

WHITE HOUSE OFFICE

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From popular culture to academia, the American presidency has long been a prominent fixture of the national imagination—naturally so since it is the beating heart of our nation’s power and prestige. It has played, for instance, a feature role in innumerable movies and television shows and has been prodded, analyzed, and critiqued by countless books, essays, and studies. But like nearly everything else in life, there is no substitute for firsthand experience, which this manual has compiled from the experience of presidential appointees and provides in accessible form for future use.

With respect to the presidency, it is best to begin with our Republic’s foundational document. The Constitution gives the “executive Power” to the President.¹ It designates him as “Commander in Chief”² and gives him the responsibility to “take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed.”³ It further prescribes that the President might seek the assistance of “the principal Officer in each of the executive Departments.”⁴ Beginning with George Washington, every President has been supported by some form of White House office consisting of direct staff officers as well as a Cabinet comprised of department and agency heads.

Since the inaugural Administration of the late 18th century, citizens have chosen to devote both their time and their talent to defending and strengthening our nation by serving at the pleasure of the President. Their shared patriotic endeavor has proven to be a noble one, not least because the jobs in what is now known as the White House Office (WHO) are among the most demanding in all of government.

The President must rely on the men and women appointed to the WHO. There simply are not enough hours in the day to manage the affairs of state single-handedly,

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so delegation is not just advisable: It is essential. The decisions that assistants and senior advisers make will directly impact the Administration, its legacy, and—most important—the fate of the country. Their agenda must therefore be the President’s agenda. Choosing who will carry out that agenda on a daily basis is not only one of the first decisions a President makes in office, but also one of the most critical. The tone and tempo of an administration are often determined on January 20.

CHIEF OF STAFF

As with most of the positions that will be covered in this first chapter, the Chief of Staff is also an Assistant to the President. However, the chief is truly first among equals. Of all presidential staff members, the chief is the most critical to implementation of the President’s vision for the country. The chief also has a dual role as manager of the staffs of both the WHO and the Executive Office of the President (EOP).⁵

The Chief of Staff’s first managerial task is to establish an organizational chart for the WHO. It should be simple and contain clear lines of authority and responsibility to avoid conflicts. It should also identify specific points of contact for each element of the government outside of the White House. These contacts should include the White House Liaisons who are selected by the Office of Presidential Personnel (PPO).

Receiving guidance from the President, the chief endeavors to implement the President’s agenda by setting priorities for the WHO. This process begins by taking stock of the President’s campaign promises, identifying current and prospective opportunities, and then delegating policy priorities among the departments and agencies of the Cabinet and throughout the three White House policy councils:

- The National Economic Council (NEC);
- The Domestic Policy Council (DPC); and
- The National Security Council (NSC).

The President is briefed on all of his policy priorities by his Cabinet and senior staff as directed by the chief. The chief—along with senior WHO staff—maps out the issues and themes that will be covered daily and weekly. The chief then works with the policy councils, the Cabinet, and the Office of Communications and Office of Legislative Affairs (OLA) to sequence and execute the rollout of policies and announcements. White House Counsel and senior advisers and senior counselors are also intimately involved.

All senior staff report to the Chief of Staff, either directly or through his two or three deputies, unless the President determines that a particular Assistant to the President reports directly to him. Most chiefs have interacted directly with

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Cabinet officers and a select number of direct reports. In most cases, the direct reports to the chief are his two or three deputies, the Communications Director, PPO Director, White House Counsel, and senior advisers. Occasionally, the Office of Public Liaison (OPL), the Cabinet Secretary, and Intergovernmental Affairs (IGA) also report directly to the chief. Usually, however, they report instead to a Deputy Chief of Staff.

The Chief of Staff's main challenge is time management. His use of his deputies, meetings with senior staff, and direction provided to the WHO must all balance with the daily needs of the President. A successful chief steers the West Wing using his management of and influence with the various individuals and entities around him. It goes without saying that selecting the right person to be chief is vital.

DEPUTY CHIEFS OF STAFF

In recent years, Presidents typically have appointed two Deputy Chiefs of Staff: a Deputy Chief of Staff for Management and Operations and a Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy. There also have been other types of deputy chiefs whose roles have included, for example, overseeing strategy, planning, and implementation. Chiefs of Staff have then occasionally appointed a principal Deputy Chief to be in charge of guiding decision-making, organizational structure, and information flow.

PRINCIPAL DEPUTY CHIEFS OF STAFF

Not all Chiefs of Staff have tapped a principal deputy. A major reason is that doing so adds another layer of command complexity. When principal deputies have been installed, their roles have varied based on the needs of particular chiefs.

Most principal deputies have functioned as doorkeepers, sorting through action items, taking on those that can be handled at their own level, and passing up others that truly require the attention of the Chief of Staff or the President. Principal deputies also have assumed control of the scheduling functions, normally under the operations deputy, and have worked directly with the policy councils at the direction of the Chief of Staff. The OPL and Office of Political Affairs (OPA) also have reported to a principal deputy.

