SENATE EMPLOYMENT OFFICE

Guide to Networking

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About the U.S. Senate Employment Office

The Senate Employment Office assists senators and Senate committees with filling entry-level through professional staff vacancies. This office is nonpartisan and administered by the U.S. Senate Office of the Sergeant at Arms.

Each Senate office is an independent employer, responsible for candidate screening, interviewing and selection, as well as job requirements, compensation, and conditions of employment. Although many staff positions are focused on administrative, legislative, or communications functions, specific titles and responsibilities may vary by office. Visit the Senate Employment Office's website for a list of sample positions and descriptions.

Offices within the U.S. Senate are equal opportunity employers.

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Networking

Networking is an excellent way to learn about a new career or industry and is a critical component to working on the Hill. By meeting people and asking thoughtful questions at networking events or one-on-one in an informational interview, you can gain valuable insight and advice to help plan the next steps in your career.

The Senate Employment Office created this guide with tips for networking and a sample list of conversation starters. You may adapt the questions at the end of this document to align with your networking purpose.

Benefits of Networking

- Learn about a new job, organization, or industry.
- Expand and strengthen your professional circle with trusted colleagues and mentors to support and lean on.
- Stay up to date on the latest trends, technologies, policies, and best practices.
- Develop and refine essential personal and professional skills.
- Gain access to potential job opportunities.

Getting Started

It is important to invest in your network, even before you begin to actively search for a new job. At the Senate, once a job vacancy is advertised, many offices maintain a strict policy against unsolicited drop-ins, phone calls, emails, or faxes. Therefore, it's important to be proactive in your networking approach.

Find a common connection

Begin by networking with Senate offices or staff with a common connection.

- Contact Senate offices where you have strong state ties—this may be your state of origin/hometown, where you've studied/worked, or where you have familiarity through family, military postings, or seasonal residence. As a constituent, you may request an informational interview with a member of the Senator's staff.
- Use your college or university network to connect with alumni who currently or previously worked in positions or industries of interest.
- Connect over common interests or activities. Perhaps you work in the same policy area, joined the same club/fraternity/sorority, or happen to be from the same small town. Discovering personal or professional interests that you share in common is an excellent way to break the ice.

Use Social Media

You may utilize social media or other online networking tools to begin to build out your network. Connecting online is also an excellent way to supplement your in-person networking strategy. Even if you are not local to a job's location, you may request virtual informational interviews over the phone or though video conferencing. Virtual face-to-face interactions can aid in building rapport and more authentic relationships.

However, remember to be mindful of your online footprint. Some hiring managers will check candidates' social media accounts, so be sure to regularly check and clean up your public online presence if needed.

Etiquette for Informational Interviews

An informational interview is a meeting, typically conducted over a cup of coffee, virtual meeting, or by phone, where you can learn from the experience of someone who is already working in a particular position, field, or industry that you are interested in entering. Since the objective is to gather information, it should not be treated like a job interview. Instead, you should come prepared by conducting background research and driving the conversation with thoughtful questions.

- Informational interviews are approximately 30 minutes in length. Make sure to schedule appointments in advance and remain respectful of the interviewee's time by limiting the meeting to the agreed-upon timeframe.
- While the conversation should flow naturally, be prepared to direct the interview by asking open-ended questions. Follow up with thoughtful questions that encourage the interviewee to do most of the talking.
- Be prepared to share some information about yourself. Practice a short "elevator pitch" or introduction in the event that you are asked about your interests, education and work background, career plans, etc.
- Take time to research the organization or contact before your meeting. Advanced preparation will help you to direct the conversation, ask intelligent questions, and learn more in-depth about the person, the work environment, and the organization.
- Rather than asking for a job, let your contact know that you're interested in a certain role and would appreciate if they could let you know about potential opportunities and their office's recruitment process.
- Take notes on what you learned, what you'd like to know, and next steps you plan to take.
    - If you conduct the interview on-site, observe the atmosphere and maintain notes on the office environment, dress code, etc. This information may help you to prepare for future interviews.
- Send a thank you note within 1-2 days of meeting.

