

# CAREER OPTIONS & PRACTICE SETTINGS



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## **CAREER OPTIONS AND PRACTICE SETTINGS**

### **PUBLIC INTEREST AND GOVERNMENT**

The American Bar Association (ABA) defines public interest law as work on behalf of individuals or causes that might otherwise lack effective representation within the legal system. Most definitions of public interest law encompass government practice and cut across political ideologies. The key is that the work is performed for constituencies or issues that are not typically served by the for-profit bar.

Most public interest legal work is performed in either non-profit, small “public interest” law firms, or government settings. However, many private sector lawyers undertake public interest work through *pro bono* representation. Substantively, most public interest lawyering is broadly categorized as either direct representation (litigation) or policy/advisory. Many organizations engage in both.

The key to finding public interest employment after graduation is early planning. The public interest legal market is substantially different from the private sector market, and in many ways more competitive. Private and public interest employers have separate hiring timelines, and value different types of experiences and skills. In addition, the public interest legal market offers fewer overall opportunities to graduating law students. But do not be discouraged! If you understand the public interest legal market and approach your job search with a realistic plan, you are very likely to find satisfying work. Early planning is critical because public interest employers seek, first and foremost, candidates who demonstrate a commitment to their issues. Though some employers also value academic achievement, virtually all of them place much greater weight on experience and dedication to public interest causes. The more experience you have, the more competitive you will be. No singular formula or program governs the hiring process.

Many public interest organizations, unfortunately, do not routinely hire permanent, entry-level attorneys. However, they do often sponsor post-graduate fellowships. Fellowships are short-term positions (usually one or two years) designed to give new law graduates experience in their fields of interest. Hundreds of fellowships are offered each year, and collectively, they are among the best ways to enter into the public interest legal market. All students with public interest career aspirations should seriously consider them. To learn more, pick up Post-Graduate Public Interest Fellowship Manuals I and II in Office of Public Interest and Community Service (OPICS).

### **GOVERNMENT PRACTICE AREAS**

#### **Direct Representation**

These organizations represent clients in legal proceedings. Typical practice areas include family law, public benefits, consumer law, civil rights, environmental law, housing, asylum and refugee law, homelessness, and criminal defense/prosecution.

Examples include the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, San Francisco Legal Assistance Foundation, Legal Aid Society, Earth Justice, Whitman-Walker Legal Clinic, U.S.

Department of Justice, Public Defender Service, and New York County District Attorney's Office.

### **Policy/Advisory**

Many public interest organizations, particularly non-profits, engage in work intended to affect systemic change in legal or political arenas. One vehicle for doing so is class action or impact litigation. Examples of organizations that frequently engage in this type of litigation are the ACLU, the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and Public Citizen Litigation Group. Other policy-oriented organizations focus primarily on strategies other than litigation. They may utilize community education, organizing, research, lobbying, policy analysis, or amicus brief writing to meet their objectives. Examples include Children's Defense Fund, Congress Watch, Sierra Club, and Human Rights Watch.

Many government agencies also engage in policy or legislative work, and most have large numbers of attorney-advisers on staff that provide advice and guidance to their own and other agencies, the public, or policy-making officials (e.g., Members of Congress).

Finally, many policy-oriented public interest and government organizations provide technical assistance to other organizations. They act as clearinghouses on current developments in their areas of expertise and coordinate advocacy efforts. Examples are the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Death Penalty Information Center, and The ABA Center on Children and the Law.

### **GOVERNMENT HONORS PROGRAMS**

Honors Programs are one avenue by which federal government agencies hire law school graduates for entry-level positions. Several federal government agencies also have summer honors programs, which provide students with excellent training and exposure to an agency or department and also increase their likelihood of obtaining permanent, postgraduate employment with the agency or department. Each program has a unique set of requirements, application procedures and deadlines. You must carefully review each program's requirements.

To find out about Honors Programs and other government hiring:

- Search the University of Arizona College of Law Website at [www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm](http://www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm) (obtain the username and password from the Professional Development team)
- Review NALP's Annual Federal Legal Employment Opportunities at [http://www.nalp.org/assets/522\\_0607fedlegalempguide.pdf](http://www.nalp.org/assets/522_0607fedlegalempguide.pdf)
- Review OPICS List of Suggested Websites for Public Interest and Government Jobs, available at OPICS: <http://www.law.georgetown.edu/opics/index.html>)
- Check the Georgetown's Job Listings on Symplicity: <https://law-georgetown-csm.symplicity.com/students/>
- Browse Agencies' Websites for Information and Applications
- Contact Individual Departments and Agencies

The application deadlines for government hiring programs are often in flux. Agencies may

change their recruiting plans based on Congressional budget decisions, election results and staff turnover.

## **CITIZENSHIP REQUIREMENTS FOR GOVERNMENT POSITIONS**

In order to be eligible for compensated positions with the U.S. Government, you must be a U.S. citizen or in some cases, hold citizenship with an "Allied Nation," as defined by the U.S. Government and U.S. treaties. If you are neither a U.S. citizen, nor a citizen of a defined "Allied Nation," you do not qualify to apply for a compensated position with almost any U.S. Government agency. For a list of "Allied Nations" and additional legal details, visit:

[http://www.opm.gov/employ/html/non\\_cit.htm](http://www.opm.gov/employ/html/non_cit.htm).