Deputy Chief of Staff for Management and Operations. The Deputy Chief of Staff for Management and Operations oversees the President's schedule and all logistical aspects of his movement within and outside of the White House (for example, both air travel on Air Force One and Marine One and ground transportation). This deputy also interfaces directly with the Secret Service as well as the military offices tasked with keeping the President and his family safe.

In the past, this deputy has also worked with the NSC, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, and the Intelligence Community and on advancing all foreign trips. If their roles are separated from that of the policy deputy, this deputy should have a strong grasp of international affairs and robust foreign policy credentials.

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This deputy further manages all facets of the working White House: technology, grounds management, support staff, personnel administration, and communications. This individual therefore needs to be meticulous and ideally should possess a great deal of command-and-control experience.

Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy. In some Administrations, the functions of the IGA, OPA, and OPL and other advisers within the WHO have fallen under the Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy. For conservatives, this arrangement could help to connect the WHO's outreach to political and external groups and be a strong conduit for state and local elected officials, state party organizations, and both grasstop and grassroots groups.

This deputy chief works directly with the Chief of Staff, Cabinet officers, and all three policy councils to support the development and implementation of the President's agenda. This deputy chief should therefore have impressive policy credentials in the realms of economic, domestic, and social affairs.

SENIOR ADVISERS

Presidents have surrounded themselves with senior advisers whose experience and interests are not necessarily neatly defined. In recent Administrations, senior advisers have been appointed to offer broad guidance on political matters and communications issues; others have acted as "czars" for specific projects or policy areas.

The most powerful senior advisers frequently have had a long personal relationship with the President and often have spent a significant amount of time with him within and outside of the White House. They have been asked not only to provide guidance on a variety of policy issues, but also to offer instruction on communicating with the American people and the media.

In a number of Administrations, new offices—or "councils"—have been created to support senior advisers. For the most part, their functions have been duplicative or overlapping, as a result of which these offices have tended to be short-lived. Even so, senior advisers should be provided the staff and resources that their portfolios require. To ensure that senior advisers are effective, their portfolios must be clearly delineated and clearly communicated across the White House. This too is a responsibility of the Chief of Staff.

OFFICE OF WHITE HOUSE COUNSEL

The Office of White House Counsel provides legal guidance to the President and elements of the EOP on a host of issues, including presidential powers and privileges, ethics compliance, review of clemency applications, and judicial nominations. The selection of White House Counsel is one of the most important decisions an incoming President will make. The office is not designed to create or advance policies on its own initiative—nor should it do so. Rather, it is dedicated to guiding

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the President and his reports on how (within the bounds of the law) to pursue and realize the President's agenda.

While the White House Counsel does not serve as the President's personal attorney in nonofficial matters, it is almost impossible to delineate exactly where an issue is strictly personal and has no bearing on the President's official function. The White House Counsel needs to be deeply committed both to the President's agenda and to affording the President proactive counsel and zealous representation. That individual directly advises the President as he performs the duties of the office, and this requires a relationship that is built on trust, confidentiality, and candor.

The Office of White House Counsel is also responsible for ensuring that each component of the White House adheres to all applicable legal and ethical guidelines, which often requires ongoing training and monitoring to ensure compliance. This means ensuring that White House staff regularly consult with office attorneys on required financial disclosures, received gifts, potential conflicts of interest, and other ethical concerns. The Office of White House Counsel is the first line of defense for the EOP. Its staff must take seriously the duty to protect the powers and privileges of the President from encroachments by Congress, the judiciary, and the administrative components of departments and agencies.

In addition to the White House Counsel, the office includes deputies, assistants, associates, and legal support staff. The assistant and associate attorneys are often specialists in particular areas of the law and offer guidance to the EOP on issues related to national security, criminal law, environmental law, and a host of administrative and regulatory matters. Attorneys working in the Office of White House Counsel serve as legal advisers to the White House policy operation by reviewing executive orders, agency regulations, and other policy-related functions. Here again, subordinates should be deeply committed to the President's agenda and see their role as helping to accomplish the agenda through problem solving and advocacy. They should not erect roadblocks out of an abundance of caution; rather, they should offer practical legal advice on how to promote the President's agenda within the bounds of the law.

The White House Counsel's office cannot serve as a finishing school to credential the next set of white-shoe law firm attorneys or federal judges in waiting who cabin their opinions for fear their elite credentials could be tarnished through a policy disagreement. Rather, it should function more as an activist yet ethical plaintiffs' firm that advocates for its client—the Administration's agenda—within the limits imposed by the Constitution and the duties of the legal profession.

