

GETTING STARTED

ELECTED OFFICE "JOB" DESCRIPTIONS

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Executive Branch

President

The President is the Head of the Executive Branch and generally viewed as the head of the U.S. Government. While the President does have significant power, it is limited by the Constitution. Specifically, the Constitution assigns the following powers to the President:

- Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces
- Make treaties, with two-thirds consent of the Senate
- Receive ambassadors and other public ministers from foreign countries
- Appoint ambassadors, Supreme Court justices, federal judges, and any officials as provided for by the Congress, with the approval of the Senate
- Give an annual State of the Union Address to Congress
- Recommend legislation to Congress
- Convene Congress on extraordinary occasions
- Adjourn Congress, in cases of a disagreement about adjournment
- "Take care that the laws be faithfully executed"
- Fill in administrative vacancies during Congressional recesses
- Grant reprieves and pardons for offences against the U.S.

Legislative Branch

U.S. Congress

U.S. Congress is comprised of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate. The Constitution grants Congress "all legislative powers" in the national government. Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution lists a wide range of congressional powers, including:

- Coining money
- Maintaining a military
- Declaring war on other countries
- Regulating interstate and foreign commerce

Congress also controls federal taxing and spending policies -- one of the most important sources of power in the government. The Constitution also gives Congress the authority to "make all laws which shall be necessary and proper," an implied source of power sometimes called the Elastic Clause.

One of the most important implied powers is Congress' authority to investigate and oversee the executive branch and its agencies, such as the Department of Defense and the Department of Justice. As part of this responsibility, which is known as oversight, Congress summons senior officials to answer questions from members, orders audits of agencies, and holds hearings to air grievances of citizens.

Congress also holds hearings on matters of general public concern. Sometimes members of Congress conduct these hearings to identify problems that create a need for new laws. In other cases, Congress holds hearings to raise public awareness about an issue.

There are, however, some congressional powers that are rarely used such as the ability to impeach an official and the ability to amend the Constitution.

In addition to the powers described above, Congress shares powers with the president in matters such as framing U.S. foreign policy and control over the military. For example, while the president negotiates treaties, they are only put into effect once the Senate approves them. Also, while Congress can declare war and approve funds for the military, the president is the commander-in-chief of the military.

U.S. House of Representatives

Elected for two-year terms, must be 25 years old, a citizen for at least seven years, and a resident of the state from which they are elected. Five additional members -- from Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia -- represent their constituencies in the House. While they may participate in the debates, they cannot vote.

The House has special jobs that only it can perform. It can:

- Initiate laws that make people pay taxes
- Decide if a government official should be put on trial before the Senate if he/she commits a crime against the country

U.S. Senate

There are a total of 100 members in the Senate. The Constitution states that the vice president has formal control over the Senate and is known as the President of the Senate. In actuality, the vice president is only present for important ceremonies and to cast a tie-breaking vote.

Senators, elected for six-year terms, must be 30 years old, a citizen for at least nine years, and a resident of the state from which they are elected.

As in the House, the Senate also has special jobs that only it can perform. It can:

- Say yes or no to any treaties the president makes
- Say yes or no to any people the president recommends for jobs, such as Cabinet Officers, Supreme Court Justices, and Ambassadors
- Hold a trial for a government official who commits a crime against the country

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

Executive Department

Governor

Qualifications: Citizen of the U.S. who has attained 35 years of age, inhabiting the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for a minimum of seven years preceding the election. Serves for four-year terms and limited to two consecutive terms.

The Governor is the Head of the Executive Branch and generally viewed as the head of the Pennsylvania Government. While the Governor does have significant power, it is limited by the Constitution. Specifically, the Constitution assigns the following powers and duties to the Governor:

- Military Power -- Commander-in-chief of the military forces of the Commonwealth, except when they shall be called into actual service of the United States
- Appointing Power -- Appoint and fill vacancies of a Secretary of Education and such other officers as he/she shall be authorized by law to appoint
- Pardoning Power -- Remit fines and forfeitures, grant reprieves, commutations of sentences and pardons
- Information from Department Officials -- Require information in writing from the officers of the Executive Department
- Messages to the General Assembly -- Give information to the General Assembly
- Power to Convene and Adjourn the General Assembly -- On extraordinary occasions
- Power of Approval and Veto of Bills
- Power of Partial Disapproval of Appropriation Bills

Lieutenant Governor

The Lieutenant Governor shall be chosen jointly with the Governor under the same term and provisions as the Governor.

