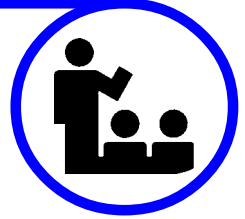


Association Executives



Occupational Brief Title Codes:

- D.O.T.: 189.117-010
- G.O.E.: 11.05.01
- S.O.C.: 11-9199
- O*NET™: 11-9199.99
- N.A.I.C.S.: 813
- H.O.C.: ESA

Occupational Subtitles:

- Associate Directors
- Chief Executive Officers
- Fund-Raisers
- Information Specialists
- Membership Services Personnel
- Project Directors
- Public Relations Personnel
- Publications Executives

Work Classification Based Related

D.O.T. Occupations:

- Customer Technical Services Managers
- Department Managers
- Industrial Organization Managers

Interests Based Related

G.O.E. Occupations:

- Airport Managers
- Bakery Managers
- Financial Institution Presidents

Skills Based Related

O*NET Occupations:

- Construction Managers
- Education Administrators,
Postsecondary
- Engineering Managers

Noteworthy Quote:

“Working for an association is both challenging and rewarding. There is never a dull moment. Juggling many priorities is a way of life. I enjoy working in the association world because there are so many opportunities to learn new things. I get to meet people from all over the world and provide services that help our members become more effective in their work.”

**—Cathlene Williams, Ph.D., CAE,
Senior Director, Education and
Research Programs, Association of
Fundraising Professionals, Alexandria,
Virginia**

Association executives (as-so-ci`a-tion ex`ec-u-tives) coordinate activities and direct staff who carry out the routine activities and operations of organizations.

A group of people is more powerful than one individual. From the earliest days people with a common background or goal banded together for reinforcement. However, the real strength and unity of a group comes from its organization. The more members there are in a group, the more differing opinions there are. To maintain unity, a few members make decisions in the best interests of the group. Other members then direct the rest of the group to carry out the activities.

In the United States there are more than 71,000 recognized trade and professional associations, scientific societies, technical organizations, labor unions, and other groups united for common purposes. Most organizations are known as “not-for-profit” because the majority of their funds go toward aiding, safeguarding and improving life in the world. They are divided into three broad groups: trade associations, professional societies, and service organizations. Some of the best-known associations are the Chamber of Commerce of the United States (a trade association), the American Medical Association (a professional society), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (a service organization).

The membership of trade associations consists of business firms, manufacturers, and industries. Although the members are usually competitors, they have common interests and concerns. Trade associations develop market statistics, sponsor seminars on the latest trends in the industry, set standards to prevent misleading advertising and to protect public safety, and help members improve



Association executives coordinate activities and direct staff who carry out the routine activities and operations of organizations. Photo courtesy of the National Technical Honor Society

business. They represent their industries before legislative bodies and lobby for legislation favorable to the public as well as their interests.

Professional societies are organizations of individuals with a common background in a subject such as medicine, law, or engineering. Members may be physicians, dentists, lawyers, or engineers. These associations, such as the American Medical Association or the American Bar Association, share the latest knowledge, establish professional standards, and attempt to influence legislation that affects the profession. Scientific or learned societies, on the other hand, are generally groups of individuals concerned mainly with expanding the knowledge of their discipline.

Service organizations are groups active in humanitarian or educational fields where they conduct programs to improve the well-being of people, animals, and the environment. These groups gather money to help those in need, or protect species of life or the environment.

Trade associations, professional societies, and service organizations have different kinds of members and goals. However, almost all associations, organizations, and unions have a board of directors which sets the policies. The association executives then direct staff, who carry out the policies.

Work Performed

Association executives work to accomplish the aims, goals, and objectives of their organization according to directives of the board. In general, these goals include the professional welfare and advancement of their members, as well as providing information for the public.

Much of the activity of associations consists of sharing information with members. To help members improve and develop their skills, association executives may prepare, plan, or oversee workshops, seminars, and technical assistance. Association executives may also direct conferences or conventions that display products or services of their industry or profession.

In pursuing the interests of their members, association executives represent the association in negotiations with representatives of government, business, labor, and other organizations, or before the public.

About 15 percent of all associations engage in lobbying activities. They establish and maintain political action committees that promote the interests of the organizations before congress and other lawmaking bodies.

Association executives also work to ensure the integrity of their organization. Most require members to stick to a code of ethics. They may investigate the conduct, professional ethics, or competence of their members, and discipline members as necessary.

The work of association executives may vary with the size of the association. In an association with a small

budget one executive and a secretary may handle all the duties, and jobs may overlap. A large national or international organization, on the other hand, may employ a staff of hundreds or more.

In a large association executive officers may have special titles and may be limited to specific duties. **Chief executive officers**, for instance, carry out the mission of the association. They direct the overall planning and programming. They serve as administrators, leaders, and financial managers.

Associate directors offer assistance to the chief executive officer. They may also be in charge of a specific area such as education, government relations, membership, accounting, or fund-raising. Associate directors are also known as **department heads** because they direct specific activities within the organization.

