



Getting good public interest jobs

Public interest jobs are jobs that are involved with what are generally nonprofit groups to address particular issues. For example, child welfare, poverty, and advocacy in a variety of areas can all involve [public interest employment](#).

One of the most visible jobs in public interest employment is [public interest law employment](#). Those who work in [public interest law internships](#) or as lawyers work to help particular groups focus on specific issues. Public interest internships are available in a number of ways and can have different duties, too. In fact, many of these public interest organizations have small paid staffs so that volunteer or public interest internships and public interest legal internships can help them flesh out the paid staff they have, including legal representation. Many of these organizations are funded through public funding, donations or grants.

Public interest organizations usually have as their focus either policy objectives that they deal with or with specific clients. For example, there are public interest organizations that deal with homelessness in specific areas such as New York. Another is the American Civil Liberties Union.

Just as important as the staff that works to further a group's causes, though, is the legal representation it has. Many public service lawyers do part of their work pro bono, or for people who can't afford to pay for legal representation. For particular groups, these lawyers can give advice, drop documents like wills or contracts, or represent clients in trials or proceedings.

If work is not pro bono, public interest legal internships may be one way legal help is attained. Lawyers with full degrees often are salaried and get paid by the government or the nonprofit organization they work for. In addition, lawyers may work on a consulting basis for public interest organizations such as the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) or other nonprofit organizations like Greenpeace.

In addition to working for "grassroots" organizations, public interest law employment may also deal with state, federal or local government agencies. These lawyers can prosecute criminals, work as magistrates or judges, or draft regulations so as to help implement laws. If you are interested in the

environment as a matter of public interest, for instance, you can work as a lawyer to protect environmental standards, and even work on prosecuting corporations that break environmental laws. Oftentimes, lawyers involved in environmental concerns are consulted when it comes to substantial real estate transactions whereby lenders and buyers don't want to inherit the cost of cleanup, should there be previous toxicity or pollution injunctions on a building site.

Training and education

Many positions in public interest, such as [public interest internships](#), do not require formal training or are done during the course of one's college education for field credit. Public interest legal internships, by the same token, provide low cost help to public interest organizations that may otherwise not have the money to retain legal help.

In other instances, a bachelor's degree or a high school diploma may be needed for certain public interest jobs. If someone becomes a public interest lawyer, of course in that case, one needs to have gone to law school, graduate, and passed the bar in his or her particular state.

If you intend to go to law school, you'll need a good score on the Law School Aptitude Test. Once you're in law school, coursework usually lasts three years and concentrates on areas such as criminal law, property law and contracts. In your second and third years of law school, you may be specializing in courses such as public service law, including family law, constitutional law and Workers' Compensation.

Getting [public interest law employment](#)

While you are in law school, you can work with attorneys who are already involved in public interest law with pro bono work. In fact, many government agencies and law firms are continually looking for law students and graduate students interested in such work. If you work for the government as a



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lawyer, you may be required to take appropriate civil service tests as needed, in addition to graduating from law school and passing the bar.

When you first graduate from law school, your public interest employment may begin with becoming a research assistant or a law clerk to lawyers who are more experienced in this area; judges, too, employ research assistants or law clerks. As you continue, you may become part of a team of lawyers that works in areas of public interest. As you continue you may also work for private law firms or remain in the areas of public interest to continue pursuing this particular line of work.

One of the fastest growing sectors of public interest law employment is in environmental law. This has become especially important because air pollution and landfill problems, as well as the larger problems of global warming has become of increasing concern. As someone involved in this type of public interest, you may work for public departments that specialize in environment law, or you may work for private firms that specialize in this way, too. Other lawyers work for the Environment Protection Agency or other federal, state or local agencies.

Job duties and situation

In addition to the regular job duties of an environmental or public service lawyer, you must also keep abreast of any changes in laws, court decisions, precedents that have

been set, and so on. Therefore, hours can be long and can sometimes be quite stressful.

Salary and outlook

Public interest employment in the law usually pays less than that in private practice. Those that work in environmental law earned quite a bit less than those in other specialties do. For example, the median salary for all lawyers is about \$90,000 a year, but it's only about \$77,000 year in environmental law. Nonetheless, this type of work is valuable and therefore the benefits are more than just monetary.

Conclusion

Public interest jobs can be had at every level and in every sector of the economy. Some public interest jobs are volunteer, while others are paid. Public interest law jobs, for example, to be had by those that go to law school, graduate and pass the bar. You may begin working in public interest jobs as a volunteer, move onto an internship, and then move on to paid work for a particular public interest group once you finish school and moving to your career as well. And these jobs don't pay as well as many others do, but for those that find this type of work rewarding, they can pay well enough to certainly be satisfying.

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