- He/she shall be President of the Senate
- He/she acts as Governor in the case of the death, conviction on impeachment, failure to qualify or resignation of the Governor or in the case of the disability of the Governor

Attorney General

The Attorney General is chosen under the same term and provisions as the Governor. The Attorney General is the independent Chief Law Enforcement Officer of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Auditor General

The term of Office of Auditor General shall be four years, chosen from the qualified electors of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and limited to two consecutive terms. The Auditor General is the independent Auditor of the finances and administration of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

State Treasurer

The term of Office of State Treasurer is four years, chosen from the qualified electors of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and limited to two consecutive terms. The State Treasurer is the independent Chief Financial Officer of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Legislative (General Assembly)

State Representative

Representatives are elected for terms of two years from 203 Legislative Districts. The House of Representatives has the power to approve budget appropriations, levy taxes, enact laws and other regulations governing the citizens of the Commonwealth.

State Senator

Senators are elected for terms of four years and there are 50 Senatorial Districts. The Senate has the power to approve budget appropriations, levy taxes, enact laws and other regulations governing the citizens of the Commonwealth, approve appointments of the Governor, and remove officials from office.

Judicial

Justice of the Supreme Court

There are seven Justices elected statewide to the Supreme Court for a term of ten years. The Supreme Court is the highest appellate court of the Commonwealth and has administrative power and jurisdiction over all other Pennsylvania Courts. Justices may be re-elected in a retention election for additional ten-year terms.

Judge of the Superior Court

The Superior Court is a statewide appellate Court consisting of 15 Judges, each serving for a term of ten years. This Court handles appeals from the Court of Common Pleas. Judges may be re-elected in a retention election for additional ten-year terms.

Judge of the Commonwealth Court

The Commonwealth Court is a statewide appellate Court consisting of nine Judges. Judges are elected for a term of ten years. This Court handles actions taken against the Commonwealth under original jurisdiction and on appeals. Judges may be re-elected in a retention election for additional ten-year terms.

Judge of the Court of Common Pleas

The Court of Common Pleas is a district Court consisting of nine Judges in Lehigh County and seven Judges in Northampton County. They are elected countywide in a municipal election for a ten-year term and may be re-elected in a retention election for additional ten-year terms. The Court hears a variety of cases encompassing criminal, civil, and family-related matters.

Magisterial District Judge

There are 14 magisterial districts located in Lehigh County and 15 throughout Northampton County. They are elected district-wide in municipal elections for a term of six years. Magisterial District Judges have jurisdiction over minor criminal offenses, traffic offenses, landlord/tenant matters, and other civil actions where the amount claimed does not exceed \$8,000.00. In misdemeanor and felony cases, Magisterial District Judges have jurisdiction to issue arrest and search warrants, hold preliminary arraignments and preliminary hearings, and set bail. They have authority to perform marriages, handle protection-from-abuse matters and issue subpoenas. They also may impose summary punishments for criminal contempt.

LEHIGH & NORTHAMPTON COUNTIES

Executive Branch

County Executive

The County Executive is the Chief Executive Officer of the County with powers over the administrative organization as allowed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, provided in the Lehigh and Northampton County Home Rule Charters and Administrative Codes. The County Executive is elected during a municipal election for a term of four years and is responsible for carrying out policies and enforcing laws adopted by their respective Legislative bodies. The Executive of Lehigh County may serve no more than two consecutive terms.

Legislative Branch

Board of Commissioners (Lehigh County) County Council (Northampton County)

The Board of Commissioners / County Council is the legislative branch of County government and has all the legislative powers that may be exercised by the County under the Constitution and the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and respective County Home Rule Charters. Both legislative bodies have a total of nine members. Lehigh County has four members and Northampton County has five members elected at large. Lehigh County has five members and Northampton County four members elected by district. All elected members serve a term of four years, elected in municipal elections, with district and at-large members running in staggered two-year periods. Some of the Board's powers are: to enact, amend or repeal ordinances, resolutions, and motions; to make appropriations; to incur indebtedness; to adopt the budget; to levy taxes, assessments and service charges; and to adopt the Administrative Code and the Personnel Code.

Row Offices

All elected Row Officers are elected during a municipal election on a county-wide basis for a term of four years.

County Controller (Lehigh and Northampton County)

The Controller's office conducts assessments of management performance and program results of any county department or agency to evaluate the efficiency and economy of the agency's or department's use of taxpayer funds.

District Attorney (Lehigh and Northampton County)

The District Attorney is charged with seeking justice for all concerned when criminal charges have been filed, and to effectively prosecute those individuals who commit adult and juvenile crimes. The District Attorney is the Chief Law Enforcement Officer for the County and works closely with all police departments within the County.

Clerk of Judicial Records (Lehigh County Only)

The Clerk of Courts' Office*, consisting of the civil division and criminal division, is responsible for the complete, accurate filing and maintenance of original records for the Lehigh County court system.

The Office of the Recorder of Deeds* records all documents relating to real estate in Lehigh County.

