

Congressional Staff: Who They Are and What They Do

It is not enough to just know the member of Congress. Because of the sheer volume and ever-increasing complexity of legislative proposals, legislators must rely heavily on their staff to research and follow the progress of legislation that is of interest to their constituents. Staff prepares brief summaries, floor statements and recommendations on issues.

Each member of Congress is responsible for an incredible number of issues that come before Congress. Members turn to their staff for assistance and advice and rely on them to keep them informed. Issues are divided up in each office and each staff member has many issues to follow. Congressional staff members develop expertise on their issues, the players and politics of the committees, the legislative process and the interest groups and constituencies involved with legislation.

Staff members are a key link between Members and constituents, lobbyists and the public, as well as an essential element in the development and promotion of legislation. It is important to develop a working relationship with staff members as they participate in every step of the legislative process. They could be your best access to the Member.

There are three kinds of staff: (1) personal office staff; (2) district staff; and (3) committee staff. You may have contact with all of them, depending on the issue and your Member's committee assignments. Congressional staff members are generally young, often in their twenties. Office space is very limited and their offices are often no more than just a desk in a room with many others.

Each aide covers many issues and may have limited knowledge of O&P issues. This means you have an excellent opportunity to educate them on O&P services and the impact they make for patients and their families.

Personal Staff

There is a basic staff structure in congressional offices, although there are variations from office to office. Some of the key staff members are:

- ***Chief of Staff (COS)*** - The chief of staff is often in charge of all office activities. He or she is usually involved in all legislative and political decisions. The COS evaluates the political ramifications of legislation and keeps the Member apprised of district and Capitol Hill political developments.
- ***Legislative Assistant (LA)*** - The LA works on specific policy issues and is responsible for all aspects of these issues for the Member. The LA follows legislative activity; handles constituent mail and casework; serves as liaison with committee staff; meets with constituents and lobbyists; makes recommendations to the Member regarding the pros and cons of legislative proposals, and; advises the Member of grassroots efforts among the Member's constituents. The LA often writes the Member's floor statements, speeches and position papers.

- **Legislative Director (LD)** - Many offices have a senior LA who is designated the Legislative Director. The LD has overall responsibility for all issues.
- **Legislative Correspondent (LC)** - The LC handles routine constituent mail and often works closely with the LA to respond to more complex correspondence.
- **Press Secretary** - The press secretary is the chief media spokesperson for the Member.
- **Scheduler/Personal Secretary** - This staff person makes all appointments for the Member and makes travel arrangements.

District Office Staff

All Members have at least one office in their district or state. The district staff often represents the Member at local activities and also does casework for constituents.

Committee Staff

Most committees and subcommittees have both a majority and minority staff to advise Members during hearings and mark-up sessions. The top staff persons are the *Staff Director* and *General Counsel*. Professional staff members are the policy experts and analysts in specific issue areas.

Congressional staffs are a vital link between members of Congress and their constituents, lobbyists and the public as well as an essential element in the development and promotion of legislation. It is imperative that you develop a working relationship with key staff and act as a resource for them. The better the staff person understands your issue, the greater the chances are they can sell it to the legislator.