

The Role of a House Systems Administrator

The Importance of a Systems Administrator

House offices are increasingly reliant on their computer systems. When the computers go down, some or all of the work in the office comes to a halt, especially if there is no one with enough technical expertise to get the computers back online quickly. This is why your Systems Administrator (SA) is the most important IT resource in a Member office. Your SA is responsible for the daily maintenance, troubleshooting, updating, and support that keeps your office (and your staff) running smoothly and efficiently.

Without a skilled Systems Administrator, your office may face the following problems:

- Your entire computer set-up (and hence, your office) will be less strategic, efficient, and effective than it needs to be;
- Irreplaceable data will be lost through haphazard backups and system maintenance;
- Your limited budget will be spent on inferior or inappropriate equipment;
- Lack of proper training and support will cause your staff to be less productive;
- Your Web site will not serve your constituents, making it an ineffective communications and outreach tool;
- Your office will be unable to take advantage of the many opportunities to improve communication and productivity that technology offers, putting you at a competitive disadvantage.

Your Options

It is important to have the technical skills required to keep your computers (and your staff) performing at a peak level. To fulfill this critical need, you can either:

- 1) Hire a full-time staffer dedicated to the Systems Administrator position;
- 2) Assign a full-time staffer with other primary duties (such as LC or LA) to handle the SA duties secondarily (This is the most commonly adopted but least recommended option.);
- 3) Contract with a part-time shared employee; or
- 4) Contract with an outside vendor.

Each of these staffing options has its own advantages and disadvantages. When making this strategic management decision, you should assess which approach fits your goals. For example, would you prefer someone “in-house” or is it more important for your office to “free up” a full-time employee slot to handle other work? Keep in mind that trying to save your office money in the short-term could cost you more over time if SA duties are neglected and complicated problems arise. These key questions and issues must be addressed when evaluating which option is right for your office.

For more detailed information about the Systems Administrator position and your options for staffing it, see the *Member Office Computing Guide – 110th Congress: Getting the Most From Technology in Your House Office*, provided to you by House Information Resources (HIR) and the Committee on House Administration.