

STAFF ASSISTANT AND LEGISLATIVE CORRESPONDENT

CAPITOL HILL

WORKING FROM HOME GUIDE

VERSION 1

July 15, 2020

At the advent of the coronavirus pandemic, staff assistants and legislative correspondents were suddenly dealing with double the constituent correspondence while transitioning to working from home and often losing their interns. Below is a guide of suggestions compiled from offices on both sides of the aisle on how to be most effective within this new reality.

MILESTONES

- MARCH 4, 2020: CHA informs members that unspent 2019 funds may be used to support remote operations; establishes House Telework Readiness Center
- MARCH 12, 2020: Capitol Complex closed to visitors, remote operations encouraged
- APRIL 6, 2020: Speaker announces new system to accept digital submission of bills, cosponsorships and statements for the record
- MAY 15, 2020: House changed rules to allow for remote committee proceedings and proxy voting
- JUNE 29, 2020: Speaker extends "covered period" due to Coronavirus emergency to August 18, 2020

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MODERNIZATION STAFF ASSOCIATION

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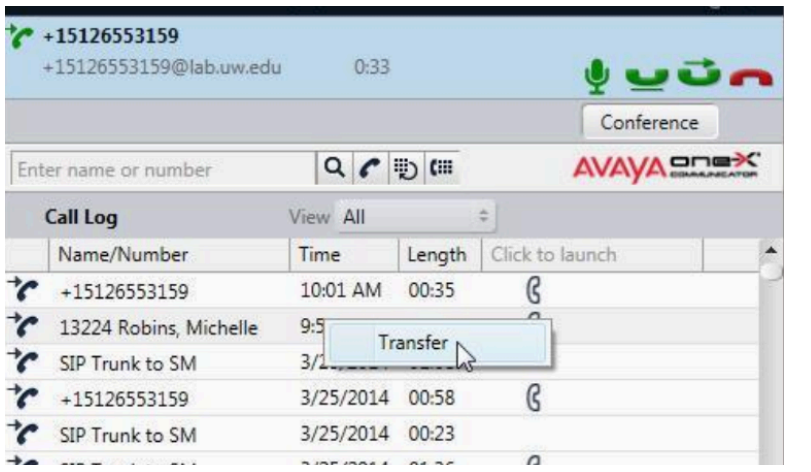
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How Offices are Dealing with Phone Calls During WFH

When more constituents than ever were trying to reach their Representatives about the growing crises in their lives, many offices suddenly appeared not to be home. While WFH, a lot of offices are letting calls go to voicemail and backlogs are growing. However, there are options to answer calls live despite being out of the office.

Option 1: Forwarding calls to all staffers using technology

Offices that use PCs can download the One-X Communicator for free. This software takes a copy of your desk phone and puts it on your laptop. With this system, you don't have to forward phone calls to cell phones, and multiple staff members or interns can be logged in at the same time. Just like in the office, an incoming call will go to everyone at once, so multiple people have the opportunity to answer, minimizing the burden on a single person and sending fewer calls to voicemail.



- Calls sent here will still go to the House voicemail if they are missed. Just like in person, you can also forward calls back to the House voicemail during all-staff meetings or at the end of each day and on the weekends.
- Works using your laptop's microphone and speaker. You can also buy a USB headset.
- To download: go to HouseNet and fill out a My Service Request form under "virtual desktop" -> "template". You can select individual staffers or the entire office.

Option 2: Forwarding calls to interns or staffers in shifts

Some offices have chosen to forward calls to a different staffer or intern's cell phone each day. If many people participate, this usually isn't as much of a burden since each individual only needs to be on the phone one day every couple of weeks. Some offices forward all of their DC calls to a DO line or vice versa and then forward those calls to a cell phone so that the staffer or intern gets both the DC and DO calls at once.



Option 3: Phone tree

Some offices have opted to create a "phone tree" system similar to many business where constituents get an automated message when they call in directing them to press "one" for a personal issue, "two" to leave a message on policy for the Congressperson, "three" for tour and flag requests, etc. Setting up this system depends on your phone system. Contact your provider to ask for options.

Option 4: Have all calls go to voicemail and have interns regularly check them

Many offices are letting all calls go to voicemail and having their interns go through and check the inbox, delete the messages, and log the calls into their constituent relationship management (CRM) software. You can have all voicemails transcribed and emailed to you, as well as upgrade your voicemail inbox to unlimited, for $4 a month. More information here.