The Office of White House Counsel also serves as the primary gateway for communication between the White House and the Department of Justice (DOJ). Traditionally, both the White House Counsel and the Attorney General have issued a memo requiring all contact between the two institutions to occur only between the Office of White House Counsel and the Attorney General or Deputy Attorney

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General. The next Administration should reexamine this policy and determine whether it might be more efficient or more appropriate for communication to occur through additional channels. The White House Counsel also works closely with the DOJ Office of Legal Counsel to seek opinions on, for example, matters of policy development and the constitutionality of presidential power and privileges and with OLA and the DOJ Office of Legal Policy on presidential judicial nominees.

When a new President takes office, he will need to decide expeditiously how to handle any major ongoing litigation or other pending legal matters that might present a challenge to his agenda. To offer guidance, the White House Counsel must get up to speed as quickly as possible on all significant ongoing legal challenges across the executive branch that might affect the new Administration's policy agenda and must be prepared at the outset of the Administration to present recommendations to the President, including recommendations for reconsidering or reversing positions of the previous Administration in any significant litigation. This review will usually require consulting with the new political leadership at the Justice Department, including during the transition period.

No day is predictable at the White House. Therefore, to handle the pace and volatility of affairs, the Office of White House Counsel must offer measured legal guidance in a timely manner. This often means forgoing law review-style memos about esoteric legal concepts and instead quickly providing high-level yet incisive guidance. Due to evolving world events, domestic affairs, and political pressures, the office often faces legal questions for which there may not be a wealth of precedent. Attorneys in the Office of White House Counsel must therefore work collaboratively within the White House and the Department of Justice, relying on each other as a team, to ensure that proper legal guidance is delivered to the President.

The President should choose a White House Counsel who is well-versed in the Constitution, administrative and regulatory law, and the inner workings of Congress and the political process. Instead of choosing a specialist, the President should hire a counsel with extensive experience with a wide range of complex legal subjects. Moreover, while a candidate with elite credentials might seem ideal, the best one will be above all loyal to the President and the Constitution.

STAFF SECRETARY

The Office of the Staff Secretary is rarely visible to the outside world, but it performs work of tremendous importance. The office is similar to a military commander's adjutant as it is responsible for fielding and managing a vast amount of information at the top of its organization. This includes information on its way into the Oval Office as well as information flowing out from the Oval Office. Because of its gatekeeping function, the position of Staff Secretary is one of extreme trust, and the individual who possesses it should be vetted to work as an "honest broker" in the President's service.

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The Office of the Staff Secretary has been described as the last substantive control point before papers reach the Oval Office. A great deal of information is headed toward the Oval Office at any moment. This includes presidential decision memos; bills passed by Congress (which may be accompanied by signing or veto statements); and briefing books, reading materials, samples of constituent mail, personal mail, and drafts of speeches. The Staff Secretary makes certain that these materials are complete, well-ordered, and up to date before they reach the President. This necessarily means that the Staff Secretary plays a key role in determining who weighs in on policy matters and when.

As noted above, the Staff Secretary also handles information leaving the Oval Office. The President may have questions after reviewing incoming material, may wish to seek more information, or may demand revisions. The Staff Secretary is often responsible for directing these requests to the appropriate places and following up on them to ensure that they are completed.

One of the Staff Secretary's critical functions is managing and overseeing the clearance process for the President's daily/nightly briefing book. This book is filled with all the reading material and leading documentation the President needs in the morning and the evening to help him make decisions. The Staff Secretary also oversees the use of the President's signature, whether by hand or by autopen, and manages the Office of the Executive Clerk, Office of Records Management, and Office of Presidential Correspondence.

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

The Office of Communications, which operates under the Director of Communications, conveys the President's agenda to the public through various media, including speeches and remarks, press briefings, off-the-record discussions with reporters, and social media. Depending on how a President chooses to structure his White House, the Office of Communications may include the Office of the Press Secretary (Press Office), but no matter how it is structured, the office must work closely with the Press Office as well as the President's speechwriters and digital strategists.

Operational functions of the Office of Communications include scheduling and running press briefings, interviews, meetings, media appearances, speeches, and a range of other events. The Office of Communications must maintain robust relationships with the White House Press Corps, the White House Correspondents' Association, regional stakeholders, and key interest groups. No legal entitlement exists for the provision of permanent space for media on the White House campus, and the next Administration should reexamine the balance between media demands and space constraints on the White House premises.

Leadership within the Office of Communications should include a Communications Director (who is a direct report to the Chief of Staff), a Deputy

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Communications Director, a Deputy Director for Strategic Communications, and a Press Secretary. This leadership team must work together closely to drive the national narrative about the White House.

The best resource for the Office of Communications is the President. The President conveys the White House's overall message through one or two inaugural addresses, State of the Union addresses, speeches to Congress, and press conferences. The office must also ensure that the various White House offices disseminate a unified message to the public. The Communications Director and Press Secretary in particular should be careful to avoid contradicting the President or delivering conflicting information.