Employment rules for "Allied Nation" citizens vary from agency-to-agency. Students must research a particular agency's requirements before reaching any definitive conclusion regarding their employment eligibility. In fact, in some instances, ultimate eligibility is not determined until the performance of a U.S. Government background investigation.

Please note that it is extremely difficult for a non-U.S. citizen to get into any U.S. government agency, especially in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Although it is tempting to argue that unpaid positions are exempt from this general rule regarding non-citizen employment, it is an agency-by-agency determination. Unfortunately, there is no single office or person that will give a definitive answer for all agencies before completion of a candidate's background check.

## **KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES (KSA'S)**

Applicants to certain governmental positions must provide documentation of experience which demonstrates that the applicant possesses the required "Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities" (KSAs) for the position. The Office of Career Services has several publications pertaining to KSAs in their library. Just stop by and ask the librarian for assistance.

## **CRITICAL HILL EMPLOYMENT RESOURCES**

Aside from regularly reading Roll Call (<http://www.rcjobs.com/>) and The Hill (<http://thehill.com/employment/>), students considering law and policy work on The Hill should become very familiar with the following: House and Senate Employment Offices, Job Lines, Vacancy Announcements resources, Resume Banks, and online sources of vacancies and application information. Some of the most useful are:

### **U.S. House of Representatives**

U.S. House of Representatives Office of Human Resources  
H2-B72 Ford House Office Building (HOB)

Fax: 202-226-7514

<http://www.house.gov/cao-hr/>

U.S. House of Representatives Job Line  
Phone: 202-226-4504

House Human Resources Vacancy Announcement Lists  
B227 Longworth HOB

### **U.S. Senate**

U.S. Senate Placement Office  
Room SH-142 Hart Senate Office Building (SOB)  
Phone: 202-224-9167

Senate Job Line (recording of Senate Employment Bulletin)  
Phone: 202-228-JOBS

### **The Tax Directory**

The *Tax Directory* is a worldwide compilation of contact information for government agencies and officials. Highlights include points of contact with the following:

- U.S. Congress
- Department of Treasury
- Internal Revenue Service
- Department of Justice's Tax Division
- Other Executive Branch Agencies, and Courts
- Current State and International Tax Officials

Additional information can be found at [www.tax.org](http://www.tax.org) and [taxdir@tax.org](mailto:taxdir@tax.org).

### **PUBLIC INTEREST FUNDING**

#### **Harvard Law School Office of Public Interest Advising Publications**

<http://www.law.harvard.edu/students/opia/planning/publications.php>

Harvard Law School's Office of Public Interest Advising produces a variety of publications assisting students in finding work and funding for public interest law.

#### **Initiative for Public Interest Law at Yale, Inc.**

<http://www.yale.edu/initiative>

The Initiative is a non-profit organization that provides start-up money for projects that protect the legal rights or interests of inadequately represented groups. Please note that the Initiative seeks to fund individuals who are launching new projects, with new or existing organizations, but not to provide funding for existing organizations. The Initiative funds innovative projects that may have difficulty obtaining money from other sources due to the subject matter of the project or the approach taken by the project. The organization funds cutting-edge projects whose successful execution might be a model for other organizations seeking new and better ways to represent clients. Applications are generally due in late January, with grants awarded in

the summer. Additional information for applicants, along with a list of grant recipients for the past five years, can be found on the Initiative's website.

## **PRIVATE PRACTICE**

Private practice involves legal work in a for-profit setting or on behalf of for-profit organizations or causes. Private sector lawyers may practice in large, medium, or small law firms, corporations, accounting firms, or trade associations.

### **LARGE FIRMS (100+ ATTORNEYS)**

Most large firms are located in urban areas, offer top salaries, and have high billable hour requirements. They typically have “summer associate” programs for second-year law students, and seek to hire entry-level associates from those programs. The current partnership track in most large firms is 8-10 years. Generally, large firms wait until the spring semester to recruit and interview LL.M. students.

### **MEDIUM FIRMS (35-100 ATTORNEYS)**

Many attorneys find a smaller, but not too small, environment better suits their temperaments and work styles. Salaries at medium firms generally are not as high as large firms, but neither are billable hour requirements. Many medium firms hire for both summer and permanent positions on the same schedules as large firms, but some wait until late winter or early spring.

### **SMALL FIRMS (LESS THAN 35 ATTORNEYS)**

Nationally, one third of the attorneys in private practice work in firms of 2-10 attorneys. Many small firms are “boutiques,” where all lawyers practice in the same area of the law, but most are general practice firms. Salaries and billable hour requirements are often lower than at large firms, and partnership decisions do not generally follow standard tracks. Small firms often offer greater responsibility to younger attorneys than big firms, but they can require client generation earlier as well. They usually do not hire until the spring semester for summer positions, and LL.M. hiring typically occurs on an “as needed” basis.

## **CORPORATIONS**

Most corporations do not hire attorneys directly from law school, but rather wait until associates have gained a few years of legal experience. Some corporations with large legal departments may hire new law school graduates, but they are the exceptions. Most (but not all) corporations do not hire students for summer positions. LL.M. candidates with significant direct experience or with transferable work experience are the most frequently recruited attorneys for these positions.

## **ASSOCIATIONS**

Trade associations are non-profit organizations. Staff sizes vary from one to several hundred, although most number 6-10 people. Duties of an association’s staff attorney might include reporting to members on governmental developments affecting their industry, facilitating

contact between members, Congress, and appropriate agencies, and presenting an industry viewpoint to representatives of the federal government.