

May 2, 2023

**To: Interested Parties**

**Fr:** Brian Stryker / Molly Murphy / Ben Reynolds

**Re:** DCCC Regional Political Director Interview Process

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Every cycle, hundreds of people apply to the DCCC Regional Political Director role. It is one of the most highly sought-after jobs by campaign staffers with a few cycles of experience—likely 1-2 cycles as House campaign manager under their belt. It has become an expectation that successful applicants tap their networks for advice and favors that they hope will make them one of the five chosen for the coveted role.

As longtime observers of the process and after having done multiple dozens of conversations with these job seekers every cycle for the last decade, we've seen first-hand the hoops people jump through to stand out in the crowd. This year, we were struck by one candidate telling us that "getting the job is a full-time job in itself." And as researchers, it intrigued us to try to understand why that is, and ultimately try to understand what works and what doesn't in seeking the job. Our goal in this memo is to give guidance to help people applying for not just the regional desk job, but hopefully a lot of good jobs in campaign politics.

We talked to nearly a dozen people in this process. They include former Regional Political Directors who had gone through the hiring process. We had also talked to people who had done the hiring for the job in past cycles, whether Executive Directors, Deputy EDs, Political Directors, or others tasked with interviewing for the job. And finally, we talked to consultants who had been asked to lobby on behalf of applicants for the job. (Many of our interviewees were all three). *Specifically, current employees at the DCCC were intentionally not interviewed in this process—this is NOT meant to be a reflection on why anyone did or didn't get hired for the 2024 cycle and none of the following is editorializing on individual applicants this or any cycle.*

The following were consistent, useful themes:

- **It's a great job, but it's not the only job.** People who had the job spoke highly of it. For people who have had the job, it is a career highlight because it lets you see the House landscape in a different way, you learn from a variety of different teams, it can expand your network. It also puts people in a high-pressure environment with talented colleagues in a way that prepares them for later work. It is also, for most, just fun. They also noted that it is not the only good job, or the only path to having these career experiences. In many cases, for applicants who have only managed one congressional (or none) their best advice was to go back out and manage again, both for the skills it provides and it being the best path towards future options.
- **With hundreds of applicants, getting the job takes ALL of the above: experience, relationships, skill, and luck.** Everything needs to go right to get the job. People who

are highly qualified and would do a good job won't get the job. And a lot of these deciding factors are outside of the individual applicants' control. There are too many good people for too few positions.

- **What it takes to get the job varies every cycle because the people hiring, the cycle, and the field of applicants are different.** We talked to more than half a dozen people who have been responsible for hiring the position at some point in the last three cycles and they each describe weighting certain aspects differently. Some relied heavily on the interview, others did not. Some cared about lobbying, others did not.

Even outside of this, however, the needs of the cycle dictated what the ideal applicant looked like, as did the other applicants while hiring managers considered what a rounded-out team looked like.

- **Everyone lobbies for the job, for good reason. But not all lobbying is the same.** The lobbying that applicants do to get the job has become an important element of being successful. However, every single person we spoke to echoed one thing: it is **quality over quantity**. Several actively advised against “asking everyone you know to make a call for you.”

Instead, they stressed how important it was for applicants to identify people who have specific, in-depth knowledge of them. Understand your relationship with someone before you ask them to lobby for you: a call from a consultant who does not know you well and isn't deeply in your corner is of no value at best and could be harmful at worst.

They also said that it was most useful if the person calling had an existing relationship with the person who was hiring (likely the political director) and their input would be most trusted. However, it was not seen as effective to prioritize this over having someone with the deep knowledge call for them. Some said that it was useful to have people who worked FOR the applicant to call, such as staffers on the campaigns they'd run who could offer insight to what they were like as a leader.

- **The consultant calls and coffees have value beyond the DCCC job.** Us and every person we talked to in this process do dozens of calls every cycle with people looking to be regional political director. In many cases, these conversations are one of the first times we are connecting with the person and are a great opportunity to relationship-build even outside of the regional job. We give some tips below for these conversations at the end.