The speechwriting team is a critical component of the communications team. Speechwriting is a unique talent: The writers selected must understand policy, should have a firm grasp of history and other liberal-arts disciplines, and should be able to learn and adopt the President's style of rhetoric and mode of delivery.

The Press Secretary is the President's spokesperson, communicating to the American people through the media. The Press Secretary engages with the White House Press Corps formally through press briefings and informally through impromptu gaggles and meetings. Individuals who serve in this role must be quick on their feet, which means, when appropriate, deftly refuting and rebutting correspondents' questions and comments.

The Communications Director must convey the President's mission to the American people. Especially for conservatives, this means navigating the mainstream media to ensure that the President's agenda is conveyed effectively and accurately. The Communications Director must be politically savvy and very aware of the ongoing activities of the other White House offices. The new Administration should examine the nature of the relationship between itself and the White House Correspondents Association and consider whether an alternative coordinating body might be more suitable.

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS (OLA)

Created by President Dwight Eisenhower, the OLA has continued to serve as the liaison between the White House and Congress. The White House must work with congressional leaders to ensure presidential nominees, for roles such as Cabinet secretaries and ambassadors, are confirmed by the Senate. The White House also relies on Congress to enact reforms promised by the President on the campaign trail, whether those promises relate to health care, education, or national defense. Because Congress holds the power of the purse, White House staffers must ensure that there is enough support on the Hill to secure the necessary funding through the appropriations process to fulfill the President's agenda.

The OLA reports directly to the Chief of Staff and in some Administrations has done so under the guidance of a Deputy Chief of Staff (usually the Deputy Chief

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for Policy). Regardless of the person to whom the OLA reports, however, the office exercises a certain autonomy on behalf of the President and the Chief of Staff in directly influencing congressional leaders of both major political parties. The OLA often must function as the mediator among the parties and find common ground to facilitate the successful enactment of the President's agenda.

As is the case with many White House offices (but especially the Office of Communications), the OLA must ensure that congressional leaders receive one unified message. If other actors within the White House maintain their own relationships with congressional leaders and staffers, it may appear that the President's agenda is fractured and lacks consensus. This dynamic has caused real problems for many Presidents in the past.

Internally, OLA staffers need to be involved in policy discussions, budget reviews, and other important meetings. They must also provide advice to policy staffers regarding whether certain ideas are politically feasible. Externally, OLA staffers have to communicate continuously with congressional offices of both parties in both the House and the Senate to ensure that the President has enough support to enact his legislative priorities or sustain votes.

The OLA requires staffers who are effective communicators and can provide a dose of reality to other White House staffers when necessary. Although a policy proposal from within the White House may be a great idea, OLA staffers must ensure that it is politically feasible. OLA staffers must therefore be skilled in both politics and policy. Furthermore, the President should seek out individuals who can advance his agenda and at the same time forge pathways with members of the opposing political party on other priorities.

Most important, the OLA must function as a well-oiled machine: precisely synced. The President cannot afford to have a tennis player on—much less as the leader of—his football team.

OFFICE OF PRESIDENTIAL PERSONNEL (PPO)

The political axiom that “personnel is policy” was popularized under President Ronald Reagan during the 1981 presidential transition. One of the most important offices in the White House is the PPO, which was created under President Richard Nixon to centralize political appointments. Departments and agencies had and still have direct legal authority on hiring and firing, but the power to fill Schedule C positions—the core of political jobs—is vested with the President. Therefore, the White House, not the department or agency, has the final word on political appointments.

PPO's primary responsibility is to staff the executive branch with individuals who are equipped to implement the President's agenda. Although its focus should be identifying and recruiting leaders to fill the approximately 1,000 appointments that require Senate confirmation, PPO must also fill approximately 3,000 political jobs that require dedicated conservatives to support the Administration's political leadership.

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Frequently, many medium-tier and top-tier jobs have been filled by policy experts tasked with accomplishing much of the work of the Administration. At the same time, appointees in the entry-level jobs have brought invaluable energy and commitment to the White House and have proved to be the “farm team” for the conservative movement.

The Office of Presidential Personnel is responsible for:

- Identifying potential political personnel both actively through recruitment and passively by fielding resumes and adjudicating requests from political actors.
- Vetting potential political personnel by conducting political background checks and reviewing any clearance and fitness assessments by departments and agencies.
- Making recommendations to the President and to other appointment authorities on behalf of the President.
- Identifying programmatic political workforce needs early and developing plans (for example, Schedule F).
- Maintaining a strong relationship with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) both for operational purposes and to effectuate the President’s direct Title 5 authorities. The President is in charge of the federal workforce and exercises control principally by working through the Director of the Office of Personnel Management.
- Training and connecting political personnel.
- Playing “bad cop” in a way that other White House offices cannot (including serving as the office that takes direct responsibility for firings and hirings).
- Serving as a personnel link between conservative organizations and the executive branch.

