

STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Over the last several decades state and local governments have increased their activities in response to a significant rise in the US population and a shift in program and responsibility from the national government to state and local jurisdictions. State and local governments currently provide a host of services to residents including education, transportation, utilities, police, courts and probation. Because there are numerous employment opportunities in state governments, as well as a great variation among states and regions in the U.S., students interested in working for government at the state or local level should explore the many opportunities available in their area.

Administrative Sector

Administrative professionals provide basic functions in numerous areas including taxation, social services, budgets, elections, and transportation systems. Because taxes and budgeting make up a large part of local governments' responsibilities, financial administrators will remain crucial professionals who collect taxes, prepare budgets, and track expenditures. Tax assessors are also essential positions at the local level since real estate taxes supply a large portion of local revenues.

Students interested in administrative sector should supplement their core understanding of government and politics with more specialized courses in state and local government, budgeting, accounting and statistics.

City Managers

The council-manager form of government is the most common one among cities with populations over 10,000. One individual, the City Manager (also called county administrator, town manager, or chief administrative officer) oversees the functioning of all government departments. Simply put, managers implement the policies of the elected officials for whom they work. Managers also work with elected officials and citizens to develop future plans for the community in areas like housing, roads and social services.

Most city managers hold a at least master's degree in public administration, or in a related field such as urban planning.

Legislative Assistants

Because all laws governing state and local jurisdictions are passed by city councils, county boards, and state legislatures, many opportunities exist in legislative support positions. State and local legislative bodies perform similar functions as the U.S. Congress including holding hearings, passing budgets, and reviewing or confirming executive appointments. Such positions include legislative aids and analysts, and, legislative committee staff members. As with entry level positions in Congress, students interested in working for local or state legislatures should seriously consider working first as a volunteer or intern. In fact, in many locales unpaid volunteer work or internships are considered a necessary prerequisite for a paid full-time position.

Service Provisions

Positions within the service sector include law enforcement (e.g. police and sheriff's officers), court personnel (e.g. court clerks), correctional officers (e.g. probation officers), social workers, and firefighters. The availability of employment in state and local law enforcement varies depending on state or local budgets, the pool of eligible retirees, and the needs of local jurisdictions. Jobs in state law enforcement agencies are generally more competitive than those in municipal departments, although the level of competition can vary greatly at the local level. Students interested in a career in these fields should consider taking courses in subjects such as criminal justice, sociology, and public law.