Batching, Electronic Mail and Physical Mail

At the start of the pandemic, many offices suddenly began receiving double the amount of weekly constituent correspondence. Rather than policy opinions, the phone calls and mail that flooded in was overwhelmingly casework. Constituents were relying on the government more than ever, but at the same time, many offices were dealing with a plethora of problems of their own, and some are still trying to get through their backlog. Below are some small tips for easing the burden.

Faxing



Offices can send and receive “faxes” via email:

To send a fax via email:

1. Send the email to "faxnumber"@fax.house.gov. i.e. 000-000-0000@fax.house.gov
2. Attach the PDF to the email that you wish to fax
3. Make sure NOTHING is in the body of the email, including your email signature (delete it!)

To receive a fax via email:

Contact your office administrator or technology specialist. They should be routed to a separate inbox that you can add to your Outlook.

Scanning physical mail

Fill out the Digital Mail Authorization Form on Housenet in order to have all of your physical mail scanned and entered into Fireside or IQ for free. This works for both DC offices and district offices!

Sending and receiving physical mail

- Mail Services comes around to offices each day to knock on the door and see if you want your mail dropped off and picked up. If you aren’t there, they will hold your incoming letters in the mail room and will not pick up your outgoing mail.
- You can visit the mail room in B-240 Longworth to pick up or drop off mail every once in a while if your office isn’t working in person regularly. For faster service, call or email Jen Bell, Postal Operations Team Lead, ahead of time at contr.Jen.Bell@mail.house.gov or 202-226-3764.
- Many Staff Assistants and LCs are going into the office every one to four weeks in order to check and send mail and flags.
- The flag office is no longer delivering flags directly to your office. Instead, they are being held with the rest of your incoming mail.
- The new flag office hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

General Tips

- Have your legislative staff help draft more emails.
- Start getting your interns more involved in drafting initial first drafts of constituent correspondence.
- Use this time to simplify and expedite your form letter approval process. Do your form letters need to be read and approved by four different people? Try to streamline the process and cut it down to one or two.



Redesigning Internship Programs

When the pandemic hit, many offices had to abandon their internship programs because they didn't know the rules governing remote work, struggled to secure compliant devices, and were not set up to engage with interns from home. But even now that staffers finally have internship guidance, many are still avoiding creating modified programs because they think they wouldn't be as valuable to the interns or they simply don't know where to start.

Without interns, all of that overwhelming and urgent constituent correspondence is landing exclusively on the plates of junior Hill staffers, roles with already overwhelming workloads. Instead, offices can think creatively about redesigning their internship programs in a way that is still beneficial for both the office and the interns.

Hiring and Setting Expectations

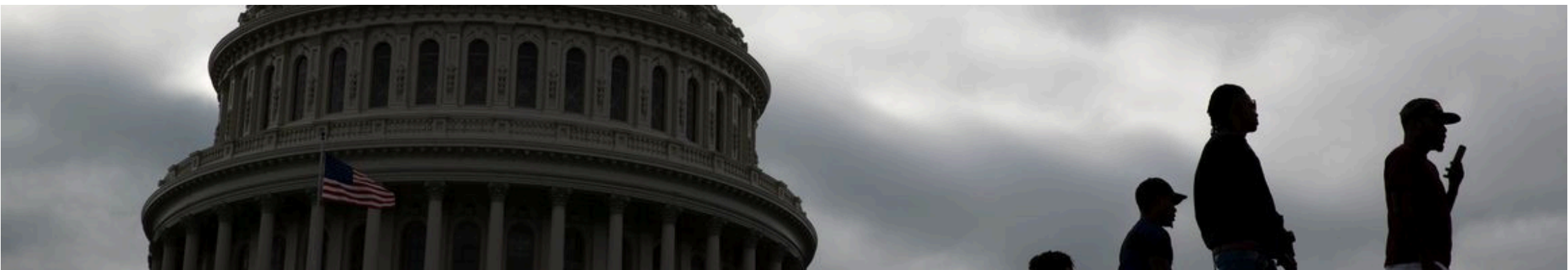
Set expectations in your position announcement. Sample language:

> *Thank you for your interest in our internship program.*
>
> *Throughout the public health crisis, the congressman's office has based its policies on ensuring the health and safety of both our staff and the Capitol staff, while continuing to serve constituents of X district and provide educational experiences.*
>
> *Internship duties in our office are part of the necessary work of the office, so we will certainly take on fall interns. Whether these will be in-person, remote, or some combination thereof depends upon the national and local health situation, which is continually developing. At the moment, our summer interns are working remotely.*
>
> *Applications for fall internships are due July 31st. While we anticipate having a clearer picture of our fall program to convey during the interview process, we understand that the logistics of travel and lodging are more difficult during this time. As such, we anticipate varied internship plans according to students' circumstances.*

Note: It's great to include as much information as possible even if you don't have exact answers. This is a stressful time for everyone, including students with very limited information about their fall situations, so the more clarity they can get, the better. It is also important to post whether internships are unpaid, or exactly how much they are paid, online before students apply! This type of transparency is better for diversity recruiting.

Adjust your interview questions to address the current situation:

- ***How do you prefer to be managed?***
- ***How would you describe your communication style? How often are you in contact with your peers and supervisors?***
- ***What challenges and advantages do you foresee for working from home?***
- ***How do you keep yourself engaged in your work and manage your mental health?***
- ***Do you have any experience coding? (backgrounds in computer science and experience with coding or even spreadsheet/data management can be great for revamping outdated office systems)***



Intern Training, Networking, Assignments and Utilization

House Paid Internship Program Regulations and Intern Telework Policy Dear Colleague:

The Committee on House Administration (Committee) has approved new regulations governing paid interns in the House. When the House Paid Internship Program (Program) was created in 2019, the Committee adopted interim regulations and said that it would review and assess the regulations after the Program's first year. The House also recently approved new funds for the Program. In addition, the unique circumstances regarding the coronavirus pandemic have necessitated adoption of a maximum telework posture for most House offices.

In light of these considerations, the Committee adopted new regulations, effective immediately, that include the following changes:

- Each office has a Program allowance of $25,000 per calendar year.
- Program funds may be used to pay interns who work in district offices.
- Paid interns are eligible to telework in the event of a disaster, pandemic, or other emergency, as part of an office's continuity of operations plan, provided the educational part of the internship is maintained, any work is incidental to said plan, and participation in the plan is certified by the office.
- House offices may issue paid interns House equipment (e.g. laptops, tablets, and mobile phones) which can be used to access the House network. This change is intended to permit paid interns to continue their internships even where their office may be using telework arrangements. This applies to all paid interns, whether they are paid from the Members' Representational Allowance, Program funds, or committee funds.

In light of the unique and unusual circumstances presented by the coronavirus, as well as to promote House office emergency preparedness in general, the Committee previously determined and announced that it is appropriate to permit Member and Committee offices to be able to access any remaining unspent LY 2019 funds to purchase teleworking equipment and supplies (e.g., laptops, tablets, cell phones, etc.). Offices may continue to use LY 2020 funds for this purpose, too. Paid interns may use such equipment for telework. Equipment is available for purchase from the House Office Supply Store, which you can reach at (202) 225-3321.

The core guiding principle of House internships remains the educational benefits for the intern. All interns, paid or unpaid, must perform services on a temporary basis as part of an educational plan. In prior Congresses, examples of an educational plan have included participation in the annual Intern Lecture Series, attendance at committee hearings, attendance at Congressional Research Service intern training programs, and other similar educational opportunities. Such in-person opportunities are limited at the present time. However, the Committee is working closely with its institutional partners and agencies to develop diverse and robust online educational programming. More information about that programming will be forthcoming.

The new regulations can be found on the Committee's website here. Unless specifically noted, all other applicable rules and standards of conduct remain unchanged. As noted in the Members' Congressional Handbook, the use of unpaid interns is subject to regulations established by the Committee on Ethics (Ethics).

Please contact the Committee at (202) 225-2061 (Majority) or (202) 225-8281 (Minority) with any questions. For questions regarding unpaid interns, please contact Ethics at (202) 225-7103.

Options for paying interns:

- Distribute the money evenly across all interns, even if it amounts to below the minimum wage. While some offices are choosing to forego the House intern pool money altogether, students would much prefer something rather than nothing.
- Create some need- or merit-based paid internships and some mostly unpaid, but pay everyone something so that everyone still qualifies to use government devices from home.
- Have some unpaid internships and one or two paid fellowships. Case study from Rep. Moulton's office: We created a foreign policy fellowship aimed at recruiting diverse candidates who would not otherwise be able to intern on the Hill. We determine financial need by requiring that they be Pell-grant eligible, which we determine by asking them for a FAFSA form.

