

YOU as a Public Interest Advocate

>>> ADVOCACY

“**Advocacy**” takes on a variety of meanings, but in general refers to the public support or action on the behalf of a certain issue in order to influence or create change.

Advocates are the people who work to promote, support and take action on these issues.

Unsurprisingly, **public interest advocates** work to protect the interests of the public, and in media and technology policy those issues include balanced copyright, patent reform, net neutrality, spectrum allocation, and others.

>>> HOW TO BUILD THE SKILLS NEEDED TO BE AN ADVOCATE

A successful public interest advocate must be a “jack-of-all-trades,” combining a broad set of skills while simultaneously serving as a constant, always-available resource for policymakers and their staff. For technology and communications policy, an educational background in **law, political**

science, communications, political communications, computer science, and various other fields plays an important role in providing necessary background knowledge, but there are also a number of skills essential to public interest advocacy that can be learned outside of the classroom.

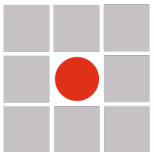
One of the key ways to build your public interest advocacy skills is through **on-the-job-training** via apprenticeships, internships, externships, fellowships, and entry-level positions at public interest advocacy

organizations. Working under experienced advocates and managers allows you to learn first hand tips and personal accounts from advocates, as well as to attend meetings, legislative hearings, monitor the policymaking process, etc. On-the-job-training facilitated by both the new advocate and an experienced supervisor allows new advocates to learn from what they see and hear, ask questions, experience how legal interpretation and procedural rules work in practice, and then take initiative to use this training to develop their public interest advocacy skills for the rest of their career.

On the other side of this resource page is a sample position description of a public interest advocate. Do you fit the qualifications? What skills or qualities are your strongest? What are your weakest? What skills could you develop during on-the-job-training?

Insider vs. Outsider Advocacy

Another important consideration when deciding to become a public interest advocate is whether you want to be an **insider** who works directly with government officials and policymakers in order build strong relationship through in-person meetings, consultations, and phone calls, or an **outsider** who focuses resources and energy on influencing the media and the public and work with “on-the-ground” grassroots advocates and tactics. Many public interest organizations have already chosen which side of the spectrum, or at what point between the spectrum, they want to occupy, so keep that in mind when looking at opportunities.



>>> **SAMPLE POSITION DESCRIPTION: PUBLIC INTEREST ADVOCATE** <<<

Goals: Customer Driven Work

A successful public advocate's efforts will be "customer driven" and mirror the public interest organization to promote and protect consumers' health, safety and pocketbooks. In general, a consumer advocate will be able to distill knowledge of an issue in a way that explains the problem and its solution (policy or market-based) in a manner that is understandable and makes sense to typical consumers. An advocate should be able to:

- *Develop a message about the issue that captures peoples' experiences and sensibilities*
- *Accurately characterize policy choices and the political environment*
- *Offer consumers a solution/proposal that they will agree with or at least understand and appreciate, even if they disagree with the value judgment*

Skills

In order to achieve maximum impact on public policy and help change markets on behalf of consumers, an effective advocate should have:

- *[Legal skills, and ability to digest and understand underlying legal documents as a prerequisite to strategic and policy planning] Strong analytical skills, including the ability to think quickly and devise legislative/political strategies to attain a projected outcome*
- *Strong understanding of marketplace trends and the political process, including regulatory and congressional procedures*
- *Substantive knowledge of and the ability to juggle multiple issues*
- *An ability to work with individuals, groups and organizations across the political spectrum and seek their input and/or cooperation a.k.a. the ability to be a team player*
- *Excellent communications skills, including the ability to translate complex ideas into understandable written and oral statements/messages to persuade/impact/inform others, including the public opinion leaders and the media*
- *An ability to conduct research and analyze data*

Measuring Success

Specific legislative and regulatory progress or victories (amendments/bills moved, testimony provided and filings offered) and/or measurable marketplace change clearly demonstrate success. [Demonstrate] quantifiable metrics such as: number of visits to and contacts with policymakers' offices, number of letters or similar written communications drafted on an issue, and number of news releases issued or news outreach efforts.

However, a winning endgame – bringing about positive change for consumers – is likely to be achieved through a combination of activities. Traditional advocacy efforts where we express our views in letters to policymakers or press releases are important, but very often are not nearly as important as the strategic relationships an advocate forges with key policymakers, leaders of other groups, and members of the press. Great emphasis will be placed on determining an advocate's ability to demonstrate progress in building these "quality" relationships. Therefore, each advocate should be prepared to report annually on the number of close relations developed with:

- *Key legislators and their staffs*
- *Members of non-profit organizations, including grassroots organizations*
- *Other potential allies, including industry*
- *Key members of the press*