In most Administrations, PPO will staff more than 100 positions during a transition and thousands of noncareer positions during the President’s first term. Direct authority and a strong relationship with the President are necessary attributes for any PPO Director. Historically, PPO has had direct review and control of personnel files, including security clearance dossiers.

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At the highest level, PPO is tasked with long-term, strategic workforce development. The “billets” of political appointments are of immense importance in credentialing and training future leaders. In addition, whatever one’s view of the constitutionality of various civil service rules (for example, the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998⁶) might be, it is necessary to ensure that departments and agencies have robust cadres of political staff just below senior levels in the event of unexpected vacancies.

OFFICE OF POLITICAL AFFAIRS (OPA)

The OPA is the primary office within the executive branch for managing the President’s political interests. Although its specific functions vary from Administration to Administration, the OPA typically serves as the liaison between the President and associated political entities: national committees, federal and state campaigns, and interest groups. Within legal guidelines, the OPA engages in outreach, conducts casework, and—if the President is up for reelection—assists with his campaign. The OPA may also monitor congressional campaigns, arrange presidential visits with other political campaigns, and recommend campaign staff to the Office of Presidential Personnel for service in the executive branch.

The OPA further serves as a line of communication between the White House and the President’s political party. This includes both relaying the President’s ambitions to political interests and listening to the needs of political interests. This relationship allows for the exchange of information between the White House and political actors across the country. The OPA should have one director of political affairs who reports either to the Chief of Staff or to a Deputy Chief of Staff. The OPA should also include various deputy directors, each of whom is responsible for a certain geographical region of the country.

Because nearly all White House activities are in some way inherently political, the OPA needs to be aware of all presidential actions and activities—including travel, policy decisions, speeches, nominations, and responses to matters of national security—and consider how they might affect the President’s image. The OPA must therefore have a designated staffer who communicates not only with other White House offices, but also with the Cabinet and executive branch agencies.

OFFICE OF CABINET AFFAIRS (OCA)

The OCA’s role has changed to some degree over the course of various Administrations, but its overriding function remains the same: to ensure the coordination of policy and communication between the White House and the Cabinet. Most important, the OCA coordinates all Cabinet meetings with the President. It should also organize and administer regular meetings of the Deputy Secretaries because they also typically serve vital roles in the departments and agencies and, further, often become acting secretaries when Cabinet members resign.

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There should be one Cabinet Secretary who reports to the Chief of Staff's office, either directly or through a deputy chief, according to the chief's preference and focus. The Cabinet Secretary maintains a direct relationship with all members of the Cabinet.

The OCA further consists of deputies and special assistants who work with each department's principal, Deputy Secretary, Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and other senior staff. The OCA also connects the departments to WHO offices.

The OCA coordinates with the Chief of Staff's office and the Office of Communications to promote the President's agenda through the Cabinet departments and agencies. The Cabinet's communications staffers are obviously another critical component of this operation.

In prior Administrations, the OCA has played a vital role by tracking the President's agenda for the Chief of Staff, Deputy Chiefs, and senior advisers. It has worked with each department and agency to advance policy priorities. In the future, amplifying this function would truly benefit both the President and the conservative movement.

From time to time throughout an Administration, travel optics, ethics challenges, and Hatch Act⁷ issues involving Cabinet members, deputies, and senior staffers can arise. The OCA is normally tasked with keeping the WHO informed of such developments and providing support if and when necessary.

The ideal Cabinet Secretary will have exceptional organizational skills and be a seasoned political operative or attorney. Because many Cabinet officials have been former presidential candidates, governors, ambassadors, and Members of Congress, the ideal candidate should also possess the ability to interact with and persuade accomplished individuals.

OFFICE OF PUBLIC LIAISON (OPL)

The OPL is critically important in building coalitions and support for the President's agenda across every aligned social, faith-based, minority, and economic interest group. It is a critical tool for shaping public opinion and keeping myriad supporters, as well as "frenemies" and opponents alike who are within reach, better informed.

The OPL is a notably large office. It should have one Director who reports to the Chief of Staff's office, either directly or through a deputy, according to the chief's preference and focus. The Director must maintain relationships not only with other WHO heads, but also with the senior staff of every Cabinet department and agency. Since a President's agenda is always in motion, it is important for the OPL to facilitate listening sessions to receive the views of the various leaders and members of key interest groups.

The OPL should also have a sufficient number of deputies and special assistants to cover the vast number of disparate interest groups that are engaged daily. The

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OPL has, by far, held more meetings in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building (EEOB) and within the West Wing itself than any other office within the WHO.