Intern Training, Networking, Assignments and Utilization

Ideas for intern assignments:

- Take notes at virtual briefings
- Initial casework phone calls: having interns call back constituents and fill out a spreadsheet to get the starting amount of information to open a case for frequent types of casework such as unemployment
- Legislative research on background for letters or bills
- Drafting cosponsor requests for leg staffers
- Conduct research and create spreadsheets of other MOCs that might be supportive of certain policy issues your boss is interested in pursuing
- Redesigning systems for the office: reorganizing or reformatting old spreadsheets, cleaning up a shared Google Drive, revamping or creating a mail report/social media report/casework report, automating news or press clips (bonus points if you have an intern who knows how to code and can do something really creative)!
- Writing or rewriting an intern handbook
- Reaching out to your local Code for America brigade and see if there are projects to partner on in your district
- Write first drafts of form letters or direct constituent responses
- Create a resource guide of contacts or programs in your district for recruiting future interns (including as an effort to increase diversity)
- Draft a new "general response" form letter each week or every two weeks to send to constituents when there aren't enough messages in for a new form letter
- Have interns write internal newsletters for staff about current events or certain issue areas

Making internships engaging:

- Host regular intern meetings/check-ins
- Have interns present weekly fun powerpoints on topics of their choice, such as favorite movies
- Set up virtual team trivia or game nights between staff and interns
- Create an "intern and staff Facebook" document with pictures, backgrounds, and fun facts of team members to get to know one another
- Set up virtual coffees with other staffs or have remote meetings with other interns in your state
  Have both DC and DO staffers do "lunches" with interns and explain their roles
- Create more overlap between DC and DO responsibilities! This is a great opportunity to take advantage of the changing roles and greater collaboration between offices
- Allow interns to sit in on constituent meetings
- Encourage interns to visit Hill Happenings and attend briefings or hearings that interest them

Intern education, prep, and information:

College to Congress is a nonprofit aimed at supporting congressional interns. College to Congress recently launched C2C-U, a self-paced, online curriculum, mentorship program, and intern resource hub designed to help college students and recent graduates secure and succeed in internships on Capitol Hill. Lessons include Hill Etiquette, Roles & Responsibilities of a Hill Intern, Dressing for the Hill, and more. The course is free to all students and interns here.

POPVOX LegiDash provides a daily email for staffers that includes a list of Hill events (currently only virtual) and updates. A special version for virtual interns — with tips and invitations — will become available this fall. Invite your interns to sign up here: http://eepurl.com/g35FT5

Onboarding During WFH

Trainings

All trainings are still required for staff members while working from home. Below is a list of where to find the trainings and whether they are also required by interns.

Training	Required for	Contact	Link
2020 Ethics Training	All staff and interns	202-225-7103	https://housenet.house.gov/for-staff/responsibilities/ethics-training
Workplace Rights and Responsibilities (covers previous sexual harassment training)	All staff and interns		https://house.csod.com/LMS/catalog/Welcome.aspx?tab_page_id=-67&tab_id=-1
2020 Escape Hood Training (In Person, only required once per Congress)	All staff	202-225-9500	https://house.csod.com/samldefault.aspx?returnUrl=%252fDeepLink%252fProcessRedirect.aspx%253fmodule%253dlodetails%2526lo%253d589541
2020 Information Security Training	All staff and interns that have government devices	cybertraining@mail.house.gov	https://housenet.house.gov/for-staff/responsibilities/information-security-awareness-training

If fellows or interns do not have House devices, they can still take the required trainings above as long as they have an account with the Staff Academy. First, create House email address/AD credentials for them (which they can have even if they never actually use the email account). Then, create an account on her behalf as follows:

Select the appropriate link

- If you are a contractor, unpaid intern, or detailee, please create an account before accessing the Staff Academy website. (Accounts can only be created with a "@mail.house.gov" email address.)

- If you are a full-time employee of the House, but were hired less than a month ago, please create an account before accessing the Staff Academy website.

- If you are a full- or part-time employee of the House hired more than two weeks ago and you are not able to access your Congressional Staff Academy account, please confirm your account.

