominent at the local level. For example, Greg Gerratana is an alderman for the city government of New Britain, Connecticut. While much of his legislative work relates to budget issues, even that work focuses on constituents. "We deal with constituents' everyday problems, and sometimes we even create new ordinances to deal with those problems," he says. "It's not about lofty ideas, but practical solutions."

## Staffs of legislators

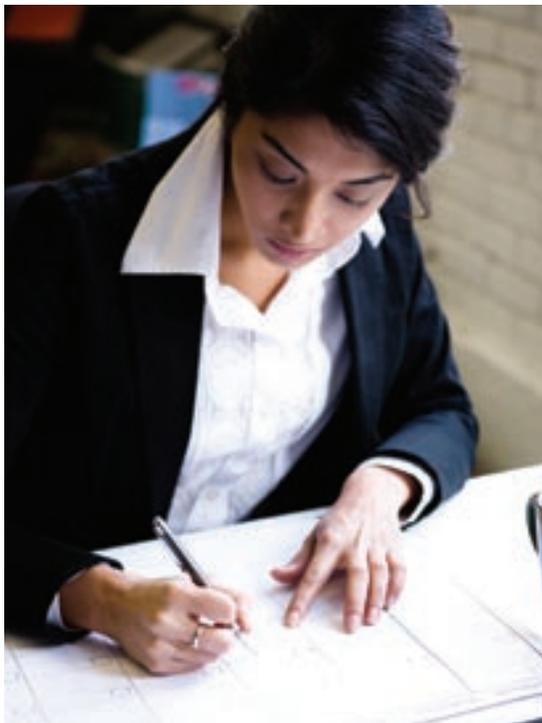
Because legislators have many different commitments, they often need assistants to help them fulfill their duties. Staff workers provide this help to legislators, particularly those in Congress. A legislator's staff generally works in a few different areas: legislation, communications, and administration. (For a brief description of some legislative staff titles, see the sidebar on the opposite page.)

**Legislation.** Staff members who assist on legislative issues research bills that are proposed or that the legislator for whom they work is interested in proposing. They write questions for the legislator to ask during committee hearings, sometimes write opening remarks for hearings, and might suggest amendments to bills for the legislator to propose. They might also draft entire bills. The legislative staff tracks the progress of

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Staff members assist legislators with a variety of tasks, such as coordinating appearances at events.

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## Other occupational titles commonly held by staff workers in politics

Each legislator in Washington, DC, organizes his or her office. Following is a list of titles commonly found in offices on Capitol Hill. Not all of these titles are found in all offices, and some offices may have alternative titles.

**Caseworkers** respond to constituents' requests and may also assist constituents in resolving problems related to Federal agencies, including problems with Social Security, Medicare, veterans' benefits, or passports.

**Chiefs of staff** are usually responsible for the overall office administration and the allocation of work among staff. They report directly to the legislator.

**Legislative assistants** are usually assigned to a particular area of legislation, such as healthcare, taxes, or foreign policy. These workers are responsible for following bills as they make their way through the legislative process and for researching the possible effects of a bill. They also may write questions or opening statements for the legislator to use in committee hearings, and they may brief senior staff about bills pending in Congress.

**Legislative correspondents** focus on relaying information to constituents. They may respond to constituents' questions and concerns regarding legislation or national policy, either over the telephone or in writing. Sometimes, forming an accurate and thoughtful response may require doing research; other times, a form letter may cover routine questions.

**Legislative directors** usually monitor the legislative schedule and brief the legislator on bills and issues before Congress. They also oversee legislative assistants.

**Press secretaries** communicate the legislator's message to constituents and the general public, often by writing press releases and speaking to the media.

**Receptionists**, also called front-desk staffers, greet visitors and guests who come to the legislator's office and direct them to the appropriate staff member. They often answer the telephone, take messages, and route calls, messages, and mail to the rest of the staff. In some cases, they may be responsible for coordinating tours of the Capitol for constituents.

**Schedulers** are responsible for distributing the legislator's time among the many meetings and events he or she is asked to attend. They also must include time for the legislator to speak with staff and prepare for upcoming meetings, debates, and hearings. In addition, schedulers may make travel arrangements.

**Staff assistants** may be asked to perform a range of tasks to support other staff members. Tasks may include word processing, photocopying, answering telephones, and running errands. Staff assistants might have duties associated with legislation or the media.

bills throughout the enactment process and keeps the legislator informed.