The OPL is the chief White House enforcer and gatekeeper among these various interest groups. It has operated best whenever the Chief of Staff has given it permission to use both the proverbial “carrot” and the proverbial “stick.” To make this work, communication with the chief’s office is vital. Additionally, the OPL has had an outsized role in presidential scheduling and both official and political travel.

The OPL Director should come from the President’s election campaign or Capitol Hill—but should not have deeply entrenched connections to a K Street entity or any other potential stakeholder. Some prior relationships can create real or perceived biases toward one group or another. The Director should be amiable, gregarious, highly organized, and willing to shoulder criticism and pushback from interest groups and other elements of the Administration.

Unlike the Director, OPL deputies and special assistants need a deep understanding of the capital, from K Street to Capitol Hill. They should have extensive experience in private industry, the labor sector, the conservative movement, and among the specific interest groups with which they will be asked to engage on behalf of the White House.

OPL staffers work with more external and internal parties than any other WHO staffers. In turn, they must be effective communicators and initiative-takers. They must also be able to influence, persuade, and—most important—listen to various stakeholders and ensure that they feel heard. All OPL staffers must understand from the outset that their jobs might be modified or even phased out entirely as the Administration’s priorities change.

OFFICE OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS (IGA)

The IGA connects the White House to state, county, local, and tribal governments. In other words, it is the one-stop shop for disseminating an Administration’s agenda to all non-federal government entities.

The IGA should have a Director to whom one or two Deputy Directors report. The Director must ensure that the White House remains connected to all non-federal government entities. The interests and perspectives of these entities are represented in policy discussions, organized events with the West Wing, EOP senior staff, and IGA staff throughout the departments and agencies.

The IGA can be staffed in a variety of ways, but two arrangements are most common:

- Each deputy and that deputy’s staffers are responsible for a type of government.
- A group of staffers is responsible for a specific geographical region of the country.

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The IGA, as suggested above, represents the interests and perspectives of non-federal government entities, but its primary job is to make sure that these entities understand an Administration's agenda and ultimately support it.

The IGA must work with all other White House offices, especially the OPA and the OPL, and manage its staff throughout the departments and agencies. IGA staffers must therefore have communication skills, understand political nuance, and be willing to engage in complex policy discussions. They should also be not just generally responsive, but also proactive in seeking out the interests and perspectives of non-federal government entities.

WHITE HOUSE POLICY COUNCILS

As the federal government has ballooned in size over the past century, it has become increasingly difficult for the President alone to direct his agenda across the executive branch. Three White House policy councils have come into existence to help the President to control the bureaucracy and ensure continued alignment between agency leadership and White House priorities. Those councils—as previewed above—are the NSC, NEC, and DPC. Each is headed by an Assistant to the President and performs three significant functions.

- **Policy Coordination.** The primary role of the policy councils is to coordinate the development of Administration policy. This frequently includes developing significant legislative priorities, coordinating policy decisions that impact multiple departments and agencies, and at times coordinating policy decisions within a single department or agency. This process must ensure that all relevant offices are included; that competing or conflicting opinions are thoroughly discussed and evaluated; and, when there is disagreement among White House senior staff or among Cabinet members, a well-structured question is presented to the President for an intermediate or final decision.
- **Policy Advice.** By virtue of working in the White House, the heads of the three policy councils will also function as independent policy advisers to the President. This aspect of the role will vary depending on the individual in this position and the President's governing philosophy. Incumbents have ranged from "honest brokers," who mostly coordinate and ensure that all opinions are fairly presented to the President, to "policy deciders," who largely drive a given policy topic on behalf of the President.
- **Policy Implementation.** The policy councils also manage and mediate the implementation of previous policy decisions. Implementation of a new statute or an executive order frequently takes years and involves many

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distinct and more granular policy decisions along the way. It is essential to have a centralized process for evaluating and coordinating these decisions, especially if they involve more than one Cabinet department or agency with differing opinions on the best approach for securing the President's goals.

The above functions have recently been managed by policy councils through a tiered interagency policy process. This process helps to identify differences of opinion and reach a decision without having to take every issue to the President. It can be used to address a single question or monitor a recurring issue on an ongoing basis. Typically, the process involves multiple Cabinet departments and agencies that have a pertinent role, policy interest, or disagreement. Each policy council's process could involve the following committees:

- **Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC).** A PCC is led by a Special Assistant to the President from the policy council and includes political Assistant Secretary-level experts from the relevant departments, agencies, or offices. The purpose is to determine where consensus exists, clearly identify where there are differing opinions, and develop options for resolving the remaining questions. If no outstanding questions or disagreements exist, the PCC may resolve the issue and move toward implementation at the agency level.
- **Deputies Committee (DC).** A DC is a meeting of presidentially appointed executives chaired by the policy council's Deputy Assistant to the President and relevant Deputy Secretaries. It evaluates the options produced by the PCC and frequently directs the PCC to add, expand, or reevaluate an option or even to reach a compromise and resolve an issue at that level.
- **Principals Committee (PC).** When questions are not resolved by a DC, the Director of the Policy Council will chair a PC, which is attended by the relevant Cabinet Secretaries and senior White House political staff. This is the final opportunity for the President's most senior advisers to discuss the question, make sure that each principal's position is carefully understood, and see whether consensus or a compromise might be reached. If not, the Chief of Staff's office will schedule time for the PC to meet with the President for a final decision.

