How Experienced Legislative Staff Contribute to Effective Lawmaking[*]

Jesse M. Crosson, University of Michigan
Geoffrey M. Lorenz, University of Virginia
Craig Volden, University of Virginia
Alan E. Wiseman, Vanderbilt University

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Abstract

Members of Congress seek to allocate their scarce staff resources carefully, given their multiple, sometimes competing, objectives. Using data on House members' staff allocations from 1994 to 2013, we demonstrate that legislators advance more (and more significant) legislation when they retain a more experienced legislative staff. This benefit, however, accrues mostly to committee chairs, whose institutional privileges allow them to leverage experienced staff, and to the most junior legislators, whose inexperience can be best supplemented by experienced aides. Finally, we show that legislators do not generally benefit from large legislative staffs, but rather from having individual legislative staffers with high levels of experience. This finding suggests that a targeted strategy to retain the most experienced legislative staff in Congress may pay the greatest dividends in regards to lawmaking.

How Experienced Legislative Staff Contribute to Effective Lawmaking

Legislative staff are integral to the functioning of Congress. In the district, congressional staff fulfill important representational roles for legislators, as they answer service requests from constituents, alert the legislator to key local events and needs, and maintain contact with influential local interests.[1] In Washington, congressional staffers serve as a legislator's engines of policy production, as they draft bills, seek out cosponsors, meet with lobbyists, and network with other key staffers on the legislator's behalf. Indeed, for those who have worked in or around the U.S. Congress, the importance of staffers to the functioning of the institution is nearly universally appreciated, with some staffers even earning titles such as a member's, or party's, "secret weapon" (Beshears 2015). Consequently, allocation of scarce resources to various types of staff represents a vital strategic decision that each member of Congress must face.

While a body of scholarship has focused on the relationship between legislative staff and the incumbency advantage (e.g., Johannes and McAdams 1981; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987) or the value of experience to staff's future compensation as lobbyists (e.g., LaPira and Thomas 2017), less research has explored how a legislator's cultivation of her policy staff affects her ability to produce and advance legislation. One recent notable contribution, however, is Montgomery and Nyhan (2017) who find that Representatives who exchange legislative staff across Congresses display similarities in their patterns of legislative effectiveness, which the authors attribute to their common staff members. Additionally, McCrain (2018) finds a positive correlation between the aggregate staff experience in a congressional office and a Representative's legislative effectiveness.

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[1] Maintaining these types of close relations with the district is correlated with increased electoral fortunes (*i.e.*, Romero 2006) and more favorable constituent views towards their elected representatives (*i.e.*, Serra 1994).

In this chapter, we build upon these early findings to explore the extent to which staff contribute to a Representative's ability to effectively legislate. In drawing on congressional data about Representatives' staff allocations in the 103rd through the 113th Congresses (1993-2014), consistent with McCrain (2018), we find a positive relationship between staffers' total legislative experience and a Representative's ability to advance legislation. However, unlike McCrain, we find this benefit to be highly conditional on a Representative's circumstances. Specifically, committee chairs receive a substantial legislative boost when working with experienced staff, whereas non-chairs typically do not obtain similar benefits. Second, new members of Congress benefit significantly from hiring experienced legislative staff when they first arrive. Finally, we show that a greater length of past service by a Representative's most experienced legislative staffer increases the effectiveness of both chairs and non-chairs alike.

These results suggest that very specific and targeted attempts to enhance congressional lawmaking capacity are likely to be more fruitful than broad-brush reforms. We find no evidence, for example, of greater lawmaking effectiveness overall among representatives with large staffs or with greater spending on legislative staff. Rather, providing experienced staff to new lawmakers who are just learning the ropes and to committee chairs, who have substantial capacity for lawmaking, seem to yield the greatest return on investment. Additionally, targeted efforts to retain the most experienced staff member in each office seem likely to be more beneficial than trying to cultivate experience across the board in this high-turnover environment.