Often, legislative staff members specialize in a particular issue or topic, sometimes working on committees that focus entirely on that issue. Specialization allows them to become more familiar with the intricacies and nuances of the topic. As they gain experience, staff members generally have more say about which issues they will cover.

**Communications.** Those who work in communications help their legislator get out messages to constituents. Doing so requires assisting the legislator in developing the message. Communications staff members also set up interviews with the media and draft press releases or newsletters that highlight the legislator's accomplishments and bills that have passed. As a result, they need to pay attention to all issues that the legislator works on.

A legislator's perceived effectiveness can hinge, in part, on constituents recognizing his or her efforts—especially the accomplishments. The communications staff works to report such news, but the complexity of legislation can make the job difficult. "It's challenging to find ways to communicate about complicated legislative procedures in ways that people can understand and that keep them engaged," says Will Jenkins, communications director for U.S. Representative Tim Bishop of New York.

**Administration.** Members of legislators' administrative staffs work on a variety of tasks. Some of them answer telephone calls, welcome visitors, and take messages. Others draft responses to constituents' letters and e-mails or assist constituents in resolving problems related to government agencies. Still others may be responsible for coordinating their legislator's schedule, which often includes ensuring attendance at meetings and arranging travel for visits to the home State or for other business-related purposes.

No matter what their primary job, though, most legislative staff members do a little of everything. For example, the day-to-day tasks of Brian Clifford, a legislative staffer for U.S. Senator John Barrasso of Wyoming and president of the Congressional Legislative Staff Association, include reviewing response letters to constituents, tracking bills on the floor, preparing amendments, and providing information to his boss before a vote. He also must prepare for hearings and for meetings with lobbyists

and constituents. In addition, as a staff director for a subcommittee his boss leads, Clifford researches issues that may appear before the subcommittee.

## **Lobbyists**

Lobbyists present the interests of businesses or groups of people to legislators. These workers may have different titles, such as government affairs coordinators. Organizations of all types—from large corporations to small civic groups—depend on lobbyists to promote their agenda. Speaking to legislators and their staffs, lobbyists explain to their clients what the effects of a particular bill or law would be.

Lobbying requires solid research and communicating the results of that research to influence legislators' support of or opposition to pending legislation. The type of organization, or client, lobbyists work for often affects the specific tasks that they do. Many of the job duties are similar in every setting, however.

**Research.** To be effective, lobbyists need to stay current on the issues coming before the legislature. They also must pay attention to news and current events by watching television and other media and by reading newspapers, Internet Web logs ("blogs"), and trade journals.

Lobbyist Adam Schwartz reads several publications daily, but his research includes personal contact, too. He needs to find out about events before they are in the news, he says, so he often meets with Members of Congress when he gathers facts. "I call these meetings 'pollination visits,' because I pick up information from one office and bring it to another," says Schwartz.

Lobbyists must be aware of which bills are appearing before committees and, in some cases, may have to attend committee meetings and hearings. In addition, they need to research how proposed legislation, if passed, would affect the company, organization, or group that they represent.

**Communication.** Much of lobbyists' work requires that they be persistent and persuasive when communicating with others. For example, lobbyists often must contact legislators

and their staffs via e-mail or telephone and convincingly present research for or against a bill. Some lobbyists set up meetings for their clients with legislators and their staffs, in which case they might first write background papers to prepare the clients for these meetings.

Building rapport through frequent communication is essential for lobbyists to gain credibility, which in turn helps them to influence legislators' decisions. As lobbyist Dave Wenhold puts it, "Lobbying is about developing relationships."

**Clients.** Lobbyists work to influence lawmakers at all levels of government, but many concentrate on the U.S. Congress. At every level, lobbyists' jobs have both similarities and differences. "The issues and topics change, but the basic tasks stay the same," says lobbyist Paul Miller. "You still need to get constituent input and do public relations."

Some lobbyists work for corporations and businesses, advocating for their employer. They must be well informed about their business' specific needs, products, and practices. These lobbyists might need to work with others in the business to discuss how proposed legislation or regulations would affect it.

Lobbyists also work in law firms or lobbying firms that handle government affairs. They may have a variety of clients, ranging from private businesses and nonprofit organizations to local and State governments. These lobbyists need to familiarize themselves with each client's needs and the legislation that affects it. As a result, lobbyists in this setting often need to learn about a broad range of issues.

