



COMPLIANCE @ WORK

advancing workplace rights, safety & health, and accessibility in the legislative branch



DID YOU KNOW?

- In addition to what your employing office provides, in-person and online resources geared specifically to legislative branch employees are available at:

[Office of Compliance](#)

[Congressional Management Foundation](#)

- Newly-hired executive branch employees receive training in 10 areas including discrimination. (See details about their [requirements](#).)
- Designed for both employees and managers, some free training is available at the [Human Resources Career Development Center](#). Courses include hiring and retaining employees with disabilities and veterans' employment.

Why is training important?

Hill employees have notoriously busy and unpredictable work schedules that allow little time for training. With so many competing priorities, even important training sessions are often cancelled or postponed. Here's why training is a necessity and why finding time for employee training should be a goal of every manager.

Training develops the office culture

Training programs contribute to a more creative, collaborative, and productive work environment, whether they train employees on workplace rights or specific job skills.

"We believe training and professional development help create the office culture," says Bradford Fitch, CEO of the Congressional Management Foundation, a Hill non-profit that focuses on improving congressional operations through research, publications, training, and management services. "It gives tools to your staff."

A recent CMF study showed that 83 percent of congressional senior staff surveyed agree that it is very important to have adequate knowledge, skills, and abilities in order to support senators' and representatives' official duties, but only 15 percent are very satisfied with current levels—a gap of 68 percentage points. "An entry-level employee at Burger King receives more mandatory training than a Chief of Staff," Fitch says.

According to Fitch, offering specialized training can also be a retention tool, used as a way of showing that a staffer is valued. While it helps staff to become more effective in their current jobs, training also makes them more marketable.

Policies don't communicate themselves

Training on workplace rights is also important for a high functioning office. Many staffers have no idea what rights and policies regulate the congressional workplace. That lack of knowledge can be counterproductive and a drain on resources and time. Research in both the public and private sectors indicates that a comprehensive anti-discrimination/harassment training program is the single most effective way to change both behavior and attitudes

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— Paula Sumberg, Deputy Executive Director
Office of Compliance

of employees within an organization.

While some managers may believe that increasing training and awareness in a workforce will create more complaints, the data actually show that the number of complaints decreases. This is because a trained staff possesses a greater understanding of discrimination and harassment and a stronger commitment to safeguarding the workplace from illegal or inappropriate behavior. According to Paula Sumberg, Deputy Executive Director of the Office of Compliance (OOC), which is tasked with educating congressional offices on workplace rights, “Even a short investment of time can help an employing office maintain compliance with workplace laws and promote an inclusive and respectful working environment.”

According to Sumberg, “It is a mistake to assume people have ever received training on workplace laws. Employees often don’t know where the legal lines are drawn when it comes to appropriate workplace behavior.”

Most companies or employers claim that they have zero tolerance for discriminatory behavior, or that their formal policies prohibit bias and inappropriate behaviors. But, written policies against discrimination must be clearly communicated to employees to be effective and workers must know where to go to enforce the policies. “A policy just tossed into a desk drawer may as well not exist,” says Sumberg.

The OOC hears complaints from legislative branch employees under the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995. Often when an employee is cautioned about behavior that is contributing to a hostile work environment, their response is to deny the behavior was unacceptable, to complain that they were unaware the behavior was frowned upon, or to insist that they are being singled out since “everyone does it.” Most workers recognize their employers’ real commitment to eliminating unacceptable behavior and will act accordingly after taking effective workplace rights training.

Liability and reputations are at stake

Recent scandals in the news highlight that issues still exist in workplaces. When these reports arise, training efforts increase. But as time passes, busy schedules resume and soon training settles to the back burner until the problem resurfaces.

Courts have ruled that employers are liable for a hostile work environment even though an anti-discrimination policy existed and the employer was unaware that the employee was being harassed. The liability can be found, in part, because the employer has failed to disseminate and train employees on the written policy. Conversely, in several court cases, training has helped employers show that they’ve exercised reasonable care to prevent workplace harassment. (See also [Compliance@Work: Sexual Harassment](#) and [OOC’s Brown Bag on Hostile Work Environment](#).)

Unlike in the executive branch, currently no anti-discrimination training is required for legislative branch employees. Some offices commit to employing an educated workforce and require all staff to take anti-discrimination training as part of their on-boarding process. Others mandate periodic in-person updates by the OOC.

Where resource constraints, busy schedules, or locations outside of DC may make in-person training impractical, the OOC’s web-based training program can be used as part of an effective and efficient training program. The OOC’s training modules are no longer than 25 minutes and are geared to legislative branch workers. Making training a priority sends a message that the office’s policies and expectations are serious.



Some Members of Congress require their staff to take the OOC’s sexual harassment training.



The newest topic of training provided by the OOC will be on the Family & Medical Leave Act.



Also at www.compliance.gov:

- *Preventing Disability Discrimination in the Congressional Workplace*
- *Overview of the Congressional Accountability Act*