Measuring Lawmaking Effectiveness

To explore the relationship between experienced legislative staff and lawmaker effectiveness, we employ the Legislative Effectiveness Score (LES). As developed and defined by Volden and Wiseman (2014, 18) the LES measures the "proven ability to advance a

member's agenda items through the legislative process and into law." Legislative Effectiveness Scores combine fifteen bill-level indicators for every member of the U.S. House of Representatives who served between the 93rd-114th Congresses (1973-2016), based on information from the Library of Congress website, www.congress.gov. For each Representative, Volden and Wiseman identify how many bills she introduced in each Congress, how many of those bills received any sort of action in committee and/or action beyond committee, how many bills passed the House, and how many bills became law. Each bill is likewise coded to account for whether it was primarily commemorative in nature, "substantive," or "substantive and significant." With these fifteen indicators (five lawmaking stages for three levels of bill significance), Volden and Wiseman calculate a Representative's Legislative Effectiveness Score, which parsimoniously captures how successful a member is at moving her legislative agenda items through the lawmaking process in a two-year session of Congress, in comparison to all other members, accounting for the substantive significance of each bill. Scores are normalized to take an average value of "1" within each two-year Congress, which facilitates easy comparison across legislators.

While the LES serves as a transparent and consistent metric of how successful a Representative is at advancing her legislative agenda in a Congress, it does not capture all aspects of legislative effectiveness. Most notably, the LES does not account for Representative's amendment activities, which can often be a channel through which a legislator can influence the lawmaking process. However, auxiliary analysis (e.g., Volden and Wiseman 2014, appendix 2.1; Volden and Wiseman 2018) illustrates how the relationships between lawmaker characteristics and LES do not appreciably change when accounting for amendment activity. Second, because the LES is based on the progression of a Representative's sponsored legislation, the metric does

not capture the impact of legislators who work behind the scenes to facilitate the lawmaking process. While such behind-the-scenes lawmakers clearly exist (and are influential), the lion's share of lawmaking activity in any given Congress is being conducted by legislators who seek to advance their own agendas. Hence, the LES metric serves as a good cardinal indicator of the relative lawmaking effectiveness of the Representatives who served in the House between the years 1973-2016. Third, the LES does not measure the obstructionist tactics that Representatives might employ to gum up the lawmaking process, which can clearly be related to lawmaking success (or lack thereof). Because the LES seeks to capture the ability of a given Representative to advance her agenda, however, its inability to measure the impact of obstructionist tactics is not particularly problematic for our current purposes.

Measuring Legislative Staff Experience

As noted by Fenno (1973, 1978) and emphasized in more recent scholarship (e.g., Grimmer 2013, Bernhard and Sulkin 2018), members of Congress vary considerably in the types of legislative and representational activities that they emphasize, as they develop their governing styles, "home styles," and reelection strategies. Among the important choices that they face is the decision of which type of staff to hire. Should the member seek out communications specialists who understand how to portray her favorably in the media? Should she consider hiring caseworkers and constituency service staff who understand the district well, and may help the member maintain strong relationships with key figures at home? Alternatively, should she invest resources and effort with the goal of passing legislation, by finding and retaining policy experts who may draft legislation, negotiate with stakeholders and other legislators, and shepherd bills through the legislative process? We focus on this last consideration, by examining the scope of

the return on investment that members should expect to receive when they help cultivate the experience of legislative staff.

To do so, we rely upon a comprehensive new dataset (Crosson, Furnas, and LaPira 2018) of all personal staff who served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1994 to 2013. Using publicly available *Statements of Disbursement for the U.S. House of Representatives*, quarterly publications of Leadership Directories' *Congressional Yellow Books*, and staffer data provided by the company Legistorm, the dataset provides a wealth of information regarding who has served as a staffer in Congress, when he or she served, and how he or she was compensated. Perhaps most importantly, the dataset classifies each staffer into one of five staffer "types," based on his or her responsibilities within the congressional office. More specifically, staffers are classified as legislative staff, political staff, communications staff, office management staff, or constituency service staff.[2] By aggregating the data by congressional office, the dataset provides detailed information on a member's total investment in each type of staff.

