

How To Series: Understanding Roles of Congressional Staff

Each Member of Congress has staff to assist him/her during their term(s) in office. To be most effective in communicating with Congress and a Member's staff, it is helpful to know the titles and principal functions of key staff. Many Members also have Interns that answer the phones and record constituents' positions on legislation before Congress.

Commonly used titles, job functions and abbreviations:

Administrative Assistant (AA) or Chief of Staff (CoS): The AA reports directly to the Member of Congress. He/she usually has the overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcomes of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The AA is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.

Legislative Director (LD), Senior Legislative Assistant (Sr LA), or Legislative Counsel (LC): The LD is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. In some congressional offices there are several LAs and responsibilities are assigned to staff that has particular expertise in specific areas. For example, depending on the congressional responsibilities and personal interests of the Member, an office may include a Legislative Assistant (LA) for Energy plus an additional LA for Natural Resources and Environmental issues.

Press Secretary (Press) or Communications Director (Comm Dir or CD): The Press Secretary's responsibility is to build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the Member, his/her constituency, and the general public. The Press Secretary is expected to know the benefits, demands, and special requirements of both print and electronic media, and how to most effectively promote the Member's views or position on specific issues.

Appointment Secretary (Appt), Personal Secretary, or Scheduler (Sch): The appointment Secretary is usually responsible for allocating a Member's time among the many demands that arise from congressional responsibilities, staff requirements, and constituent requests. The Appointment Secretary may also be responsible for making necessary travel arrangements, arranging speaking dates, visits to the district or state, etc.

Caseworker: The Caseworker is the staff members usually assigned to help with constituent requests by preparing replies for the Member's signature. Responsibilities may also include helping resolve problems constituents present in relation to federal agencies. For example, Social Security and Medicare issues, passports, etc. There are often several Caseworkers in a congressional office.

There are additional titles used in a congressional office that may include: Executive Secretary, Office Manager, and Receptionist. The Directory for the 110th Congress – 1st session Congressional Directory only lists four staff positions which are: CoS, LD, Sch and Press.