

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN ASSOCIATIONS

Description of the Field

Associations are grouped under the headings of professional associations (existing to serve the interests of a professional group), trade associations (serving business interests), or groups of individuals with a common interest (such as philanthropic and charitable associations). There are approximately 22,200 national associations and 115,000 associations with state, regional, or local scope in the United States. In addition, approximately 22,300 multinational, binational, and non-U.S. national associations operate internationally. The majority of associations in the US are headquartered in Washington, DC, New York, or Chicago.

Associations serve to:

- Share up-to-date information about their professions
- Solve occupational problems and share solutions
- Advance the special interests of the profession or group
- Educate members and the public about the profession or group and their interests
- Set professional standards
- Establish product safety and quality standards
- Provide research on the profession/industry
- Gather and analyze data
- Advocate for and mobilize to meet social and economic needs
- Serve as a communications link between members and government
- Assist members with understanding and complying with new laws and regulations.

Career Paths and Entry Salaries

More associations are becoming involved in the international arena, partly due to an expansion of organization memberships to include non-US members, and partly due to an upsurge in opportunities for entering new overseas markets. As a result, associations are hiring full-time personnel who are skilled in international operations. Duties can range from developing new chapters or affiliates outside the United States, to marketing the organization's products and services internationally.

In a trade association, employees plan trade missions to specific countries, or develop reports on the export potential of its' members' products. In addition, trade association employees may organize a group of members to participate in overseas trade shows or help recruit overseas exhibitors to the association's exposition in the United States. Professional societies often work with the organization's overseas counterpart to co-sponsor a technical or educational meeting. Employees may also be involved in translating the organization's publications into one or more languages, or developing an international certification program.

Entry-level positions and salaries are based on education, experience, geographic location, size, and budget of the association. The salary range for people with graduate degrees in public policy, international affairs, business, economics, political science, or law, who serve as analysts, policy specialists, management, and government affairs assistants, is between \$30,000 and \$50,000. Salaries for directors of entire departments range from \$65,000 – \$75,000 and up depending on the department.

Finding a job in an association is the same as finding a job in any other career. The American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) suggests job seekers network, contact ASAE people in their geographic area, browse trade publications and directories, consider interning at an association, or join an association to locate employment opportunities.

Government affairs specialists will spend a considerable amount of time monitoring government activities to identify public policy that could affect members; therefore, they should have a solid understanding of government procedures and an intimate knowledge of key issues surrounding the association's profession or industry. Association staff may, from time to time, testify before congressional committees. Students often end up working either on national legislation in an advisory or advocacy role, or on standards, policy and treaty obligations through international organizations. Additional duties may include: arranging conventions, meetings and seminars; functioning as sales and marketing staff; fulfilling roles in finance, government relations, publishing, fundraising, public speaking; and working with an association's board of directors.

Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field

- ✓ Good coordinating and planning skills
- ✓ Excellent communication skills
- ✓ Ability to manage people
- ✓ Knowledge of financial management
- ✓ Public relations skills
- ✓ Ability to work on a team
- ✓ Ability to communicate well to a group
- ✓ Ability to explain complex issues in simple terms
- ✓ Proficiency in a second language
- ✓ Excellent writing skills
- ✓ Experience working or studying in other cultures
- ✓ Familiarity with international government relations
- ✓ Sound understanding of the fundamentals of intercultural communication

Sample Employers

Associations can be found for most industries (e.g. Chocolate Manufacturers Association), service sectors (National Restaurant Association), professional associations (American Bar Association, National Governors Association) policy issues (Coalition for Gun Control, National Rifle Association), and health concerns (American Diabetes Association, American Lung Association). Browsing the websites of a range of professional, trade, charitable and philanthropic associations will provide additional information on the scope of association activities and missions. The following cross-section of associations may be a good place to start:

Associations

- American Automobile Association (AAA) <http://www.aaa.com/>
- American Council on Education <http://www.acenet.edu>
- American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) <http://www.asaenet.org>
- Association of Southeast Asian Nations <http://www.aseansec.org/>
- Central and Eastern European Networking Association <http://www.ceenet.org/>
- Council of Michigan Foundations <http://www.cmif.org>

- Environmental Defense Fund <http://www.edf.org>
- National Academy of Sciences <http://www.nas.edu/>
- National Association of Manufacturers <http://www.nam.org>
- United Nations Association <http://www.unausa.org/>
- US Chamber of Commerce <http://www.uschamber.org/>

Resources for Additional Information

Internet Resources

- *Encyclopedia of Associations* <http://library.dialog.com/bluesheets/pdf/bl0114.pdf>
The *Encyclopedia of Associations* is a comprehensive source of detailed information on over 135,000 nonprofit membership organizations worldwide. The Encyclopedia of Associations database provides addresses and descriptions of professional societies, trade associations, labor unions, cultural and religious organizations, fan clubs, and other groups of all types.
- *Association Management* <http://www.asaenet.org>. The Association for Association Executives ASAE monthly magazine available through any of the ASAE web, email or phone sources.
- *Association Trends* <http://www.associationtrends.com/>
Weekly newspaper by Martineau Corporation. Phone: 301-652-8666.
- *Associations on the Net*, <http://www.ipl.org/div/aon/> Internet Public Library
- *FITA Directory of International Trade Associations in North America*, <http://fita.org/members.html>, Federation of International Trade Associations
- *USAE – The Weekly Newspaper of Associations, CVB's and Hotels*
<http://www.usaenews.com/index.php>
- *Directory of Associations* <http://www.marketingsource.com/associations/>