The Office of the Register of Wills* probates wills and collects taxes for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It assists the public, title searchers, attorneys, and genealogists in the research of information from the probate files. Records date back to 1812.

Coroner* (Lehigh County Only)

The Office of the Coroner investigates the facts and circumstances surrounding the death of any individual who falls within the jurisdiction of the Coroner, to determine the time, cause and manner of death.

Sheriff* (Lehigh County Only)

The Office of the Sheriff serves all original civil, criminal and protection-from-abuse documents issued by the Court of Common Pleas. The office provides security for the County's courtrooms, judges and buildings. It transports prisoners, holds sales to collect debts on both real and personal property, investigates and apprehends fugitives and bail jumpers, and preserves the peace at riots and civil strike injunctions.

*(Note: These positions are appointed in Northampton County. The Clerk of Courts' civil division is the Office of the Prothonotary in Northampton County.)

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

In Pennsylvania there are three types of Municipal Government:

1. City -- Large populated urban area.
2. Borough -- Small populated urban area.
3. Township -- Large geographic area with mixed (urban and/or suburban and/or rural) population density.

The state classifies Cities and Townships by population and establishes forms of government and powers accordingly. The three cities in Lehigh and Northampton counties are classified as third-class cities. Only one class of borough exists in the Commonwealth. There are two classes of township: first-class and second-class. Local option and home rule may be adopted by any of these types of municipality, amending the governing codes established by the Commonwealth.

City/Borough

Mayor

City and Borough Mayors serve four-year terms. The mayor of a city has broad powers defined by the city's charter and the laws of the Commonwealth regarding their respective state classification (generally determined by population). Among the responsibilities of the mayor is to appoint department heads and to prepare, with the cabinet, the annual budget for approval by the council. The mayor of a borough has relatively few powers (Pennsylvania's boroughs operate under what is often described as "weak-mayor" government), but has responsibility for issues regarding public safety and the police department.

Council

City/Borough Council members are elected during municipal elections and serve four-year terms. There are usually five or seven members of municipal councils. In Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton they serve at large. In a few boroughs they represent wards. Council is the legislative body of the municipality and has broad powers within the Borough or City code. Council members need to be familiar with analyzing budgets, planning and zoning issues, health and safety regulations, and many other matters affecting citizens. Generally, council members serve on one or more committees.

Township

Township Executive (Whitehall Only)

Chief Executive Officer of a home-rule, first-class township, elected township-wide for a term of four years.

Board of Commissioners

Legislative Board of at least five members that serves a first-class township. Commissioners are usually elected township-wide for staggered term of four years. Some townships elect by ward or district.

Board of Supervisors

Board of three or five members that serves both the executive and legislative functions of a township of the second class. Elected township-wide for staggered terms of six years. Supervisors may be appointed to full-time positions working for the township.

Board of Auditors

Second-class townships elect a three-member board of auditors, whose function is to set the annual pay and benefits of those supervisors who are employed by the township. The function of auditing township financial records is generally undertaken today by professional auditors. They are elected on a township-wide basis for staggered terms of four years.

Treasurer

First-class townships have an elected treasurer for the collection and distribution of taxes and municipal funds. Treasurers run township-wide for a term of four years.

Municipality

Tax Collector

Boroughs and second-class townships have elected Tax Collectors, elected on a municipal-wide basis for a term of four years. Their function is to distribute tax billings and collect taxes for the municipality, school district and county as determined by each governmental entity.

Voting Precinct

Constable

Constables are elected for a term of six years. Constables provide security in each voting precinct and may provide certain legal and law enforcement services as provided by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Constables are elected as follows: one for each city ward, one for each borough and second-class township, two for each first-class township.

Judge of Elections

One Judge of Elections is elected in each voting precinct for a term of four years. During primary and general elections they oversee the fair administration of the election process in their precinct.

Inspector of Elections

Two Inspectors of Elections, a Majority Inspector and a Minority Inspector, are elected in each voting precinct in a Municipal Primary Election for a term of four years. One is a Republican and one is a Democrat. During primary and general elections they assist in the fair administration of the election process in their precinct.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

School Director

Nine School Directors are elected in each School District for a term of four years. Four members are elected in a municipal election with the remaining five elected in the next municipal election two years later. Most school districts elect directors at large. School Boards make all major decisions concerning activities in their district in accordance with Commonwealth regulations. Each Board is empowered to:

- Fix the length of the school term
- Approve textbooks
- Employ teachers and administrators
- Levy taxes and adopt budgets
- Buy and sell land
- Create indebtedness
- Appoint tax collectors
- Dismiss teachers after hearings
- Adopt courses of study
- Establish additional schools
- Designate depositories for school funds
- Enter into contracts
- Fix salaries of administrators and teachers