Agencies within the executive branch often have staff members who are called congressional liaison specialists. These workers follow legislation, advocate specific bills, and understand how their agency works, as well as how a bill, if passed, could affect their agency's day-to-day operations. In addition, when Congress allocates the Federal Government's annual budget, these specialists might lobby Members of Congress to provide their agency with as much funding as possible.



Finally, some lobbyists work for trade associations, advocating on behalf of the industry or occupation that their association represents. They study issues relevant to the association's occupation or industry and analyze how legislation affects it so that they can lobby legislators on behalf of the association.

### **Political consultants**

Political consultants work on the election campaigns of candidates who run for public office at all levels of government. Usually, political consultants specialize in a variety of areas, with two of the most significant being media relations and fundraising.

Job tasks vary for political consultants, and not just by specialty. "I do a lot of dif-

ferent things," says political consultant Mary Erin Casale, "all depending on when you ask."

**Media relations.** Consultants who specialize in media relations help candidates develop a strategy to deal with the press. As political consultant Peter Robbio describes it, "My job is to help [candidates] get into the media in a positive way."

A media consultant assists candidates in developing their message to the public. During a campaign, for example, candidates must convince voters to choose them over their opponents; media consultants help candidates to explain why they are the best choice and to present that message through the media.

Media consultants organize press conferences, write and distribute press releases, plan campaign events, and write editorials for

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Lobbyists meet with legislators and their staffs to build strong working relationships.

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newspapers. Some consultants are responsible for advertisements, including buying time on radio and television stations or space in print publications and on Web sites. When purchasing ads, media consultants must determine how to stay within the campaign's budget while getting the most benefit from the ad. This analysis requires that consultants set priorities in targeting specific areas of a candidate's town, district, or State to maximize the ad's effectiveness.

Some media consultants also monitor opponents' ads and assist candidates in responding to them. In addition, they might coach candidates in media interaction and public appearances, including preparing for debates by holding practice sessions and writing answers to anticipated questions. Consultants also help candidates respond to negative publicity.

**Fundraising.** Political consultants who work in fundraising help candidates raise the money necessary to run for office. Campaigning can cost hundreds of thousands—or millions—of dollars, even at the local level. Because candidates rely largely on donations to fund their campaigns, they must contact people who are likely to donate money. This task often falls to political consultants who are experienced at raising money.

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Personal contacts are important in politics, so most of these workers are "people persons."

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Consultants directly contact individuals, such as those who have given money in the past, and ask them for a donation. They might assist candidates in contacting donors directly by setting up phone calls and meetings. They may also ask some of these people to provide names of others who may be interested in donating or in hosting a fundraising event. "It's all about names and the number of people you can reach," says Susan Brodsky Burnett, a former political consultant. "You get more names from each person you talk to."

Additionally, these consultants plan fundraising events, such as dinners or receptions. Most fundraising events require the purchase of a ticket, with the profits helping to fund the candidate's campaign. Consultants follow up with attendees of events, as well as with those who have pledged donations, to ensure that the campaign contribution is made.

**Other.** Political consultants work in many other areas of a campaign, including polling and opposition research.

Some consultants who specialize in polling might telephone or visit people to ask questions about the candidates. Others may wait for responses to those questions; then, they analyze the data and brief the candidate and his or her campaign staff about the results.

Consultants who work in opposition research spend long hours studying their candidate's opponents. They look through public records for information that differentiates their candidate from his or her opponents, including details that may be detrimental to an opponent's campaign. The consultant might report findings from this research to develop political strategies, such as incorporating facts about opponents into political ads.

## Earnings

Because of the way the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) classifies occupations, many people working in politics are categorized by job function rather than by where they work or by job title. For entry-level workers especially, pay for political jobs was often below

the national median of \$31,410 in May 2007. Anecdotal information suggests, however, that earnings may be higher for many of these workers—such as those with many years of experience—than BLS data indicate.

In May 2007, for example, legislators had median annual wages of \$16,220—meaning that half of all legislators made more than this amount, and half made less. Ten percent of legislators earned less than \$13,090, and 10 percent earned more than \$76,260. However, these data include wages for those who work part time, such as elected officials in local government. Salaries for Members of Congress were set by Congress at \$169,300 in 2008, according to the *Federal Register*.

