



# CAMPAIGNS AND INTEREST ADVOCACY

There are over 500,000 elective positions in the us that form the backbone of American democracy, as regular elections are held for mayors, city council members, county treasurers, sheriffs, governors, state legislators, representatives, senators and the president. Since virtually all elections are contested at the state, county or local level, there are ample opportunities to work in electoral politics no matter where you live.

## THE BENEFITS OF CAMPAIGN EXPERIENCE

- ❑ Elections offer direct opportunities to engage in representative or direct democracy. The vast majority of campaign workers volunteer because they believe in their candidate or issue and want to participate in the democratic process directly.
- ❑ Campaign work also offers several paths for career development: Many people consider it a necessary prerequisite to gaining a full-time paid job in politics or government. Often state legislators and members of Congress look first to their campaign staff when hiring for their district or legislative offices, as unpaid campaign workers have already demonstrated their loyalty and commitment to their candidate and proved themselves to be good workers who have the requisite skills and experiences.
- ❑ Campaign workers often form a camaraderie and common sense of purpose that lasts well beyond election day. Thus, working in electoral politics is an excellent way to make contacts with people who share similar interests and position yourself to find (and compete for) political positions later on.
- ❑ People with extensive campaign experience are most qualified for professional campaign positions, including campaign manager, pollster and consultant. They are also good prospects for non-electoral positions in public relations firms and political interest groups, such as labor unions or the NRA.

## THE NATURE OF CAMPAIGN WORK

- ❑ **The smaller campaign organizations** are usually run by a campaign manager who is responsible for organizing the campaign and depending on the size of the campaign, will work on fundraising, events planning and press relations. Basis tasks in the campaign will likely include fundraising, phone banking, conducting mass mailings and canvassing from door-to-door. In small local campaigns the candidate (and often his or her family) will work side-by-side with volunteers to get these jobs done. Because everyone pitches in on various tasks in smaller campaigns, the opportunities to gain experience in many campaign functions may be greater than working in large campaign organizations.
- ❑ **Larger campaign organizations** will often hire individuals for a few professional positions that are coordinated by the outside political consultant. These positions might include press secretary, pollster, fundraiser, treasurer, and coordinator of direct mailings. A candidate for higher office such as U.S. representative, senator, or governor, might hire a political consulting firm to handle all or most of these basic functions.
- ❑ **Many interest groups** are involved in electoral politics directly or engage in electoral activities through support of political action committees or political party organizations. Political groups, such as trade associations, labor unions and single-groups, hire individuals with campaign experience.
- ❑ Similarly, **political action committees (PACs)** are major players in electoral politics that offer paid opportunities for people with substantial campaign experience. Created and sponsored by interest groups,

trade associations, and even individual office holders, PACs gather monetary contributions together and redistribute them to candidates in a coordinated way. Whether you consider PACs unworthy tools of "special interests" or] legitimate vehicles for more effective democratic participation, the reality is that PACs are and will remain key players in electoral politics.

- **Political parties** and their affiliated organizations at the national and state level engage in various electioneering activities including candidate recruitment, training, fundraising, advertising, mobilizing campaign supporters and get-out-the-vote drives. Parties spend a lot of money and effort to get their candidates elected, or their office holders re-elected. While paid positions are scarce in the periods between elections, interns and volunteers who are willing to invest the time and make a strong effort can often find a paid position. Be aware, however, that party workers are expected to be consistent in their partisan activities. A lifelong Republican activist, for instance, is not likely to get hired by a Democratic candidate and vice versa.
- **Political consulting, polling and communications firms** also offer substantial professional opportunities for experienced job candidates. Consulting firms specialize in one or a few functions such as advertising, focus groups and polling, while others provide a wide range of services to include strategic planning, advertising, media buys, fundraising and government lobbying. Some firms are more partisan than others.

## LOBBYING AND INTEREST ADVOCACY

Interest advocacy encompasses traditional lobbying and related positions in governmental affairs, public relations and media relations. In recent decades, America has experienced a virtual explosion of interest group activity that hasn't slowed. Changes including the civil rights and environmental movements, as well as efforts on behalf of women, racial minorities, the elderly, the poor and even endangered species have brought about more organized activity. More groups employ lobbyists, also known as public affairs or government specialists, than ever before.

- There are several types of groups that offer significant employment opportunities to those who love to discuss politics and public policy:
  - **Umbrella Organizations**, also called associations, represent one segment of society but often take stands on a variety of policy matters that affect their members. These groups include the National Association of Manufacturers, the AFL-CIO, and the National Association of Beer Wholesalers.
  - **Single-Issue Groups** organize around a single issue and committed members who advocate on behalf of that issue. Examples include the National Right to Life Committee, the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights League, and the National Rifle Association.
  - **Public Interest Groups** generally speak for broader interests including consumers, children, and environmentalists. Examples include the Sierra Club and the National Taxpayers Union.
  - **State and Local Governments** seek to influence national policymakers directly or advance their interests through participation in organizations like the National League of Cities and the Council of State Governments.
- You do not have to move to Washington, DC to develop the skills and experiences necessary for a career in interest advocacy. Since organized interests operate at the national, state and local level, opportunities for employment are found in various shapes, sizes and places. Organizations like the NRA or Sierra Club maintain regional and local operations, as well as national headquarters, and lobby the Congress, state legislatures, executive departments and agencies at all levels.