Project directors prepare and make arrangements for meetings, conferences, and seminars throughout the year. They arrange reservations for rooms and meals, promote attendance, and collect fees.

Publications executives write, edit, print, and produce house publications, magazines, and newsletters. They may publish survey findings along with other relevant findings in outside journals, newsletters, and videos.

Public relations personnel develop and set-up programs to enhance the public image of the group and its members. They work with the media and prepare press releases, speeches, and other public communications.

Information specialists maintain association information services, Web sites, and libraries. They respond to member inquiries and collect and distribute information on current issues affecting the members.

Membership services personnel supply services to members. They may administer insurance, credit cards and other programs. These executives may set up and run an information clearinghouse and hotline. These workers also promote membership. They canvass for prospective members for the association. They may also screen candidates when the membership is limited.

Fund-raisers write applications for grants. They may solicit funds from association members, corporations, foundations, and other donor sources.

Working Conditions

Most association executives work in an office or a suite of offices. They conduct their business with the help of staff, computers, telephones, and FAX machines. A meeting planner or director of conventions may travel extensively in order to arrange these affairs. A legislative staffer may spend a great deal of time on Capitol Hill or in state legislatures. Whether surrounded by staff or working alone, association executives work, deal, and communicate with people.

Hours and Earnings

Association executives may work a forty-hour week, but some put in much longer hours. They may have business-related dinners or other events they attend in the evening or on weekends.

Salaries in associations vary widely. Salaries in individual member organizations are 20 to 30 percent less than those of corporate-member organizations.

Association executives are among the highest paid workers in the U.S. economy. However, salary levels vary substantially depending upon the level of managerial responsibility, length of service, and type, size, and location of the organization. The Bureau of Labor statistics classifies association executives with all other managers. According to the May 2004 salary survey, these workers earned an average of \$77,350 a year. Earnings ranged from a high of more than \$129,230 a year to a low of less than \$40,950 a year. According to a survey by Abbott, Langer & Associates, chief executive officers of not-for-profit organizations earned an average of \$81,000 a year in 2003. Executives of the largest companies and industries receive much higher salaries.

Benefits are good. Almost all associations have health and life insurance programs. Workers receive paid sick and personal time. The lengths of vacations depend on years of service, and accumulated work hours.

Education and Training

Many associations look for well-educated executives with a wide range of skills. A bachelor's degree in liberal arts combined with business administration studies, for instance, may qualify job seekers. Special positions require more specific preparation. For instance, a person entering public relations should have a thorough background in communications. High school students should prepare for college by taking college preparatory classes in English, business, and computer science.

Opinions differ on what kind of education is best for executives of professional societies. Some argue the best executive is a member of that profession. Others favor an outsider with strong management skills. Either way, whether professional or administrator, the executive must have an extensive background of formal study and training.

Some associations support their executives by paying partial or full tuition for formal studies. Many offer scholarships or grants. There are about 60 state and local groups of association executives which also offer career training for their members.

Certification and Professional Societies

Association executives need not be certified to work in an association. However, the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), with a membership of more than 25,000 individuals, certifies association execu-

tives by awarding the Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation and the Association Management Company (AMC) accreditation.

To become certified, executives must pass a written test on the theory and practice of association management, organizational structure, and personnel management. It measures skills in governance and structure, leadership processes, management and administration, internal and external relations, and other programs and services.

Personal Qualifications

Association executives work with people and for people. They deal with staff, association members, and the public. To do so, executives must have excellent interpersonal and written and verbal communications skills.

Executives must handle multiple tasks at the same time. In dealing with the media, in booking conventions, in conducting government relations--in all management work--executives must be good planners, coordinators, and public relations experts. They must handle small details while thinking strategically about the larger goals of the organization.

Occupations can be adapted for workers with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

Where Employed

Association executives heading national organizations tend to work in metropolitan areas such as Washington, D.C., which has the most national groups. Chicago and New York follow.

Associations exist in all parts of the United States. The Encyclopedia of Associations published by Gale Research, Inc. lists more than 22,000 national associations. An additional 64,000 state, local, and international groups also are active nationwide.

Employment Outlook

Opportunities are broad. Association executives enjoy advancement and good pay. Competition for executive posts with these associations is common.

Changes in the national economy can change the membership base of many associations. Communications technology is bringing change. Although some organizations disband after they achieve their objectives, many others refocus their missions, and many associations start up each year.

Entry Methods

Individuals interested in working for an association can get an idea of whom the employers are by researching the Encyclopedia of Associations or the National Trade and

Professional Associations of the United States directory. Conference executives and public relations managers need clerical and other support staff. New workers can start in these positions and work their way up.

Students may find a summer job with a large association. Others may start by doing volunteer work in order to get experience. Many associations offer internships.

Advancement

Continuing education and training are important to those who want to advance. Executives can improve their qualifications through formal education and management workshops. They may find an aptitude in another field, they may move up in their own field, or they may move to another association.

Another possibility may be a move to an association management firm. There are an increasing number of association management companies that run several nonprofit organizations on contract. They may handle a number of associations.

For Further Research

American Society of Association Executives, 1575 I Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005. Web site: <http://www.asaenet.org>

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