Reliable wage information for other workers in politics is even less clear. As mentioned previously, staffs of legislators include a number of different occupations. Generally, those who perform administrative tasks earned lower wages than those who worked in communications and legislation.

Lobbyists and political consultants had widely ranging salaries. Those with the highest earnings usually bring many years of experience to the job.

## Ups and downs of political work

Like most jobs in any field, working in politics has its ups and downs. Political jobs commonly require long workdays and frequent travel; the uncertainty of election results creates additional stress.

On the other hand, working in politics also offers rewards. “There is a lot of interesting work to be done,” says lobbyist Penny Farthing. “Our process provides a lot of opportunities for groups to be heard, and advocacy helps us hammer out the best policy.”

### Advantages

Many people enter these jobs and turn them into careers because they are fascinated with politics. They are attracted to the interesting work, excitement, and opportunities for making a difference.

**Interesting.** Laws affect our everyday lives in countless ways. Enacting and maintaining those laws is the crux of working in politics, and the diversity of topics contributes to the uniqueness of these careers. “There’s a wide range of issues,” says Farthing, “which makes working in politics very different than working for a company.”

Because of the importance of personal contacts in politics, most of these workers are “people persons.” Working with interesting people need not be limited to outside contacts, either. Political consultant Robbio has worked on two presidential campaigns, where he enjoyed being part of the candidates’ teams in seeking to win the White House. “We all came together from different walks of life,” he says, “to do something most people haven’t done before.”

**Exciting.** Everyday work in politics can present new challenges and different focuses that are based, in part, on the variety of job tasks. Working on a campaign or researching legislation can be invigorating, and many people in politics enjoy the fast-paced environment that defines lawmaking. As political consultant Cathy Allen says, “It is fun. It’s exciting. There is never a dull moment.”

Not only can every day be exciting, but it is often varied as well. One day might include attendance at hearings and high-level meetings, followed by brainstorming sessions and library research. Another day might require making telephone calls, visiting legislators or their staffs, and responding to inquiries. “It’s never boring,” says Farthing. Lobbyist Gina Bancroft agrees: “Very seldom is one day the same as the day before.”

**Rewarding.** Many who work in politics say that their jobs are both professionally and personally satisfying. For some, it’s the opportunity to ensure that the government responds to those it is intended to serve. “I really enjoy being able to help the local people with their particular needs,” says Alabama State Senator Orr.

Others get satisfaction from working to maintain or improve their town, State, or country. The chance to make a difference is

its own reward. “I like that I get to play a part in the process of engaging all the important issues facing America today,” says communications director Jenkins. “I like being able to help the country grow the way it needs to.”

## **Disadvantages**

As gratifying as work in politics may be, it is also demanding. Long hours, frequent travel, and the uncertainty of the election cycle all contribute to the stressfulness of these careers.

**Long hours.** Many political jobs extend beyond the standard 40-hour workweek. Hearings, meetings, and events, such as fundraising dinners, are often scheduled outside of normal working hours—including evenings that can turn into late nights. In addition, the preparation needed to attend a function may require working overtime. Legislation nearing a vote may result in a flurry of activity, requiring more work hours than usual. Work on the campaign trail may be continuous and exhausting.

However, these long hours may not be steady. Many legislatures are in recess for parts of the year. Legislators, their staffs, and lobbyists may be able to work shorter hours during these times. Outside of the election season, some political consultants choose to spend their downtime working in other positions, such as media relations and lobbying.

At the State and local levels, many legislators serve part time in these positions and work full time in an unrelated job. Because they may have little or no support staff, these legislators must research, write, answer the telephone, respond to constituents, and perform other legislative tasks themselves. Fulfilling all of these duties may require that they forfeit evenings and weekends to political work.

**Frequent travel.** Some jobs in politics require lots of travel around the district, State, or country. What may seem like a glamorous job perk at first, such as the constant mobility required during a State or national campaign, can quickly become burdensome.

Legislators may need to travel between their home district and the capital (State

legislators) or Washington, DC (Members of Congress), to keep in touch with their constituents. They might also have to travel for political appearances, meetings, or conventions, such as when Members of Congress go overseas to visit troops or to meet with foreign dignitaries. Some staff members may need to accompany legislators on these trips.