Despite having seemingly clear and separate portfolios, the three policy councils frequently have areas of overlap, which can result in confusion, duplication, or conflict. For example, there are the areas of immigration and border security

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(either NSC or DPC); health care, energy, and environment (either NEC or DPC); and trade and international economic policy (either NSC or NEC). Identifying these potentially problematic areas and assigning policy responsibilities to only one council where possible will help to speed up the policy-coordination process.

While other chapters will cover specific policy goals for each department or agency, incoming policy councils will need to move rapidly to lead policy processes around cross-cutting agency topics, including countering China, enforcing immigration laws, reversing regulatory policies in order to promote energy production, combating the Left's aggressive attacks on life and religious liberty, and confronting "wokeism" throughout the federal government.

National Security Council. The NSC is intended to be an interdepartmental body within the White House that can set national security policy with a whole-of-government approach. Unlike the other policy councils, the NSC was established by statute.⁸ Statutory members and advisers who are currently part of the NSC include the President and Vice President; the Secretaries of State, Defense, and Energy; the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and the Director of National Intelligence.⁹

The NSC staff, and particularly the National Security Adviser, should be vetted for foreign and security policy experience and insight. The National Security Adviser and NSC staff advise the President on matters of foreign policy and national security, serve as an information conduit in times of crisis, and as liaisons ensuring that written communications are properly shared among NSC members.

Special attention should be given to the use of detailees to staff the NSC. In recent years, the NSC's staff size has been rightsized from its peak of 400 in 2015 down to 100–150 professional members. The next Administration should try to limit the number of detailees to ensure more direct presidential control.

National Economic Council. The NEC was established in 1993 by executive order and has four key functions:

- To "coordinate the economic policy-making process with respect to domestic and international economic issues."
- To "coordinate economic policy advice to the President."
- To "ensure that policy decisions and programs are consistent with the President's stated goals" and "that those goals are being effectively pursued."
- To "monitor implementation of the President's economic policy agenda."¹⁰

The NEC Director coordinates and implements the President's economic policy objectives by working with Cabinet secretaries, their departments, and multiple

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agencies. The Director is supported by a staff of policy experts in various fields, including infrastructure, manufacturing, research and development, agriculture, small business, financial regulation, housing, technology and innovation, and fiscal policy.

The NEC considers economic policy matters, and the DPC typically considers anything related to domestic matters with the exception of economic policy matters. It also differs from the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA). Whereas the NEC is in charge of policy development, the CEA acts as the White House's internal research arm for economic analysis.

It is therefore critically important to find people with the right qualifications to head both the NEC and the CEA. The CEA is almost always led by a well-known academic economist, and the NEC is regularly led by someone with expertise in directing the President's economic policy process. Those who have served in the role have ranged from former CEOs of the nation's largest investment firms to financial-services industry managers to seasoned congressional staffers who have managed the economic policy issues for top financial and tax-writing committees.

Domestic Policy Council. The Domestic Policy Council (DPC) consists of advisers to the President on noneconomic domestic policy issues as well as international issues with a significant domestic component (such as immigration). It is one of the primary policy councils serving the President along with the NSC and NEC. The Director serves as the principal DPC adviser to the President, along with members of the Cabinet, and the Deputy Director chairs the committee responsible for coordinating domestic policy development at the Deputy Secretary level. In this respect, both the Director and the Deputy Director have critical institutional functions that affect the development of domestic policy throughout the Administration.

The DPC also has policy experts (for example, Special Assistants to the President or SAPs) who are responsible for developing and coordinating, as well as for advising the President, on specific issues. It is essential that DPC policy expertise reflect the most prominent issues that are before the Administration: issues such as the environment, health care, housing, and immigration. In addition, DPC SAPs should demonstrate a working knowledge of the rulemaking process (although they need not necessarily be experts on regulation) because a working knowledge of the rulemaking process will facilitate the DPC's effectiveness in coordinating Administration policy.

The DPC also needs to work closely with other offices within the Executive Office of the President to promote economic opportunity and private-sector innovation. This includes working with the Office of Management and Budget and its Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs as well as the Council of Economic Advisers, Council on Environmental Quality, and Office of Science and Technology

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Policy. To this end, the Director should chair a standing meeting with the principals from each of the other EOP offices to enhance coordination from within the White House.

