

### **Description of Field**

Government relations, also known as lobbying, consists of individuals and organizations engaged in promoting the interests of their employers or clients. Their activities involve monitoring legislative and executive activities to influence policy, legislation, regulations, or negotiations, on behalf of governments, industries, specific companies, interest groups or constituencies. In Washington, DC, lobbying is regulated by law, calling for disclosure by lobbyists of organizations or clients they represent, LDA (Lobbying Disclosure Act) or FARA (Foreign Agents Registration Act.)

In addition, lobbying may also be carried out by PACs (Political Action Committees) that represent specific constituencies or may simply represent themselves on stated issues. Lastly, there is a subdivision of Executive Branch Legislative Offices, that represent various departments and agencies of the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government, charged with the purpose of influencing the Congressional Branch on legislative affairs.

### **Career Paths and Entry Salaries**

Most of those seeking careers in lobbying begin with volunteer work on political campaigns for elected public officials, or as legislative staff on Capitol Hill, in State Houses or in governmental agencies. With such experience, graduates can often move to the mid-level of organizations; without such experience, graduates will typically enter in the research area or in roles that support more senior staff.

Moving in and out of government, sometimes known as the “revolving door,” usually increases a person’s marketability in both the public sector and private sector. There are few straight line careers in lobbying as these positions are influenced by the ebb and flow of politics, or opportunities in the government. From a position as a research assistant, a person may become an analyst or manager within a lobbying organization or move to a position on the staff of an elected official or government agency.

Typical entry-level job titles include issues analyst, research analyst, research assistant or associate. Salaries vary based on experience and professional contacts. Private sector companies typically pay more than non-profit and public interest organizations. In 2003 the salary range in government relations extended from \$12,000 to more than \$150,000 with a median annual salary of \$49,000.

### **Demand**

The lobbying industry is highly competitive, and without experience or contacts, graduates must be willing to start at an entry level. There is a wide range of issues, both international and domestic, that draws people to the field. A foreign government, a company with international trade concerns, or an advocacy group working on human rights may all call for representation by a lobbyist. Vacancies are rarely posted since many positions are filled by networking and by referral.

## **Qualifications Necessary to Enter Field**

Government experience is a highly regarded qualification. Strong communications skills, both written and oral, are essential. A comprehensive understanding of organizational structure and legislative procedures is important. Excellent people skills, high energy, flexibility and willingness to work long hours are also important, as is the ability to compromise.

Students interested in lobbying careers should consider volunteering on political campaigns or interning with a government agency. The contacts developed through volunteer work and experience in analyzing issues and understanding government processes, can be invaluable. A graduate degree in law or in public affairs/public policy is often helpful for advancement in the field.

## **Sample Group of Employers**

In Washington, DC there are approximately 17,000 people engaged in lobbying who are registered along with the interests they represent. Employers consist of public relations consultants, law firms, corporate lobbying agents, public interest organizations, trade and professional associations, political action committees and political parties. A sample listing follows:

- *Public Relations Consultants:* Burson Marsteller; Edelman; Weber Shandwick Worldwide
- *Law Firms:* Arnold & Porter; Patton, Boggs & Blow LLP
- *Lobbying Agencies:* Morgan Casner Associates
- *Public Interest Organizations:* Children's Defense Fund; Handgun Control, Inc.
- *Trade & Professional Organizations:* National Federation of Independent Business Inc.
- *Political Action Committees:* related to Trade and Professional Organizations.
- *Political Parties:* Democratic National Committee, Republican National Committee

## **Future Challenges to the Profession**

As issues facing government become more numerous and more complicated, lobbyists become more important and more prevalent. While lobbyists serve as advocates for the interests of their employers or clients they also provide information to elected officials and staff that may be useful in the decision process.

Lobbying in Washington, DC is the most visible, but lobbying on the State level as well as lobbying foreign governments and agencies is growing. It should be noted that at the present time, regulations restrict the lobbying activities of former U.S. government officials.

## **To Obtain More Information**

Network, network, network. Internships, volunteer work and part-time jobs can lead to valuable contacts and information.

Associations: American League of Lobbyists (ALL), [www.alldc.org](http://www.alldc.org)

Directories: Washington Representatives  
Beacham's Guide to Key Lobbyists  
The Complete Guide to Public Employment  
National Trade and Professional Associations