



# Roles of Governors' Chiefs of Staff: Are Large States Different?

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Management Brief  
Governor's Office Operations

Observers of governors' offices have often speculated as to how the structure, organization and operation of governors' offices in the largest states may differ from the structure, organization and operation of governors' offices in other states.

In the spring of 2007 the National Governors Association (NGA) Office of Management Consulting and Training conducted a survey of governors' chiefs of staff regarding their roles and responsibilities. This recent survey begins to provide some insight into the similarities and differences regarding the role of chief of staff across the states. In this management brief we describe how the ten largest states compare with the remaining states.<sup>1</sup> For additional information on the survey findings see the NGA management brief, "Roles and Responsibilities of the Governor's Chief of Staff."

## Structure of Governors' Offices

The greatest determining factor in the structure of a governor's office is usually the governor's own management style. Many governors prefer a hierarchical, business-like structure with clear lines of authority and most staff reporting to the chief of staff. Other governors seek input from many sources or employ key advisors that report directly to the governor in a decentralized system. There are also governors who prefer a blended centralized and decentralized or "hybrid" structure.

According to the 2007 survey, governors' offices in the largest states most commonly feature a decentralized (11 percent) or hybrid (56 percent) structure with several senior staff members reporting directly to the governor. Governors' offices in the largest states are significantly less likely (22 percent) to be hierarchical than all other states (58 percent).

GOVERNORS' OFFICES REPORTING STRUCTURES

Response	Percent of States Responding		
	Largest States (9 of 10)	All Other States (36 of 45)	Total (45 of 55)
Hierarchical	22	58	51
Decentralized	11	8	9
Hybrid	56	31	36
Other	11	3	4

## Positions in Decentralized or Hybrid Structures Reporting Directly to Governor

In both the largest states and all other states with hybrid or decentralized structures, the legal counsel is the staff member most frequently cited as having a direct reporting relationship to the governor. However the frequency of the legal counsel's direct reporting is significantly higher in the large states. In the largest states the next most frequent direct reports to the governor are the press secretary, communications director, policy director and scheduler.

<sup>1</sup> Ten largest states based upon population: California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Georgia and North Carolina.

In all other states the next most frequent direct reports to the governor include the deputy chief of staff, communications director, press secretary, scheduler, legislative director and policy director.

Overall the data suggests that the number of direct reports to the governor in the largest states is somewhat fewer than in all the other states. Thus while the largest states are more apt to use a decentralized or hybrid structure, the number of positions with a direct reporting relationship to the governor is fewer in the largest states than in all the other states.

#### POSITIONS REPORTING DIRECTLY TO THE GOVERNOR

Response	Percent of States Responding		
	Largest States (7 of 10)	All Other States (15 of 45)	Total (22 of 55)
Deputy Chief	0	40	27
Press Secretary	29	40	36
Communications	29	33	32
Legal Counsel	86	53	64
Legislative Director	14	33	27
Policy Director	29	33	32
Appointments	0	27	18
Correspondence/ Constituent Services	14	7	9
Cabinet Affairs	14	0	5
Scheduler	29	40	36
DC Office Director	0	7	5
Other	29	0	

#### **Functions Performed by the Chief of Staff or by an Individual Reporting Directly to the Chief of Staff**

When examining the roles played by chiefs of staff relating to the functions of chief operating officer, initiatives manager, policy director, political director and office manager, two major differences surface between chiefs in the largest states and all the other states' chiefs of staff. All of the chiefs in the largest states indicate that they serve as the initiatives manager (the individual responsible for managing the implementation of gubernatorial initiatives) while this function is played by only eighty-nine percent of the chiefs in all other states. The percentages are reversed in the case of the office manager function, with chiefs in the largest states less likely to play this role.

#### FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY CHIEFS OF STAFF

Response	Percent of States Responding		
	Largest States (9 of 10)	All Other States (35 of 45)	Total (44 of 55)
Chief Operating Officer	78	89	86
Initiatives Manager	100	89	91
Policy Director	78	83	82
Political Director	67	63	63
Office Manager	89	100	96

**Functions Performed by Individuals (other than the Chief of Staff) Reporting Directly to the Governor**

In the ten largest states, senior staff with responsibility for the functions of chief operating officer, policy director and political director report to the governor directly in almost one-quarter of the states. This direct reporting relationship for these senior staff members is less common in all other states.

**FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY SENIOR STAFF MEMBERS**

Response	Percent of States Responding		
	Largest States (9 of 10)	All Other States (36 of 45)	Total (45 of 55)
Chief Operating Officer	22	6	9
Initiatives Manager	0	9	7
Policy Director	22	17	18
Political Director	22	9	9
Office Manager	11	3	4

**Additional Functions Performed By the Chief of Staff**

All of the chiefs of staff in the largest states responded that they serve as a personal confidant to their governor and eighty-nine percent also indicated that they serve as gubernatorial vicar and crisis coordinator. These percentages are higher than the percentages in all other states. The difference is particularly striking in relation to the chiefs serving as their governor’s personal confidant as less than two-thirds of the chiefs from all other states reported that they played this role.

**ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY CHIEFS OF STAFF**

Response	Percent of States Responding		
	Largest States (9 of 10)	All Other States (36 of 45)	Total (45 of 55)
Gubernatorial Vicar	89	75	78
Guardian of the Palace	67	81	78
Headhunter	78	92	89
Crisis Coordinator	89	78	80
Personal Confidant	100	64	71
Other	0	3	2

**Conclusions**

The chiefs of staff from the largest states are most commonly one of several senior staff members reporting directly to the governor. More than their counterparts in other states, these chiefs of staff serve as their governor’s personal confidant and are charged with responsibility for managing gubernatorial initiatives. Chiefs of staff from the largest states are also more likely than their counterparts in other states to serve as gubernatorial vicar and crisis coordinator.

**Additional Information**

For additional information regarding the roles and responsibilities of governors’ chiefs of staff, or other available services, please contact Barry Van Lare, Director of NGA’s Office of Management Consulting & Training (202/624-7895; [bvanlare@nga.org](mailto:bvanlare@nga.org)).