Requesting an Informational Interview

Once you have identified an individual to interview, contact them through email or LinkedIn messaging. Mention how you got his/her name, and state your objective, to seek information and advice, not ask for a job.

Example 1

Hello, my name is Alexandra Hill, and I am a constituent from Hawaii. I will be graduating with my Bachelor's in Political Science this May, and would love to meet with a member of your staff to learn about potential entry-level opportunities in Senator Adams' Washington, DC office. You may reach me at 808-123-4567 or candidate@email.senate.com. I look forward to hearing from you.

Example 2

Hello, I hope you are well. My name is Caroline Hill, and I am a fellow National University alum. I am currently a House Staff Assistant looking to move into a legislative role. If you'd be open to it, I'd love to meet for coffee to learn more about your experience as a Senate Research Assistant. Please let me know when might be a good time to connect.

Example 3

My name is Benjamin Hill, and my friend, Gerald Etanes, passed along your contact information in hopes that we could connect.

Gerald mentioned that you have extensive experience working on Capitol Hill and that you'd be a great resource to add to my network as I look to learn more about this field as a future career. I'd love to connect with you to learn about your background and experience working at the Senate. I'd like to set up some time to chat over the phone.

Thank You Notes

Be sure to follow-up by sending a thank you note to your contact within 1-2 days of meeting. You may choose to send a handwritten or emailed note. However, take time to edit your message carefully. This is professional correspondence, so it's important to ensure that there are no spelling or grammar mistakes.

In your note, keep future lines of communication open by indicating your wish to remain in contact. You might ask to add your contact on LinkedIn or other networking sites, reach out to provide periodic updates, congratulate contacts on

their accomplishments, or perhaps share an interesting article or other relevant information as a follow-up to something that was discussed in your meeting.

Example 1

Hello, thank you so much for meeting with me yesterday. I enjoyed learning about your experience as a Senate Research Assistant and connecting over our shared interest in tennis. Your insight on navigating the hiring process will be especially helpful as I begin to apply for legislative positions after graduation. I greatly appreciate your time, and if it's alright, would like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn.

Example 2

I hope you are well and having a great week. It was so nice meeting you at yesterday's Staff Association networking event. Since we are both passionate about early childhood education, I thought I would send you this article from Education Quarterly as a follow-up to our conversation about child nutrition programs. Again, I really enjoyed meeting you and hope to catch up at the next Staff Association event.

Next Steps

Devoting time to strengthen your network as a Senate staffer will continue to be instrumental. You may have already noticed that your connections have assisted with building support for your boss' legislation, led to bipartisan collaboration on amendments, or helped you to progress personally. As you advance in your career, both on and off of the Hill, continue to look for opportunities to extend and strengthen your professional network.

Look for networking events that are specific to your industry or areas of interest. Consider attending conferences or events hosted by affinity groups such as congressional staff associations, trade organizations, or other professional associations.

You might also think about ways that you can "pay it forward" by helping individuals in your network. You could share a recent article that is relevant to a topic discussed during an informational coffee, or find volunteer opportunities in your community. If the latter, try to find skills-based volunteer opportunities where you can leverage your professional skills and connect with other volunteers. By helping others, you'll be known as a team player, and individuals in your network will want to help you in return.

Conclusion

Networking is critical to one's professional development and should continue even after securing a job. By continuing to network, you can expand your professional circle and establish new relationships with individuals who can offer insight, mentorship, and who may spark new ideas or opportunities. Regularly networking can also help you to develop and refine essential soft skills, such as communication, relationship-building and self-presentation, which are valuable in any professional setting. Ultimately, networking should be an ongoing activity, practiced throughout your professional career.

