CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, LOBBYING, AND CAMPAIGNING

Description of Field
Government relations, also known as lobbying, consists of individuals and organizations engaged in promoting the interests of their employers or clients to the government. 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 the disclosure by lobbyists of organizations or clients that they represent. This is done through the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) and Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

In addition, lobbying may also be carried out by Political Action Committees (PACs) that represent specific constituencies. People may simply represent themselves on stated issues as well. Last, there is a subdivision within the Executive Branch Legislative Offices that represents various departments and agencies of the Executive Branch of the US Government, responsible for influencing the Congressional Branch on legislative affairs.

Career Paths
Most of those seeking careers in lobbying begin with volunteer work on political campaigns for elected public officials, or in legislative staffs on Capitol Hill, State Houses, or governmental agencies. After acquiring such experience, graduates can often move into the mid-level of organizations; without such experience, graduates will typically begin 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 and private sector. There are few permanently established career paths in lobbying, as these positions are influenced by the ebb and flow of politics and the current opportunities available in the government. One possible career path may include starting as a research assistant, eventually becoming an analyst or manager within a lobbying organization, and then moving to work for the staff of an elected official or government agency.

Typical entry-level job titles include issues analyst, research analyst, and research assistant or associate. Salaries vary based on experience and professional contacts, keeping in mind that private sector companies typically pay more than non-profit and public interest organizations.

Demand
The lobbying industry is highly competitive; without experience or contacts, graduates must be willing to start at the 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 referral.

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Qualifications Necessary to Enter Field
Government experience is a highly regarded qualification. Strong communications skills, both written and oral, are essential as well. Those seeking to work in government relations must also have a comprehensive understanding of organizational structure and legislative procedures. In addition, excellent people skills, high energy, flexibility, and a willingness to work long hours are also important, as is the ability to compromise.

Students interested in lobbying careers must network and should consider volunteering on political campaigns or interning with a government agency. The contacts developed through volunteer work, internships, 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
According to the Washington Post, the number of registered lobbyists in Washington has more than doubled since 2000 to more than 34,750. 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 – www.burson-marsteller.com
- Edelman Public Relations - www.edelman.com
- Weber Shandwick Worldwide - www.webershandwick.com

Law Firms
- Arnold & Porter LLP - www.arnoldporter.com
- Patton Boggs LLP - www.pattonboggs.com

Public Interest Organizations
- Children’s Defense Fund - www.childrensdefense.org
- The Brady Campaign - www.bradycampaign.org
- Public Citizen - www.citizen.org

Trade & Professional Organizations
- National Federation of Independent Business Inc. - www.nfib.com

Political Parties
- Democratic National Committee - www.democrats.org
- Republican National Committee - www.gop.com

Future Challenges of the Profession
As issues facing government become more numerous and complicated, lobbyists increasingly become more important and 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 at the state level as well as lobbying foreign governments and agencies is growing. It should be noted that current regulations restrict the lobbying activities of former US government officials.
Resources for Additional Information

Associations
- American League of Lobbyists (ALL) – www.alldc.org

Internet Resources
- The Advocacy Institute - www.advocacyinstitute.org
- Center for Policy Alternatives - www.stateaction.org
- Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest - www.clpi.org
  - A directory of United States Lobbyists

LinkedIn Groups
- US Government Relations & Public Affairs - www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=22294
- Government Relations Professional Networking - www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=82054
- Government Relations Careers - www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=1917201

Publications