Several areas will be especially important as the DPC works to develop a well-defined domestic policy agenda. One is the promotion of innovation as a foundation for economic growth and opportunity. The President should establish an economic opportunity working group, chaired by the DPC Director, to coordinate the development of policies that promote economic opportunity. Another important area is the promotion of health care reform to bring down costs for the American people and the pressure that spending on health programs puts on the federal budget. Finally, DPC should coordinate with the NSC on a policy agenda to enhance border security.

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT (OVP)

In modern U.S. history, the Vice President has acted as a significant adviser to the President. Once elected, the VP helps to promote and, in many instances, put into place and execute the President's agenda. The President may additionally determine the inclusion of OVP staff in White House meetings, including Policy Coordinating Committee, Deputies Committee, and Principals Committee discussions as has been done in various recent Administrations.

Recent Presidents have decided to give Vice Presidents space in the West Wing. The VP's proximity to the President—as well as to the Chief of Staff and additional senior advisers—makes his or her role a powerful one within the West Wing.

Presidents typically tap VPs to lead various Administration efforts. These efforts have included serving on the NSC Principals Committee, heading the National Space Council, addressing immigration and border issues, leading the response to health care crises, and supervising workforce programs. VPs traditionally also spearhead projects of personal interest that have been authorized by the President.

The VP is also charged with breaking tie votes in the Senate and in recent years has served abroad as a brand ambassador for the White House and more broadly the United States, announcing Administration priorities and coordinating with heads of state and other top foreign government officials. The Vice President, as President of the Senate, could be a President's emissary to the Senate.

OFFICE OF THE FIRST LADY/FIRST GENTLEMAN

The First Lady or First Gentleman plays an interesting role in the formation, implementation, and execution of policy in concert with the President. Active and interested first spouses often champion a select number of signature issues, whether they be thorny social issues or deeper policy issues. One advantage of the first spouse's taking on hot-button social issues is that any political backlash will be less severe than it would be for the President.

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The first spouse normally appoints a chief of staff who has enough assistants to support the spouse's activities in the East Wing of the White House. This group works exclusively with the first spouse and senior members of the White House along with EOP personnel to implement and execute the first spouse's priorities, which reflect the first spouse's passions and interests and are often identified as important in discussions with the President. Executed well, they can be strategically useful in accelerating the Administration's agenda. Past East Wing initiatives have focused on such issues as combating bullying, fighting drug abuse, promoting literacy, and encouraging physical education for young adults and children.

The first spouse is afforded significant resources. His or her staff also works with the President's policy team, members of the Cabinet, and other EOP staff.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The preparation of this chapter was a collective enterprise of individuals involved in the 2025 Presidential Transition Project. All contributors to this chapter are listed at the front of this volume, but Edwin Meese III, Donald Devine, Ambassador Andrew Bremberg, and Jonathan Bronitsky deserve special mention. The author alone assumes responsibility for the content of this chapter, and no views expressed herein should be attributed to any other individual.

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ENDNOTES

1. U.S. Constitution, art. II, § 1, <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/article-2/> (accessed February 14, 2023).
2. U.S. Constitution, art. II, § 2.
3. U.S. Constitution, art. II, § 3.
4. U.S. Constitution, art. II, § 2.
5. See Chapter 2, “Executive Office of the President,” *infra*.
6. H.R. 4328, Omnibus Consolidated and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1999, Public Law No. 105-277, 105th Congress, October 21, 1998, Division C, Title I, § 151, <https://www.congress.gov/105/plaws/publ277/PLAW-105publ277.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2023).
7. S. 1871, An Act to Prevent Pernicious Political Activities, Public Law No. 76-252, 76th Congress, August 2, 1939, <https://govtrackus.s3.amazonaws.com/legislink/pdf/stat/53/STATUTE-53-Pg1147.pdf> (accessed March 7, 2023).
8. S. 758, National Security Act of 1947, Public Law No. 80-253, 80th Congress, July 26, 1947, <https://govtrackus.s3.amazonaws.com/legislink/pdf/stat/61/STATUTE-61-Pg495.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2023). “The National Security Council was established by the National Security Act of 1947 (PL 235 – 61 Stat. 496; U.S.C. 402), amended by the National Security Act Amendments of 1949 (63 Stat. 579; 50 U.S.C. 401 et seq.). Later in 1949, as part of the Reorganization Plan, the Council was placed in the Executive Office of the President.” The White House, “National Security Council,” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/> (accessed February 15, 2023).
9. See Chapter 2, “Executive Office of the President,” *infra*.
10. President William J. Clinton, Executive Order 12835, “Establishment of the National Economic Council,” January 25, 1993, in *Federal Register*, Vol. 58, No. 16 (January 27, 1993), pp. 6189–6190, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1993-01-27/pdf/FR-1993-01-27.pdf> (accessed March 7, 2023).