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CRS Services to District and State Offices: Overview and Selected Resources

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) serves all congressional offices—those on Capitol Hill, as well as those in a Member’s home district or state office. This resource guide provides a brief overview of how CRS may assist all congressional offices with resources designed for activities often undertaken by district and state offices.

CRS is Congress’s own nonpartisan think tank, reference library, and information resource hub, housed within the Library of Congress. CRS can assist district and state offices with any number of work-related needs. For example, staff frequently have questions about demographic characteristics or other information about their district/state or a municipality, options for navigating constituent casework, and assorted questions originating from local stakeholders. CRS works exclusively for Congress and does not directly interface with the public. CRS can assist with providing information to help offices respond to inquiries from constituents or other entities. Resources on CRS.gov are accessible only to Members and congressional staff; publicly available copies of CRS reports can be accessed at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/>.

For additional discussion of constituent services topics, see CRS In Focus IF10503, *Constituent Services: Overview and Resources*.

Customized CRS Assistance: How To Ask For Help

CRS assists all congressional offices, including staff in district and state offices. Offices may ask for assistance with identifying resources or data, guidance on various issues, general information, and briefings.

Congressional offices can get in touch with CRS in a number of ways: by making direct contact with a CRS subject matter expert, calling the CRS main line (202-707-5700) during business hours (Monday-Thursday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. eastern standard time; Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 pm; Saturday 10:00 am-5:00 pm if either chamber is in session), or placing a request online via the CRS Place a Request portal (accepted anytime and routed to experts Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. eastern standard time). Members and staff can also sign up for a MyCRS account to make requests more quickly, save searches, and receive notifications about new or updated CRS products on topics of interest.

CRS Events for District and State Staff

CRS periodically provides a District/State Staff Institute, a two-day seminar that offers discussions on a range of topics for staff in district and state offices. Topics typically include an overview of CRS services, Congress.gov, grants

services to constituents, staff safety, casework practices, and casework resources from several federal agencies (e.g., Social Security Administration, Internal Revenue Service, Department of State, Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Veterans Affairs). The program is typically offered at least a few times a year, sometimes virtually, and sometimes in-person in Washington, DC.

CRS holds many events for Members and congressional staff throughout the year, including seminars on appropriations and budget processes, federal legal research, legislative process, and policy and legal seminars. See “CRS Events” for a list of upcoming opportunities, or contact CRS to request information on planned future dates. CRS seminars may be offered in-person in Washington, DC, or virtually. Since CRS offers customized assistance, district and state offices may also request custom virtual trainings and briefings.

Casework

Casework refers to the response or services that Members of Congress provide to constituents seeking assistance, often when they are dealing with a federal agency to resolve a specific problem. Common requests involve securing federal benefits, obtaining a missing record or payment from a federal agency, or assistance with immigration matters. Each Member office has considerable discretion in how it defines and approaches casework, subject to House or Senate rules, ethics guidelines, and statute. An office’s casework portfolio may include other constituent services, including those that are discussed in more detail in select CRS products, including the following:

- CRS Report RL33209, *Casework in a Congressional Office*
- CRS Resource Website, *Casework & Other Constituent Services*, at <https://www.crs.gov/Resources/casework>
- CRS Report R44696, *Casework in Congressional Offices: Frequently Asked Questions*
- CRS Video WVB00093, *Introduction to Congressional Casework*

Federal Agency Congressional Liaisons

One challenge for caseworkers can be determining who to talk to at a particular federal agency. CRS maintains a directory of about 200 congressional liaison offices, intended to help congressional offices with contacting federal government agencies. Resources on congressional liaison offices include the following:

- CRS Report 98-446, *Congressional Liaison Offices of Selected Federal Agencies*, and <https://www.crs.gov/Resources/LiaisonOffices>
- CRS Video WVB00389, *Finding Congressional Liaison Contacts*

Congressional offices can also reach out to CRS if additional agency contacts are needed.

Grants and Funding

Federal grants are intended to meet goals authorized by Congress and often target community needs. Most federal grant funds go to state and local governments, which, in turn, may award funds as subawards to local entities, such as nonprofit organizations. The following resources can help district and state staff obtain additional information about grant programs and may be used by Member offices to provide assistance to constituent grant seekers.

Grants Resources for Congressional Staff

Members of Congress frequently receive requests from grant seekers needing funds for projects. Each office handles grants requests in its own way, depending upon the Member's legislative agenda and overall organization and workload of office staff. These CRS resources may be useful:

- CRS Resource Website, *Grants and Federal Assistance* at <https://www.crs.gov/resources/grants>
- CRS Report RL34035, *Grants Work in a Congressional Office*
- CRS Report R42769, *Federal Grants-in-Aid Administration: A Primer*
- CRS Video, *Federal Grants Process*

CRS is available on request to discuss the grants portfolio of the district or state office, and to review possible strategies for managing staff workload or developing strategies for constituent engagement related to grants.

Grants and Other Funding Resources for Constituents

Some CRS resources contain information that may be helpful for constituent grant seekers and businesses.

- CRS Report RL34012, *Resources for Grantseekers*
- CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*
- CRS In Focus IF12449, *Connecting Constituents with Federal Assistance for Businesses*

Grants Content for Member Websites

CRS also produces standard content for many Members' websites containing grants resources for the benefit of constituent grant seekers. This CRS-written resource guide can be embedded on Member sites. Offices can contact the

House Web Services office (202-225-6002), or the Senate HelpDesk (202-228-HELP), to learn how to best integrate the grants resources content onto the Member's website.

Other CRS Reports and Guides for District/State Offices

In addition to casework and grants assistance, district and state offices engage in various other constituent service activities, including U.S. service academy nominations and administrative and budget process activities. The resources below provide additional information on other constituent service activities, as well as resources that district and state staff might find useful about congressional operations, working in a congressional office, and the legislative work of Congress.

Constituent Services Overview

- CRS Report R44726, *Constituent Services: Overview and Resources*

U.S. Service Academy Nominations

- CRS Report RL33213, *Congressional Nominations to U.S. Service Academies: An Overview and Resources for Outreach and Management*
- CRS In Focus IF11788, *Defense Primer: Military Service Academies*

Administrative and Budget Resources

- CRS Issue Area Website, *Congressional Administration & Elections*, at <https://www.crs.gov/iap/congressional-administration-and-elections>. This page contains resources on Member office operations, staffing, and funding; congressional ethics; commemorations; and constituent service, among other topics.
- CRS Issue Area Website, *Legislative & Budget Process*, at <https://www.crs.gov/iap/legislative-and-budget-process>. This page contains resources on the legislative process, including committee rules and floor procedure, as well as the federal budget and appropriations process, among other topics.
- CRS Report R40962, *Members' Representational Allowance: History and Usage*. The MRA provides funding for House Members' offices.
- CRS Report R44399, *Senators' Official Personnel and Office Expense Account (SOPOEA): History and Usage*. The SOPOEA provides funding for Senators' offices.
- CRS Report R44688, *Congressional Staff: CRS Products*

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