SENATE EMPLOYMENT OFFICE

Job Responsibilities and Skills

(202) 224-9167 | employmentinfo@saa.senate.gov
https://employment.senate.gov/

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.

Updated December 2023.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any way without the express written permission of the U.S. Senate Employment Office.

Understanding the Job

Applicants should carefully review the vacancy announcement to learn about a position's tasks, responsibilities, and competencies. A thorough understanding of the job will tell you what qualities the hiring manager is seeking in a candidate.

Once you understand the job's qualifications, take inventory of your skills and experience. Especially when transitioning to a new career or industry, think about your "transferrable skills," including how you can match skills or draw parallels between your current experience and the new job. This will help as you prepare your application materials or practice for an interview.

Tasks and responsibilities are activities, duties, and obligations of an employee. Read our *Position Descriptions* resource to learn about general responsibilities for various Senate staff positions.

Competencies include knowledge, skills, abilities, or behaviors required to perform a job's tasks or responsibilities.

Competencies may be categorized as fundamental, knowledge, or technical. The level of proficiency required for each competency will vary based on the position and needs of the employing office. Please note that these lists may not be exhaustive of all skills or competencies desired by Senate employers.

All Staff: the below competencies are frequently required of all Senate office staff.

Fundamental Competencies, "Soft Skills" or Abilities

Innate potential or learned through the application of knowledge or experience.

- Interpersonal skills: collaborates with others on a team; is self-aware or has emotional intelligence; conflict resolution skills; and respect for social/cultural diversity.
- Communication: writes and speaks in a clear and effective manner.
- Adaptability: is flexible, solves problems creatively, and is resilient.
- Initiative: motivated, has a proactive work ethic, and is entrepreneurial.
- Organization: exhibits prioritization and time management skills; pays attention to detail.
- Accountability: is dependable and follows through; results-oriented.
- Integrity: exhibits ethics, discretion, and confidentiality.
- Public service motivation

Knowledge Competencies

Gained through experience or study.

- Organizational awareness: understands the Senate's role or responsibilities within the federal government; acts to achieve the office's mission, priorities, and goals.
- Foreign language fluency (in select offices/positions)

Technical Competencies

Gained through experience or study.

- Technology literacy: general understanding of computer operations and software applications such as word processing.
- Constituent relationship management software: such as IQ, Fireside, or VOICE.
- Productivity software applications: familiarity with video conferencing and/or workflow tracking systems.
- Certifications or licensure: such as a driver's license or bar admission.

In addition to the "all staff" competencies listed above, Senate hiring managers may seek staff who possess other competencies needed to perform specialized tasks. Below are additional competencies, organized by area of office operations.

Administrative and State Staff[1]

- Customer service: has a constituent-oriented mindset and ensures customer satisfaction.
- Empathy: having awareness or understanding the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others.
- Situational awareness: anticipates office/staff needs and troubleshoots difficult situations.
- Document management: properly maintains and archives print, digital, and media records.
- Executive support: supports multiple leaders and teams.
- Office administration: applies knowledge of support policies and practices to ensure efficient office operations.

Legislative and State Staff

- Policy experience: maintains expertise in the designated policy portfolio.
- News awareness: remains abreast of national, state, and local events and issues affecting constituents.
- Legislative knowledge*: has experience advancing legislation on Capitol Hill.
- Senate knowledge*: familiarity with Senate rules and procedures.
- Political judgement: understands internal/external politics that impact the work of the office/organization and acts accordingly.
- Coalition building: ability to effectively engage with various stakeholders.
- Advising: briefs or prepares an executive for meetings and events.
- Advocating: influences and negotiates with stakeholders.
- Technical writing and editing: analyzes research and crafts clear, strategic messages to communicate with targeted audiences.
- Statistical/programming software* (in select offices/positions)
- Security clearance* (in select offices/positions)

---

[1] State Staff: Review the "Legislative and State Staff" section for additional competencies.

* These competencies are generally not required of all State Staff, but may be helpful to possess.

Communications Staff

- Media relations: builds relationships with media networks to inform the public of the office/organization's work or actions.
- News awareness: remains abreast of national, state, and local events and issues affecting constituents.
- Senate knowledge: familiarity with Senate rules and procedures.
- Political judgement: understands internal/external politics that impact the work of the office/organization and acts accordingly.
- Advising: briefs or prepares an executive for meetings and events.
- Advocating: influences and negotiates with stakeholders.
- Technical writing and editing: analyzes research and crafts clear, strategic messages to communicate with targeted audiences.
- Design software: understands principles of content creation, photo and video editing, and graphic design.
- Digital literacy: proficiency with online media, including digital marketing and social media management, and other electronic communications channels.

Senior Staff

- Strategic leadership: focuses on the big picture, sets a clear vision, and inspires others within the organization.
- Change management: develops transformative plans; coordinates and manages projects.
- People management: understands human resources principles and practices; delegates work, develops teams, and leverages diversity.
- Business operations/acumen: knows Senate budgeting and financial management policies and practices.
- Must also possess the aforementioned competencies held by administrative, legislative, and/or communications staff

Transferrable Skills

When preparing to interview or apply to a new position, aim to connect skills or experience from your past work to the position's responsibilities and competencies.

Many competencies are "transferrable," meaning that they can be applied across different types of jobs or industries. If you do not have direct experience on Capitol Hill, you may be able to highlight your transferable skills to demonstrate that you possess many of the attributes required to perform the job.

As an example, let's say you are a high school math teacher. In this role, you have developed specialized knowledge in in your content area, understand curriculum development and pedagogy, and have practical experience leading a classroom, among other fundamental competencies listed above. One of the important skills that you have developed, is the ability to instruct or present complex information that is

appropriate to the age and abilities of your audience. This skill is transferrable to the work conducted by Senate staff.

Every day, Staff Assistants answer hundreds of phone calls. These front-line staff must remain knowledgeable of current events and legislation to verbally communicate information about their senator's position on these issues to a wide range of constituents.

Meanwhile, Legislative Assistants or Policy Advisors may brief the senator on complex policy issues to prepare them for an upcoming hearing or meeting. These policy staff may or may not have practical experience with the issues in their portfolio, but are expected to quickly learn new concepts and develop subject matter expertise to provide answers to questions from the Member, who most likely only has a general understanding of the issue.

Although the consumer may be different in both cases, this demonstrates the versatility of your experience as an educator, which has trained you to tailor your message to the audience's communication preferences and level of understanding.

A variety of websites provide guidance on how to relate your current occupation's skillset and experience to other careers. You may find these resources through an online search.

Professional Development

If a position may be a slight "reach," take note of the skills or experience that you need to develop, and continue working to advance in those areas. Pursuing professional development can open opportunities by helping you to demonstrate progress while working toward your dream job.

For example, you can sharpen skills through informal or formal learning opportunities, conferences and events, or relevant extracurricular and volunteer experiences. Alternatively, you can seek internship or fellowship opportunities to gain practical, hands-on experience in a congressional office.

Conclusion

It is important to learn about a position in order to understand the qualities needed to fulfill the position's tasks and responsibilities. Applicants can read the hiring office's vacancy announcement to learn about a particular position, or gain broad insight about Senate opportunities by researching similar positions and networking with Senate staff who currently or previously held these position(s) of interest.

By developing awareness of a position's responsibilities and competencies, applicants will be better able to tailor their application to a specific role. They can also translate their experience and develop skillsets to aid in their professional growth. Please visit the Senate Employment Office's *Applicant Toolkit* for other guides to help you tailor your resume or prepare to interview for Senate opportunities.