Conversation Starters

Questions to Break the Ice at Events

- I'd like to introduce myself. I'm [name] from [organization].
- I see we have some mutual connections. Let me introduce myself.
- It's nice to meet you. How is your day/night going?
- Don't I know you from …?
- We've worked alongside each other for a while, but our paths have never crossed.
- You've found the coffee, my type of person!
- Compliment someone. E.g. That's a great tie. Where did you get it from?
- What brought you here today?
- How did you hear about this event?
- What are you enjoying most about this event so far?
- The speaker was great today. What did you all think?
- I see you work at [name of office]. How is work going?
- What do you do? How long have you been in your current role?
- What do you love most about your line of work?
- I'm looking to get into a field similar to yours. Any advice for working here?
- How did you get into this industry?
- Have you worked on any exciting projects lately?
- What's the most interesting thing about your organization?
- What do you like most about working in this field?
- How long have you lived in [city]? Why did you move to [city]?
- Where did you go to school?
- What's the newest skill you just learned?
- Are you going to any other events in the next few weeks?
- Which industry blogs/social media accounts do you follow?
- What is your favorite podcast?
- What book(s) have been influential or helpful with your career?
- What was the best piece of advice you've ever received?

- I can see you're a fan of [team/tv show]. Did you watch their last game/episode?
- Hello, you seem to be having an interesting discussion, can I join you?
- I don't know anyone here but you seem like a friendly bunch, do you mind if I join in?
- How do you all know each other?
- These networking events can be so loud. Mind if I join you over here where it's a little quieter?
- These appetizers are great! I think I'm going to grab another. Care to join?
- I'm going to get some food now that the line has died down a bit. It was great meeting you!
- I've got to say hello to someone, but I'll be back.
- I'm going to take a lap around the room. I'll be back soon.
- Have you met [colleague name]? S/he works in your industry as well. I'm sure you both will have plenty to talk about.
- Well, I think it's time for me to head out. I would love to continue this conversation at another time. Do you have a card or a way to contact you?
- It was wonderful meeting you. Is it possible for me to connect with you on LinkedIn?

Questions for Informational Interviews

Listed below are different categories of questions that one may ask during an informational interview. If you are pressed for time, consider selecting several questions from each category to focus on. You may also use questions to follow-up on something the interviewee says or shares.

Questions about the interviewee

- What has been your career path?
- How did you decide to enter this field?
- How would you describe a typical day in your job?
- What kinds of experiences helped to prepare you for this job?
- What does it take to be successful in your job?
- What are some of the challenges that you experience daily/long-term in this position?
- What has been most satisfying or frustrating about this job?
- Are there opportunities to continue to learn in your role?
- Would you have done anything differently in your career?
- Do you have any regrets about choosing your profession?
- What effect has your career had on your lifestyle/family?
- Have your priorities changed since you started your current career?
- Is your dream career different from your current job?

Questions about the line of work

- What skills are necessary to be successful in this field?
- What experiences would be helpful for someone entering this field?
- What type of preparation, credentials, or training must one have to enter this field?
- What is the job potential? Are there opportunities to grow from this position?
- What can I do to make myself more marketable or competitive to hiring managers?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of working in this field?
- What technologies are important in this career?
- What recommendations would you have for an entry-level/new person considering this field?

Questions about the organization structure or culture

- How does your position fit into the organization's structure?
- What is the organization's culture?
- Who are the organization's leaders? How long have they been with the organization? How are they perceived?
- What is the management philosophy of the organization?
- What is the style of supervision in the organization?
- What kinds of hours do people work? Are the hours standard for everyone or is overtime encouraged?
- What are the opportunities for growth? Is there a professional development program? Are people promoted from within?

Questions about next steps

- Where is the best place to find out about job opportunities with the organization?
- Would you be willing to take a look at my resume?
- Do you have any tips for someone looking to break into your industry?
- Are there any additional experiences that you would recommend I gain to become a more competitive candidate?
- Do you know of other individuals whom I could contact in order to gather different perspectives?
- Can I keep in touch with you in case I have additional questions?