Who’s Who in a Congressional Member’s Office

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The Congressional Management Foundation’s 2017 survey of senior congressional staffers found visits to a member’s Washington, D.C. office are the most effective way to positively influence undecided lawmakers on an issue. To catch face time with an on-the-go senator or representative, face-to-face meetings require a written request. Appointment requests are handled by the scheduler, who works to get bookings on the crowded calendar. The scheduler is one of about a dozen people working in the D.C. office who play vital roles in shaping policy, communicating the office’s positions and keeping the member on track. The staff “often more knowledgeable of individual issues than the legislators themselves,” says Robert Longley of ThoughtCo.

During fly-ins, these staffers serve as the face of the office, and the eyes and ears of the member. Visiting constituents or groups will typically have access to only the staff, such as a legislative member, and not the lawmaker themselves — the staff, however, will relay constituents’ views and materials to the lawmaker for their consideration. Key positions on a lawmaker’s staff:

- **Chief of staff**
  - Manages the member’s legislative portfolio and priorities and manages the legislative assistants and correspondents. They work directly with the member to establish priorities and strategy.
  - The legislative director is in charge of vote strategy and legislative priorities.
  - The policy team may also include:
    - Legislative director
      - The assistant, a senior position on the team, conducts research on legislation and handles mail. An office may have multiple legislative assistants who handle different issue areas or priorities of the member’s policy and legislative portfolio.
    - Legislative correspondent
      - Researches legislation and issue areas. Often, they report to legislative assistants. They also draft correspondence to constituents who write in to the member with questions about policy.

- **Communications director**
  - Implements the member’s communications strategy and manages the press team. The director handles television interviews, press releases, social media and print media.
  - The communications director also advises the member on political matters, plays an important role in long-term strategic communications strategy and legislative priorities.
  - The communications team may also include:
    - Press secretary
      - Manages media requests, executes a strategy that communicates what the team is doing and raises awareness about issues that are important to the member’s constituents.
    - Communications director
      - The number one in any office. The chief is responsible for how the office functions — they establish office policies and procedures. The chief oversees staffing decisions, manages employees and handles day-to-day responsibilities, including budget and press.

- **Chief of staff’s office**
  - Scheduler
    - Also called a scheduling director, the executive assistant is the axis of every congressional office. He or she is responsible for scheduling the member’s engagements and works directly with the chief.
    - The director allows time for the communications and legislative teams to meet with the member, organizes and books travel plans, knows the fundraising schedule and assists with the office’s finances. They review invitations to speak at or attend certain events and help plan the member’s travel back home.
  - Office manager
    - Oversees office needs, which could include managing supplies, human resources, ensuring compliance with House rules and other labor rules, managing paperwork and other compliance matters on mailings, employment and related matters. They manage office staff assistants and others who work on office administration.
  - Staff assistants
    - Answer phones, handle word processing, filing and faxing. They welcome visitors in the reception area and handle other general requests, such as flag and tour requests, from constituents. An office may have a ‘front person’ to greet visitors to the member’s office.
  - Systems administrator
    - Oversees physical technology (computers, printers, smartphones), software, cybersecurity and the office’s other technological needs. The admin may manage subscriptions and passwords, and ensures that the office aligns with House guidelines for technology and other rules.

Reporting to the chief of staff:

- Manages media requests, executes a strategy that communicates what the team is doing and raises awareness about issues that are important to the member’s constituents.
- Implements the member’s communications strategy and manages the press team. The director handles television interviews, press releases, social media and print media. Either the communications director or the press secretary may serve as the formal spokesperson and may speak on the record about a member’s policies and plans.

Note: Organization charts vary by Congress member.

Sources: Congressional Management Foundation’s 2017 report “Citizen-Centric Advocacy: The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement,” ThoughtCo, ACLU, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and NPI

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