If the links above don't work, you can find them on the Staff Academy page on HouseNet. It can take up to three days for your account to be approved.

Congressional IDs

- Scan your form
- Have a staffer escort the person to the ID office so they can still enter the House building
- New ID office hours: Thursdays 9 AM - 1 PM, Cannon 122
- Contact information: idservices.inboundfax@mail.house.gov or 202-225-0239

Equipment Loan Contract example (not legally enforceable)

This contract is in reference to the loan of __a desktop computer__. The rental period for my Equipment is from __April 15, 2020,__ to _____. I understand that it is my responsibility to pick up or receive the Equipment, and to return it to the same location at the end of my rental period unless otherwise agreed by both parties. I agree to return the Equipment in the same condition that it was in on the day I rented it, normal wear and tear excepted.

I understand that there is no charge for the rental of the Equipment. However, in the event that the Equipment is lost or destroyed during my rental period, I agree to replace the Equipment at my own expense. Also, if the Equipment is damaged during my rental period, I agree to have the Equipment fixed or replaced.

Tours

Some examples of messages letting constituents know that tours are not currently available:

Requesting a new tour:

Unfortunately, at this time, we are unable to offer tours, as the Capitol, White House, FBI, Bureau of Engraving and Printing ,and US Treasury are all closed for tours. If you have any questions regarding your itinerary, please contact our office at _____. We encourage you to schedule a tour next time you visit Washington. If the tour sites are open at that time, we would be more than happy to schedule those for you.

Update on previously booked tour:

We know that you had tours that were originally scheduled for the next few days but, unfortunately, due to the coronavirus pandemic, all tours have been cancelled. Hopefully, once we are able to provide tours again, we can reschedule for a time that works for you. If you have any questions regarding your itinerary, please contact our office at _____.

Current status of when sites are reopening:

- Closed - US Capitol
- Closed - White House
- Closed - Treasury
- Closed - FBI
- Closed - BEP
- Closed - Supreme Court
- Closed - Washington Monument

Scheduling resource:

- TourTrackr is a digital tool that makes the tour management process easy. You can easily track each request and send automated itineraries. No more Excel or manual copy/paste itineraries emails!
- A great system compatible with IQ and Fireside21 for booking and tracking tours and conducting all related correspondence

