CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Description of Field
There are a wide range of positions in state and local government. As a result, there is no single description of the field, but, in general most states have agencies that are analogous to national level institutions. Positions vary by state and locality, with varying amounts of international involvement. State and local governments do, however, offer some unique opportunities for international interaction. Such positions incorporate international development activities with local economic issues, while often allowing employees to bypass the more demanding characteristics of international professions, such as working far away from home.

Career Paths and Entry Salaries
State and local governments place a great deal of importance on internships. Full-time, limited term, as well as paid, internships are available for master’s students, such as the California State Senate Fellows Program. These programs provide students with the skills, knowledge, and networking connections that will help with entry into state and local government.

Due to the broad nature of the field and the variety of positions available, there is no pre-set career path. Furthermore, there is a degree of movement between federal, state, and local governments, in addition to movement between government positions and private industry via their government relations offices. Entry salaries will vary by state and locality, but as a point of reference, New York state employees have a starting salary from the high $30,000s to the mid $50,000s.

Demand
Most hiring demands in state and local governments are met by residents of that state or locality. If a necessary skill is lacking, however, agencies will seek outside their region for employees. As such, currently 75% of all state and local jobs are in entities such as towns, municipalities, counties, and school districts. 50% of all jobs are in the education sector, with health services as the second most numerous.

Hiring, especially in state governments, is, of course, affected by the financial health of the state. This limiting factor is somewhat offset by the anticipated growth in retirements among state and local government employees.

There has been an increasing trend of state and local governments getting involved with international affairs. Many have their own foreign policies, covering issues such as local economic development, tourism, international shipping, and trade promotion. As a result, there is a growing need for financial specialists in a wide range of state government areas.

Likewise in the economic development sector, a growing number of states are establishing venture capital funds, revolving loan and loan guarantee programs, and other financing strategies. State legislatures are also hiring financial analysts, with one major international program focusing on export promotion. State development agencies, departments of commerce, and other departments within state governments often provide important assistance to groups with export relationships with the state, such as market development, marketing assistance, export education, trade missions, and trade shows. In addition, other programs promote foreign direct investment (FDI) in the state or particular locality. Area economic development agencies and chambers of commerce, including some public utilities, are very active in this area.
Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field
A bachelor’s degree is the minimum required to begin employment, but a master’s degree will make one more competitive. In addition, one should have relevant internship or work experience. Previous experience working with the federal government is viewed favorably, as many of the skills and competencies learned there translate directly into related positions in the state and local sector.

Future Challenges of the Profession
State and local government professionals will continue to work in a field restricted by increasingly tighter budgets. In addition to stretched resources, individual agencies are often understaffed. While there is a need for personnel that are focused on international aspects, budgetary concerns will restrict employment. Flexibility, a solid grasp of functional skills, and creativity will be vital traits for those entering this profession.

Resources for Additional Information

Internet Resources
- America Job – www.americajob.com
- Govjobs.com – www.govjobs.com
- Govtjobs.com – www.govtjobs.com
- State and Local Government on the Net – www.statelocalgov.net

LinkedIn Groups

Publications