Lobbyists must travel to other parts of the city, State, or country to meet with legislators or legislators’ staffs. They might also need to travel for meetings with clients or with people who may be affected by a specific policy or piece of legislation.

Political consultants may need to travel frequently, depending on the type of election they are working on. In presidential elections, consultants might have to travel across the country for many months, often without having a chance to return home. At the State and local levels, consultants may need to travel across the city, district, or State; however, they may have an opportunity to go home at the end of the day or on weekends.

**Election uncertainty.** In one way or another, nearly all workers in politics are affected by the uncertainty that comes with the election cycle. After all, life as a politician, or in association with one, is dependent on the politician’s being elected to public office.

To continue in their position, eligible legislators—those not restricted by term limits from serving additional years—must run for reelection at the end of their term. This may require that they spend time campaigning, making it more difficult for them to perform their legislative duties. In addition to having physical demands, campaigning can become more difficult if the tone is negative. Furthermore, because of the uncertainty that they will be reelected, legislators’ positions are somewhat unstable.

Legislators’ staffs are affected by elections in similar ways. Staff members whose boss is not reelected may need to find other jobs. However, legislators and their staffs also are affected by the elections of other legislators. For example, legislators and their staffs may have difficulty getting their bills passed if



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Jobs with State and local legislatures are available throughout the country.

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other legislators in their political party are not elected. This is because a party that is in the minority has less political power.

Lobbyists may need to adjust their approach if legislators with whom they have developed a relationship are not reelected. Likewise, political consultants' viability may rest on whether their efforts resulted in a client's successful election.

## Getting into politics

Jobs in politics vary by function. In general, however, they require a similar educational background and experience. There are specific skills, education, and experience that employers look for when hiring. Networking with people currently working in politics is also important.

The one exception is legislators. Because legislators are elected, not hired, their job entry requirements are different from those of others who work in politics.

## Skills

Many of the skills that are important for working in politics are similar for all of these occupations. Interpersonal skills are essential, because most positions require interacting with a variety of people. Some workers suggest that taking an introductory course in psychology may be helpful for understanding people.

Because success in these jobs often hinges on being able to persuade others—whether to take a particular viewpoint or to vote for a particular candidate—communication skills, both written and oral, are also important. Persuasive communication skills require the ability to convey complicated legislative procedures to people who know little about the process. Strong writing skills are critical, especially for jobs that involve drafting position papers, bills, speeches, or press releases.

In addition, anyone interested in getting a job in politics must understand how the political process works. The legislative and political processes can be complicated, so

applicants who have a solid grasp of how things work are preferred.

## Education

Most occupations in politics require at least a bachelor's degree for an entry-level position. In undergraduate programs, many students interested in these careers study political science, government, or communications.

Getting additional education may help boost your credentials, but some workers say that actions speak louder than degrees. "It's really what you do with your education that matters," says lobbyist Wenhold. "Education is great, but it's really the implementation of the learned skills that counts."

For some occupations, however, an advanced degree is necessary. Those interested in working on legislators' staffs on specific issues may need at least a master's degree in political science or public policy. Generally, those who work in polling must have a master's or doctoral degree in statistics or survey methodology. Lobbyists commonly

have a law degree, but that is not the only path of entry into the occupation.

## Experience

For entry-level work in politics, many employers seek applicants who have some experience. One of the best ways to get this experience is through volunteer work or internships. (The Congressional Page Program, designed for high school students, is described in the box below.)

Not all volunteers and interns find paid positions in legislators' offices or on campaigns. However, the experience of working in a political setting is also useful for entering other occupations, such as legislator or lobbyist

**Volunteering.** Because campaigns are expensive and resources are often tight, candidates rely on volunteers to do a variety of tasks. These tasks include answering telephones; canvassing, or soliciting votes; stuffing envelopes; and performing other administrative duties. The size of the campaign

## Congressional Page Program

Both the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives have programs for high school students to get experience on Capitol Hill by serving as pages. Pages work as couriers for Members of Congress, carrying messages and documents to offices, committees, and the Library of Congress. In addition, they distribute the *Congressional Record* and assist in cloakrooms.

Pages may serve either for one semester during the academic year or in the summer. They live in residence halls in Washington, DC; during the academic year, pages attend classes, which are generally held in the morning before Congress is in session.

Pages are appointed by Members of Congress and must be in their junior year of high school. There are 72 positions in the House and 30 in the Senate, so the selection process is highly competitive.