Tour Contacts

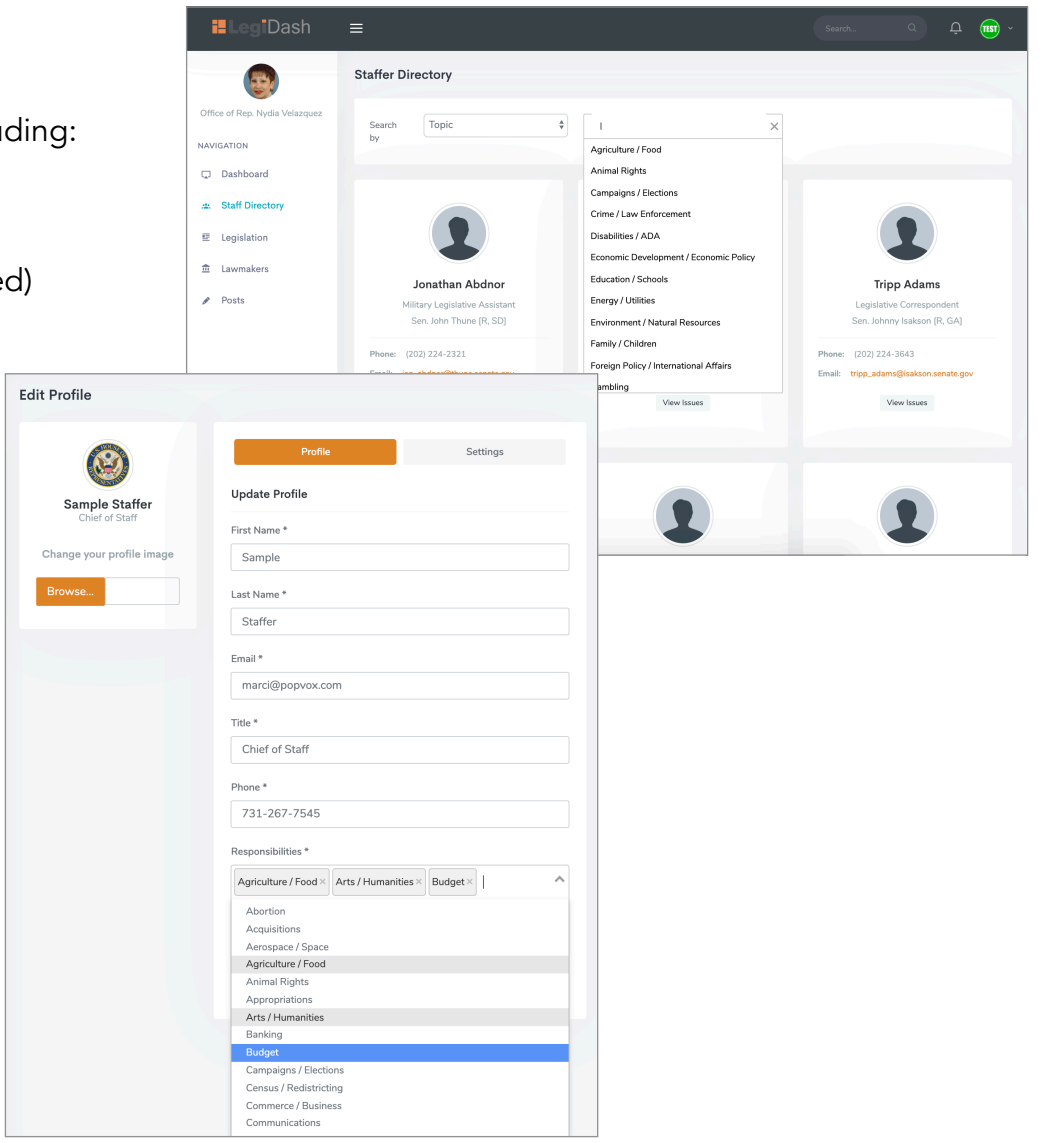
Organization	Contact
White House	Phone: 202-456-2322 Email: VisitorsOffice@who.eop.gov
US Capitol (USC)/ Dome tours	(202) 593-1762 (Capitol Tour Questions and Reservations) Accessibility Services: 202-224-4048 Congressional Liaisons: Beverly Ward – bward@aoc.gov 202-593-1782 Lee Ann Brackett (training) — lbracket@aoc.gov 202-593-0048
FBI	202-323-0367 FBITOURS@FBI.gov
BEP - Bureau of Engraving and Printing	Tour Office Phone: 202-874-2330 Toll free: 1-866-874-2330 Email: TourScheduler@bep.gov
US Treasury	202-622-0146 Monique Nelson Monique.Nelson@treasury.gov
Library of Congress	202-707-4683 (Constituent tours) congtours@loc.gov Congressional Liaison: Kathy Ott – kott@loc.gov 202-707-6577
Supreme Court	(202) 479-3499
State Department	(202)-647-3241 [Voice Mail]
The Pentagon	(703) 697-1776
Kennedy Center	202-416-8341
National Cathedral	(202) 537-5700 tours@cathedral.org
Smithsonians	202-633-5125
U.S. Botanic Garden (USBG)	Group Tours: 202-226-2055
National Archives	Chrissa Rich (202)-357-6816
National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC)	Kathleen Mead, meadk@si.edu yocomj@si.edu
Washington Monument	(202) 426-6841

Staying Connected

POPVOX / LegiDash provides a cloud-based toolbox for staffers, including:

- Calendar of Hill events (currently virtual only)
- Legislative Staff Directory (search by office, chamber, topics covered)
- Update your profile with current title and issues covered
- Daily newsletter

Activate your LegiDash account at this link.



Additional Resources

- Constituent mail guidance
- Flexible work arrangements and related things to consider (communications, expectations)
- Dealing with difficult constituents
- General intern management

Submit Feedback

If you would like to submit feedback on information listed in this guide, share resources or ideas that you would like included in future updates, or if you have problems or questions you would love addressed in future guides, please submit it here.

MODERNIZATION STAFF ASSOCIATION

The Modernization Staff Association (MSA) is a bipartisan group that focuses on internal reform issues that primarily affect junior Hill staffers. Our mission is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Congressional staff by modernizing systems that affect their day-to-day operations. For more information or to join, please contact Ananda Bhatia at ananda.bhatia@mail.house.gov or 703-728-4293.