

PRACTICE AREAS

Public Policy

Public policy can be defined as a government's course of action regarding an issue. Though it's not always considered a "traditional" legal career path (ie, litigation), attorneys work in many roles and practice settings to influence and shape public policy. Below are descriptions of public policy jobs at several types of employers, resources to help you plan your legal career in public policy, and examples (and quotes!) from GW Law students who have worked in public policy jobs.

Law Firms

There are law firms with legislative, public policy, or governmental affairs practice groups, often composed of former government attorneys who provide familiarity with and insight into legislative processes. Their law practice likely consists of tracking, researching, and drafting legislation, preparing clients for hearings and to testify about legislation, and contacting government officials to advance clients' interests. Use [Martindale](#) to identify law firms with these practice groups.

Quotes from GW Law Students

- Olsson, Frank & Weeda: "As a part of the Public Policy Group, we worked primarily on influencing the legislative process on Capitol Hill."

Advocacy Groups

Advocacy groups are organizations seeking to influence public policy, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-profits, and think tanks. Attorneys working for an advocacy group will have duties largely determined by how the organization functions. Some advocacy groups are primarily lobbying groups, while others run community programs or provide direct legal services. Use [PSLawNet](#) to identify public interest organizations; resources to identify other advocacy groups are listed under Resources below.

Quotes from GW Law Students

- Public Citizen (public interest group): "fantastic opportunity for progressive students to be heavily involved in consumer rights policy work. The work environment is terrific and the opportunities to network are ample."
- Inova Health System (non-profit): "There is a great deal of substantive work, and if you actually have an interest in HealthCare Law this might be a wonderful place to be"

- The Constitution Project (non-profit): “I and other interns accompanied the Project's President to multiple strategy sessions with Congressional officials--it was an amazing education into the way the political process works.”; “Absolutely recommended to anyone who wants an experience touching on very diverse elements of law--legislation, litigation, public policy, strategy, and government were all represented. I would do it again in a heartbeat.”

Congress and Government Agencies

Many attorneys pursuing public policy careers work for federal, state, or local government agencies or organizations as lobbyists, policy analysts, or legislative assistants or directors. On the Hill, duties include researching, tracking, and drafting legislation, advising on legislative matters, and responding to constituents’ needs. Each government agency is structured differently; therefore, opportunities in public policy may be located in one or several offices within that agency. Please refer to the CDO’s Capitol Hill and Lobbying/Government Relations Jobs Handout and How to Find a Government Job for details and resources for pursuing jobs on the Hill and in government respectively.

Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program

The PMF Program, administered by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, solicits applications annually for a two-year paid fellowship designed “to attract to the Federal service outstanding men and women from a variety of academic disciplines and career paths who have a clear interest in, and commitment to, excellence in the leadership and management of public policies and programs.” Upon successful completion of the PMF Program, Fellows convert to a permanent Federal position. For more information, visit the [PMF website](#).

Quotes from GW Law Students

- United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary: “intense policy work”
- US Department of the Air Force, Office of the General Counsel: “Crafting law of war policy for the US military.”; “Great job. I'd take it over a firm any summer.”
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Division: “The attorneys are fantastic. My assignments were interesting and substantive.”

Resources

- Symplicity student evaluations; select “Government Policy” under Practice Areas
- www.policyjobs.net
- www.publicservicecareers.org
- American Government and Public Policy Resources (Institute of Governmental Studies Library at UC Berkley) <http://igs.berkeley.edu/library/gallery-us.html#PUBLIC>
- NIRA’s World Directory of Think Tanks: www.nira.or.jp/past/ice/nwdtt/2005/index.html
- University of Michigan Political Science Resources: www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/psthink.html
- Harvard Kennedy School Think Tanks Directory: www.hks.harvard.edu/library/research/guides/think-tanks-directory.htm