Students interested in learning more about the program and how to apply should contact their Senator or Representative in Congress.



doesn't matter as much as the opportunity for gaining experience. In fact, working on a small campaign, in which activities are more concentrated, might offer better learning opportunities than working on a large campaign.

Volunteering for a political campaign gives people a chance to learn about how campaigns work. It also allows them to make a name for themselves. Those who work hard and take on additional tasks may be able to translate their volunteer experience into a paid position on a campaign or on the legislator's staff.

**Internships.** Legislatures at the Federal and State levels, as well as some lobbying and political consulting firms, provide students with a chance to gain experience through internships. These internships are frequently unpaid, but invaluable, opportunities to get a hands-on understanding of politics and to interact with legislators, their staffs, and others involved in the political process.

The experience gained in these positions is often necessary for finding paid jobs in Washington, DC, or in State capitals. Interns usually have a variety of duties that give them a chance to learn about the legislative process and about legislative offices. Interns who prove themselves might get paid positions.

Most students think of internships as a summer option, but positions exist year round. Legislative staffers suggest that college students interested in finding an internship with the U.S. Congress consider studying for a semester in Washington, DC, during a time when vying for a job on Capitol Hill is less competitive. Likewise, students might consider spending a semester in a State capital to intern with the State legislature.

## Networking

Networking is an important way to meet people who currently work in politics. It can help applicants find openings that may not be advertised. Also, knowing people who are influential can be an advantage in the application process.

Volunteering with a campaign and working as an intern are just two ways to network. Helping with a local political party and volunteering for a politically active organization are other good ways to learn about jobs in politics and to meet people in political careers. Networking is important both for starting out and for building steppingstones to a career in politics.

Influential people exist at all levels. For many jobs in politics, especially when someone wants to break in at the local level, networking within the community can be the best credential. "It's not as important where you go to undergraduate and graduate school," says legislative staffer Clifford. "Local connections count for more."

## Legislators

Becoming a legislator is different from entering other occupations in politics. There are no formal education or experience requirements for becoming a legislator, although legal conditions vary by office and may include minimum age or residency requirements. The only prerequisite for entering this occupation is to be elected by the voters in a town, city, district, or State.

However, candidates should have some personal or professional experience that is related to the office they are seeking. For example, someone interested in running for the city hospital board might have spent time working in a hospital. Similarly, a candidate interested in running for State senate might have previous experience as a State representative.

Running for office is often an arduous process. Political campaigns can be expensive, which means that candidates must be comfortable asking people for money to fund their

campaign. Getting experience in fundraising is helpful for campaign work.

Also, some politics become personal when opponents run negative campaigns and attack a candidate's private and professional life. Candidates must be prepared for criticism—and be able to work in spite of it.

## For more information

To pursue a job in politics, you should contact local elected officials to learn about opportunities available in your area. Contact information is in the blue pages of your telephone book, and most governments also provide the detail on their Web sites.

Other good sources of information include public libraries and offices of career counselors. To find a counseling office near you, contact the U.S. Department of Labor toll free, 1 (877) 872-5627, or go online to find a One-Stop Career Center at [www.servicelocator.org](http://www.servicelocator.org).

Another useful resource is the 2008-09 *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, available in print at most local libraries, or online at [www.bls.gov/oco](http://www.bls.gov/oco). Job duties, working conditions, earnings, and employment projections for many of the occupations described in this article are in the *Handbook*.

Several associations, including the following, also provide information related to careers in politics:

American League of Lobbyists  
P.O. Box 30005  
Alexandria, VA 22310  
(703) 960-3011  
[www.alldc.org](http://www.alldc.org)

American Association of  
Political Consultants  
600 Pennsylvania Ave, SE Suite 330  
Washington, DC 20003  
(202) 544-9815  
[www.theaapc.org](http://www.theaapc.org)

The National Conference of State Legislatures maintains a list of contacts for legislative internship and fellowship programs in all 50 States and many U.S. territories. For the list and more information, including application suggestions, contact:

National Conference of State Legislatures  
444 N. Capitol St. NW., Suite 515  
Washington, DC 20001  
(202) 624-5400  
[www.ncsl.org/public/LegInternProg.htm#programs](http://www.ncsl.org/public/LegInternProg.htm#programs) ∞∞

