

CRS Report for Congress

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Congressional Staff: Duties and Functions

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The tasks of a Member's personal staff include developing legislation, managing the office, press relations, answering mail, casework, scheduling appearances and appointments, and other duties. Congressional committee staff assist Members with committee hearings, markups, reports, and assist Members when necessary on the floor and in conference committees. This fact sheet is one of a series of fact sheets on legislative process; see [<http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml>].

Member Personal Staff

Members of Congress control the hiring of personal staff as well as the assignment of tasks in their offices. While the staff of a Member's office in the House of Representatives may not exceed 18 full-time employees and four part-time employees, the average number of staff in an office is 15 (*2002 House Staff Employment* survey by the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF)). A Senator has no limit on the number of employees that can be hired, as long as the Senator stays within the combined allowances available for staff and office expenses. A CMF 2001 *Senate Staff Employment* survey found that the average number of employees in a Senate office is 35. Senate staff size varies according to the population of a state. Senators from states with fewer than two million people average 33 employees, while Senators from states with over 10 million people average 44 employees. Approximately one-third of personal staff work in district or state offices, according to CMF. Although congressional offices vary in how staff positions are structured, a staffer performs one or more of six common activities:

- **Legislative staff** conduct research and analysis on policy issues and assist in devising and carrying out strategies for accomplishing the legislative goals of the Member. Positions include legislative director, legislative assistant, legislative correspondent, and legislative secretary.
- **Administrative (and some legislative)** staff are responsible for processing and responding to mail. Position titles are office systems manager, legislative correspondent, computer operator, and mail clerk.
- **Office management staff** deal with staff recruitment, pay, coordination between district and state offices and a Member's Washington, DC,

office, the assignment and flow of work through the office, and the use of space and equipment. These responsibilities are performed by the administrative assistant or chief of staff, district or state representative, executive assistant, or office manager. (CRS Report RL30807, *Congressional Member Office Operations*.)

- **Press and public relations staff** inform constituents and representatives of the mass media on legislative issues and a Member's activities. This duty is performed by a communications director or press secretary.
- **Projects and casework staff** assist local governments, public or private organizations, and individuals in their transactions with federal agencies. Members put a premium on service as part of their representational role as facilitator and intervener between constituents and the national government. Typical position titles are caseworker, or federal grants coordinator or project director. (CRS Report 98-878, *Casework in a Congressional Office*.)
- **Scheduling and reception staff** manage competing demands for a Member's time and receive visitors to a Member's offices, both in Washington, DC, and in the home district or state. These tasks typically are handled by the appointments secretary and receptionist.

Committee Staff

Each congressional committee employs its own staff. The average number of committee staff is 68 employees in the House and 46 employees in the Senate. Committee budgets and work load affect the number of committee employees. Committee staff are hired to perform work in accordance with the rules of their respective chambers. (CRS Report RL30898, *Committee Funding Resolutions and Processes, 107th Congress*, and CRS Report RS20023, *Committee Funding and Staff in the Senate*.)

- **Professional staff** brief Members on policy issues within a committee's jurisdiction; plan agendas; review agency and committee budget documents; coordinate hearings and meetings; draft and analyze legislation and amendments; draft committee reports; prepare legislation for reporting to the House or Senate; and assist Members in committee meetings, on the floor, and in conference committee; and monitor the implementation of laws and the administration of programs. Professional staff also maintain liaison with their counterparts in the other chamber, executive branch officials, and interest groups sharing concern for the subject matter before the committee. Typical position titles held by professional staff include staff director, chief counsel, counsel, professional staff member, investigator, auditor, economist, and press assistant.
- **Administrative staff** schedule hearings, markups, and other meetings, set up hearings and meeting rooms, distribute documents, receive visitors, handle phone inquiries, and perform clerical duties. They also compile committee calendars and other documents, arrange for transcription of hearings, and maintain and archive committee records. These tasks are typically handled by the chief clerk, clerical assistant, secretary, hearings assistant, documents clerk, and file clerk.