



# Use of Interns in Governors' Washington, D.C. Offices

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## Summary:

In order to maintain an effective presence in the nation's capitol, many governors establish federal offices in Washington, D.C. to advocate the needs and priorities of their states. Governors' federal affairs offices in Washington D.C typically consist of limited staff. As a result, many offices find great value in utilizing interns to augment their small staff sizes and provide learning opportunities for students interested in government and politics. The 2006 Washington Office survey found that 22 Washington D.C. offices utilize non-paid staff (interns or volunteers) with an average of 1.6 interns per office in the 2006 calendar year. This management brief examines the use of interns in governors' Washington, D.C. offices with particular attention to the methods used to hire interns and the responsibilities interns are typically assigned. The NGA Office of Management Consulting & Training interviewed the federal relations offices of Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, and Texas to learn the structure and operation of their intern programs.

The offices interviewed generally select interns who have at least reached the junior or senior level of a college or university program. They often recruit interns by searching local universities for students in Washington D.C. Offices prefer to recruit students from the governor's state. Interns are given a variety of administrative tasks to free staff members to engage in federal relations activities. Strong performance of administrative tasks are integral to the success of interns in the Washington D.C. offices. More substantive work assigned to interns includes: tracking the appropriations process, attending congressional hearings, and drafting memos. Interns are also encouraged to take full advantage of the Washington D.C. environment by attending events with the state's congressional delegation, meeting with Capitol Hill members and experiencing unique area events.

## Minnesota

The small staff of the Minnesota Governor's Washington D.C. office makes the intern a valuable member of their team. Prospective interns apply to the governor's internship program in the St. Paul office, and they can select the Washington D.C. office as their first preference on the application. Interns are unpaid, but may apply for college credit as a result of their participation. The Minnesota Washington, D.C. office prefers to select interns who are at least at the junior or senior level of college to ensure their skill level prepares them to understand the complex affairs of the office. An emphasis is also placed on applicants' writing skills since they are often required to compose memorandums.

Interns attend to the significant administrative needs of the office including answering phones and other duties in order to free the office staff to engage in various federal relations

activities. In addition, interns are engaged in a variety of more substantive tasks during the course of the internship. These include:

- Tracking bills of key significance to Minnesota;
- Attending congressional hearings and drafting summary memorandums; and
- Compiling weekly updates for office staff that includes press releases from the congressional delegation, news events in Minnesota, information on federal agencies, and other important issues that are important to the governor's agenda.

Interns are also encouraged to engage in the complete Washington D.C. experience by attending events and receptions with the Minnesota congressional delegation. The office tracks interns' progress with evaluations, including a self-evaluation on a monthly basis and at the end of the internship.

The office also provides a resource binder compiled and updated by interns on an ongoing basis.

The binder includes information on:

- **Office Functions:** A description of the key roles and relationships of the office and a breakdown of each staff members' duties and issue areas
- **Key Office Tips:** Instructions for answering the phone, taking messages, etc.
- **State Government Contacts:** Key staff and departments
- **Intern Projects:** How to track bills; suggested tips for drafting hearing memos; sample templates of memos, emails, and letters
- **D.C. Contacts:** Congressional and association resources
- **D.C. Happenings:** Entertainment and other activities in the D.C. metro area

(A PDF version of this binder is available; please contact [jberlow@nga.org](mailto:jberlow@nga.org).)

## North Carolina

The North Carolina Governor's Washington D.C. office offers one ten-week paid summer internship coordinated with the statewide internship program of the North Carolina Department of Volunteerism. Interns are compensated \$8.25 per hour and work forty hours per week. The office has a preference for students at least in the junior level of college or graduate students. The North Carolina office recently started accepting unpaid interns during the fall and winter academic semesters through the "Semester in Washington" programs sponsored by many North Carolina universities. These students work in the office part-time for credit while attending classes at Washington D.C. area colleges and universities.

The office staff makes it a priority to engage interns in substantive work. An emphasis is placed on teaching interns the congressional appropriations process. Interns often scan appropriations request letters to find earmarks related to North Carolina, and they track House, Senate, and conference bill differences on spreadsheets. Interns are also paired with office staff according to their issue areas of interest, and interns often write brief position and research papers. Interns also accompany staff to meetings to Capitol Hill for a chance to meet with congressional staff members. The North Carolina staff feels their efforts and interactions with the interns benefit the state by building future leaders.

## **New York**

The New York Governor's Washington D.C. office utilizes two to three interns at all times throughout the year. Interns are recruited through internship postings with local universities in Washington D.C. The office generally prefers to recruit interns who are from New York, have completed some college, and are actively engaged in the community. Interns often negotiate a part-time schedule with the office while they attend classes. Interns are paid \$9.00 per hour as undergraduates and \$14.00 per hour as graduate students.

Interns complete administrative tasks such as compiling press clippings, answering phones, distributing correspondence, and searching through legislation. The office has a philosophy of direct contact with the interns, and thus interns are paired with staff members with similar interest areas. Interns are also urged to take advantage of being located near Capitol Hill. They are encouraged to make contact with the New York congressional delegation.

## **Texas**

The Texas Governor's Office of State-Federal Relations offers internships primarily during the summer months. Interns apply to the office directly through the office's website. Interns are not paid but can apply for college credit for their performed work. Interns often perform administrative tasks such as answering phones and opening mail. They are also given the opportunity to attend hearings on Capitol Hill. Office staff encourages interns to pursue an issue and "become owners of that issue."

Interns in the Texas office are also encouraged to attend events related to the Texas congressional delegation. When the office is not busy they are given the opportunity to explore the sights of Washington D.C.

## **Conclusion:**

While interns can provide a valuable resource to Washington offices, it is imperative to recognize that internships are also intended to contribute to the education of the interns. A successful internship program should combine general office support with substantive tasks, create mentoring relationships between staff and interns, and provide exposure to the Washington D.C. environment and culture. Successful programs also require careful planning and supervision in order to properly train and manage interns. Interns in Washington D.C. offices generally come from home state college internship programs and through recruitment of students attending local colleges and universities.

## ***Additional Information***

For more information on internship programs in Washington D.C. offices, please contact Jason Berlow of NGA's Office of Management Consulting & Training at 202/624-5408 or [jberlow@nga.org](mailto:jberlow@nga.org).