

# Interacting with Congress

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# Policy, Personality and Politics

## Policy:

- Mission orientation vs. Members policy/political agenda
  - In Departments and Agencies there is a mission orientation
  - On the Hill there is no there, there
- 535 Different Agendas
  - Debate is all along the ideological spectrum
  - Debate is often drawn on geographical lines
  - Policy is taken seriously but personally derived
  - Lack of cohesion – even among members of the same party
- **Everyone's idea of what policy is differs**
  - For some, writing legislation is key
  - For some, what is best for their district is primary
  - For some, oversight is their agenda
- Many see oversight as legitimate policy involvement
  - Ability to assert policy power
  - Congress sees itself as the principal and the Executive Branch as their agent
- Reelection is intimately tied with being able to carry out policy agenda
- Policy progress often relies on political timing

## Personality:

- It is a very human place
- **It is a very “clubby” place**
  - Networking key
    - Who is talking to who?
    - Who is on the same committees?
    - Delegation unity (or not)
- Nature of personality matters
  - Liked
  - Disliked
  - Media hound
  - Past history
  - Political aspirations
- Personality of members greatly determines how offices function
  - We all trade notes on good and bad offices
  - Its important to know nature (volatility, etc) of offices
  - Serious office vs. casual office
- Can be very arbitrary place
  - Moods on the Hill matter
  - Many lobbyists walk to pick up small items/mood
- Key is to be able to target interest of the member
  - Finding what touches that Member
  - Tailoring presentation or case to connecting with that Member

## Politics:

Suggested strategy/prism for judging the political environment:

- Overall Environment
  - Hot national issues
  - International events
  - Where in the congressional term
  - On year/off year
  - Mood of the country
  
- University/Foundation/NGO
  - Who is the current leader
    - Past history with Congress
    - Knowledge of issues
    - Monetary impact
  
- National Science Foundation Situation
  - History of Director
  - History of NSF with this Congress
  - Is it a priority to the White House
  - Who does it impact
  - Who might be opposed
  
- Project/Program Situation
  - What is the history of the project/program
  - Does it touch constituents
  - **Is it anyone's pet project**
  - Does it have any likely antagonists

# PERSONAL STAFF VS. COMMITTEE STAFF

## PERSONAL STAFFS:

Staff members serve at the pleasure of the Member of Congress.

### Their Structure

Washington Office:

- Chief of Staff
- Office Manager
- Press Secretary
- Legislative Director (LD)
- Legislative Assistants (LAs)
- Legislative Correspondents
- Receptionist

(Senate offices have more stratification within these categories)

District Offices:

- State Director (for Senate Offices)
- District Manager (for House Offices)
- Office Manager
- Chief Case Worker
- Case Workers
- Grants and Special Projects Director
- Field Representative
- Receptionist

### Washington Office Staff Nature & Motivation

- Legislative generalists
- Serve the needs of the individual member
- Constituent oriented – on legislative matters
- Often young, inexperienced and overburdened
- Cover legislation, meetings, committees and projects
- Little to no formal training
- Almost always reactive
- Always cognizant of reelection
- Loyal to their Member
- Want to be involved in politics

### District Office Staff Nature & Motivation

- Devoted to constituent service
- Serve the needs of individuals to serve their Member
- Very constituent oriented – problem solving
- Less partisan than Washington staff
- Less turnover than Washington
- Some staffers serving for many years
- Economics in the district matter
- Often good functional relations with Agencies and Departments
- Calmer environment
- Loyal to their Member
- Want to serve people

## COMMITTEE and SUBCOMMITTEE STAFFS:

Staff members serve at the pleasure of the Committee Chairman or the Ranking Minority Member

### Their Structure

- Majority Staff Director
- Majority Deputy Staff Director
- Majority Analysts assigned specific issues
- Office Manager
- Receptionist
  
- Minority Staff Director
- Minority Analysts (fewer in number than majority analysts)

### Their Nature

- Legislatively oriented
- Highly specialized
- High pay
- Long tenure
- Want to see legislation carried out
- Institutional memory
- Seniority
- Majority Rules
- Partisan split
- Chairman dominates all action

### Motivation

- Passion for legislation
- Impact on legislation is greatest in committee
- Believe in the process of government
- Expertise
- Close to Chairman or Ranking Member
- Highly sought after upon leaving the Hill