### The Job Itself

- **The job is a great job.** It is an extremely rewarding position and can yield a plethora of connections. It's especially valuable for increasing people's network—multiple people who did the job spoke of “knowing everyone” after they did it, from consultants to members/chiefs of staff to in-state players. The DCCC typically employs some of the

smartest people in Democratic politics at the epicenter of decision-making for Democratic congressional races, and there's real value in being part of that.

- **However, the best applicants are not singularly focused on this job.** Despite it being a very good job, it should not be seen as an end-all, be-all careerwise. Many pointed to being on the road, or running a statewide, as a comparably valuable experience.

People we talked to spoke of the tunnel vision applicants get for this job, to the detriment of their other options. Applicants should be applying to EMILY's List, End Citizens United, 314, and going back out on the road at the same time. They should think about statewide races past just top-tier top-ticket races, too: downticket statewide races and less-competitive Senate/Governor races should be on their radar.

And, in terms of the lobbying calls to consultants, many of the people we spoke with expressed exasperation at the idea that some applicants were disinterested in considering anything beyond this job, or had no plan B.

- **The job provides options after doing it, but it is no guarantee to a particular career path.** At most 20% of people who do the job go on to be the DCCC Political Director, and multiple people mentioned it not being an automatic path to a statewide race. Many mentioned the experience and connections making a natural transition to House Chief of Staff, or to consulting. And most we spoke to suggested that it is rare for someone to go directly from this job into consulting and often spend a few more cycles on the campaign or Hill side before making that transition.

## Resume + Interviewing

- **Know who is hiring and what matters to them.** One thing we have observed in applicants is that they are ready to start lobbying for the job before the political director (and sometimes the Executive Director) is even hired. But what was striking in talking to people who have done the hiring for the job is what people wanted—and how they looked for it—varied widely from year to year.

People are people, and they go about processes differently. Some people we talked to weighted the interview very heavily; others said the interview was less consequential to them. Some gave a lot of weight to lobbying calls, others opted to call their own connections to understand an applicants' strengths and weaknesses.

They also went about building the team and thinking of the puzzle pieces for the five jobs in different ways. There's only so much to glean about the 2025 process from looking back to 2023/2021/2019, because different people will run it.

- **People spoke about the ideal profile being someone who has managed races, ideally for multiple cycles.** This isn't a hard and fast rule. However, being in the driver's seat on a campaign and learning how to manage others effectively and work with a

budget can help make a strong resume. Not all the campaigns have to be congressional races, and having a variety of experiences can help. Everyone we spoke to who hired for the job like to see that you've done work on the road and managed something complex, and had to tackle big issues. That can come from managing a red-to-blue district or even a big mayoral race.

- **Finding someone with the right soft skills was as important as the hard skills.**

Dozens and dozens of resumes had the requisite campaign experience, due to the nature of how many House races there are every year. People described skills like “knowing how to manage laterally” and “being able to talk to serious people and recruit them to set their lives on hold for two years to run for office.” The job is “very different from most of the jobs that you'll have had before because, basically, no one works for you in that job, but you are very responsible for the success of a lot of other people who don't answer to you.”

They described best candidates as “adults” who understood that they are powerful and powerless at the same time, can hold their own with tough people but have humility, and be able to set an example to their pods and to their campaigns that details matter and cutting corners will hurt everyone.

## Lobbying + References

- **How an applicant pursues the job is a measure of their soft skills.** This process of lobbying/campaigning was real, and some hiring managers described it as actively helpful in judging applicants' inside-political acumen. They describe the importance of the lobbying both for what they hear about the applicant from members and consultants in the process, but also because it gives them a sense of the applicants' judgment in who they are asking to make calls and how often.
- **Nobody gets the job through lobbying.** Most hiring managers described it as useful in two situations: in putting someone on their radar who they may not have given a first interview, and when they were genuinely torn between a final hiring decision. Everybody dismissed the idea that you could get the job through calls themselves.
- **The best people to make the call are members who have had tough races, consultants/senior people who have had the job before, and consultants who know what the job entails.** Consistently, people who have hired said that they most appreciated hearing from people who know the ins and outs of the building and know what makes a good regional political director. This extends to members of Congress – all members have an important view, but those who have been Red to Blue and Frontline have a deeper understanding of the job.
- **Getting a lackluster lobbying call can be a flag.** Consultants spoke of having a disincentive to say no to a lobbying request because they don't want to harm a potential future relationship, or just simply don't want to be a jerk. As a result, everyone admits that

they have told an applicant they'd make a call for them and then either only technically called ("so and so asked me to make a call") or just not picked up the phone at all. Hiring managers spoke of the former calls as being unhelpful. Use your political acumen: if you're not confident in your relationship, don't ask.

