

CAREERS IN PUBLIC POLICY

Social workers in public policy can work in a variety of settings from local, state, or federal government, to the non-profit and private sector. Examples of policy opportunities include:

- ⇒ Public social service agencies
- ⇒ Legislative bodies, such as committees, or with Legislators as aides, and Governors' offices and/or Lt. Governor's offices
- ⇒ Public policy "think tanks"
- ⇒ Advocacy organizations
- ⇒ Organizations such as the Child Welfare League of America, the National Governors' Association, Planned Parenthood of America
- ⇒ Public or Private Research Organizations
- ⇒ Private foundations
- ⇒ "Hot Spots" include: state capitals, Washington D.C., Texas, California, New York, and states with progressive social welfare policies

Social workers in public policy should possess excellent written and verbal communications skills. In addition, most policy positions require:

- ⇒ Knowledge of and exposure to the legislative process
- ⇒ Excellent problem solving and analytical skills
- ⇒ Excellent computer skills
- ⇒ The ability to connect the past (history) with the present tenacity
- ⇒ Possess strong research skills, including well-developed quantitative skills
- ⇒ A certain amount of political savvy, and to be able to think on your feet

Social workers can gain valuable experience in public policy by:

- ⇒ Volunteering or completing a field assignment in public policy organizations
- ⇒ Joining and being active in an organization such as NASW or Bertha Capen Reynolds Society
- ⇒ Working as a legislative aide (hopefully for an enlightened legislator)
- ⇒ Reading voraciously and asking the right questions of the right people
- ⇒ Speaking with clients from all walks of life (they've been there and done that)

In addition to utilizing traditional job search techniques to prepare for a career in public policy, social workers should also:

- ⇒ Gain and maintain knowledge of policy issues and the legislative process on both the federal and state level
- ⇒ Network extensively with those already established in the profession
- ⇒ Complete a post-graduate degree training program such as: Coro Fellows Program in Public Affairs, Presidential Management Intern Program, or the Social Work Congressional Fellows Program
- ⇒ Work first in direct services in the area you are interested in (nothing like doing it to know how to do it)
- ⇒ Studying the history of social welfare policy in depth, and reading the works of social work pioneers (never stop learning!)
- ⇒ Finding one or more mentors and absorb all you can
- ⇒ Search for employment via state agency web pages, legislature web pages, state government web pages, federal agency and Congress web pages