- *Most consultants described recommending just 2-6 people per cycle.* Consultants want their recommendations to be meaningful, which necessarily means shortening their list to people they feel strongly about and have something useful to add about a person. Hiring managers said they put very little weight to consultants who put in a dozen names.
  - *Quality over quantity of asks for an applicant was important.* The least-helpful calls to hiring managers were when a lobbying call said "I think this person is great" and had nothing to offer past that.
- **Even if these consultant calls do not result in them recommending you for the job, there is still value in doing them for the job seeker AND the consultant.** There are multiple reasons consultants do these interviews:
    - *Paying it forward.* All of us have been early in our careers with no network, struggling to figure out how to get a job. We're sympathetic!
    - *Giving free advice.* The people we talked to are happy to share everything they know about the best ways to get the job. They have important insight into what it takes to do well in this business and can give good advice to job seekers.
    - *Finding good people, even if not for this job.* A 'blind-date' call with a consultant you don't know well or haven't worked with is not going to get them to call the political director for you. However, consultants have lots of different clients and races who need good people, and making a good impression absolutely puts someone top-of-mind for other jobs.
    - *Building our own networks.* We're all marketing in off years, and we want to know the smart young people who are going to hire consultants for big races in the future.
    - *Helping people without the network, often POC and women.* Many described wanting to help level the playing field in our own corner of the world, and most consultants (including us at Impact) are actively seeking to build diversity at our own companies and in the broader Democratic ecosystem.

## Best Practices

With an important caveat that there is not a singular way to get the job, and that every cycle there are exceptions that prove the rule, the following are best practices for job seekers as they engage in the process.

- **Do your homework on who is hiring and what matters to them.** Different people hire for this job every cycle, so understand who you are talking to and what they are looking

for.

- **Likewise, consider who is in your corner and what they would say about you.** This is just like putting a reference on your resume: you should know that person is in your camp before you put them on your resume. Ask people who you know are your champions, and ideally if you have several to choose from, prioritize those who have a strong relationship with the hiring managers.
- **Consider your pitch for what only YOU bring to the role.** Hiring managers are looking for a team, not five separate individuals. All serious applicants will have cleared the hurdle of hard-skill resume qualifications. To be best positioned for the job, consider what your specific strengths are that you will bring to the building, campaigns, or the battlefield. Some hiring managers spoke of applicants who described their deep understanding of what incumbents and chiefs of staff need from the building. Others knew how to manage laterally and had a specific knack for training up and mentoring green managers.
- **Be mindful of timing your lobbying calls.** While the guiding principle should be quality over quantity, some hiring managers described the value in spacing out the calls so that they were not ever inundated with calls at once, but rather were hearing regularly over intervals about a person. This was preferable and allowed them to have conversations with the consultants/members calling during the interview process that helped them form a better sense of the person than getting spammed all at once prior to the initial interview.
- **View the consultant calls/coffees as interviews.** The best applicants emerge from the process with a wider network of people who are impressed by them – whether they get the job or not. The most impressive applicants all do the same things on these calls:
  - **Have a point of view and a path for yourself.** We got repeated feedback that the toughest calls are the ones where the ones where somebody said something to the effect of “I don’t know what I want to be when I grow up.” The most productive calls were where someone had a reason they wanted a particular job (or type of job) and had some sense of what the step after that may be, even if just a vague one. It’s easier to give advice and help when someone has a goal in mind.
  - **Ask for advice more than help.** Advice means consultants get to do one of their favorite things: giving opinions and feeling listened to/smart. Getting someone to give advice can spur productive areas of conversation. Some of that advice can be very useful as well, especially if the consultants have good relationships with the people doing the hiring!