To examine the influence of legislative staff on a member's legislative effectiveness, we focus on the scope of legislative staff work *experience*. While the dataset provides for additional means for measuring legislative staff investment, such as total legislative staff expenditures or the number of legislative staff, serving in an office legislative staff experience most directly captures the level of accrued policymaking expertise found within a member's office.[3] To generate this variable, we rely upon staffer classifications from Crosson, Furnas, and LaPira (2018) to generate a list of all legislative staffers found within each member's office, within each year. Using this list, we trace the employment history of these staffers to determine their earliest

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[2] See http://www.jessemcrosson.com/research for greater detail.
[3] Below, we report the lack of correlation between legislative effectiveness and both staff size and staff expenditures, indicative of experience instead being the key consideration.

appearances in the dataset, generating a count of years served in Congress. We then add these

counts together within each member's office for each Congress to generate our *Total Legislative*

Staff Experience variable.[4] The variable therefore represents the total number of years served in

Congress among all legislative staffers in a member's office. This measure is similar to the work

experience variable that is employed by McCrain (2018), but our metric captures the experience

of legislative staff specifically, and not all (potentially irrelevant) work experience among a

staff.[5]

In addition to examining overall legislative staff work experience, we also explore how

the presence of highly experienced staffers may influence a member's ability to effectively

legislate. Specifically, we measure how long each member's most experienced legislative staffer

has served in Congress, either in the current member's office or with others in the institution. To

compile this variable, we make use of the same experience calculations underlying our office-

level measure of legislative staff experience. Instead of adding together all legislative staffers'

experience levels, however, we simply record the experience level of the longest-serving

legislative staffer in each Representative's office. Measuring experience in this fashion allows us

to better delineate why increases in overall legislative staff experience may increase a member's

legislative effectiveness. Because values of this variable are particularly susceptible to

measurement error due to left-censoring (*i.e.*, we cannot measure how long staffers served on the

Hill before they entered our dataset in 1994), we confine our analyses of this variable to time

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[4] Because the staff data are available annually, we average the two years' totals to calculate this variable's values within a given Congress.

[5] An additional departure from McCrain's measure derives from our means for addressing the left-censored nature of the data. That is, while McCrain uses the natural log of staff experience as his dependent variable, we simply drop the first two Congresses from our analysis (therefore beginning the analysis in the 105th Congress), as experience measurements in those first two Congresses are artificially low.

period after the 106th Congress (i.e., post-2000), at which point the mean and variance of our *Most Experienced Legislative Staffer* variable becomes fairly stable.

In the analysis that follows, we explore the relationships between the cultivation and retention of experienced legislative staff and a Representative's legislative effectiveness, as measured by a Representative's Legislative Effectiveness Scores. We also explore how staff investments interact with a Representative's institutional positions and personal experience (or lack thereof) to influence legislative effectiveness.

Do Experienced Legislative Staff Promote Effective Lawmaking?

It is commonly believed that skilled staff are crucial for a lawmaker's success. By engaging with stakeholders, negotiating legislative details, and navigating the practices and procedures of the House more effectively, experienced staff may provide their bosses with a crucial edge in their lawmaking efforts. If so, we might expect that as the total number of years of work experience of a Representative's legislative staff increases, so too does the Representative's legislative effectiveness.

To examine this relationship, we estimate a series of linear regression models in which a Representative's Legislative Effectiveness Score (LES) in each Congress is the dependent variable, and the independent variable of interest is the total years of experience possessed by that Representative's legislative staff. Our models also include a wide range of conventional control variables (consistent with Volden and Wiseman 2014), and we employ legislator fixed effects to account for idiosyncratic factors that are associated with individual legislators, which might influence their effectiveness. For example, some legislators might be more interested lawmaking, and hence cultivate and retain more experienced legislative staff than do those who focus on other activities. More details on our empirical strategy, as well as tables with

descriptive statistics (Table 1) and with the regression results (Tables 2-6), can be found in the Methodological Appendix.

Based on our analysis of all House members from the 105th-113th Congresses (1997-2013), we find that, on average, House members with more experienced legislative staff appear to be somewhat more effective lawmakers, although not at conventional levels of statistical significance ($p = 0.11$).[6] The small size and lack of significance suggests that the average member is unlikely to notice any benefit from cultivating and retaining an experienced legislative staff.

Of course, Representatives vary widely in their experiences and institutional positions. Some members, for example, hold committee chairs, which allow them to wield a disproportionate level of influence over the lawmaking process. Indeed, our analysis in Table 2 shows that members attaining committee chairs approximately quadruple their lawmaking effectiveness, all else equal. Do experienced staff complement such members' institutional advantages? On the other hand, new members of the House often find that they must learn deeply about a set of issues, personalities, folkways, and procedures, such that they may lag behind their more senior peers in terms of legislative effectiveness. Do experienced legislative staff supplement the efforts of these more novice legislators? And for the many members of the House who are neither new nor institutionally empowered, is there any benefit from cultivating experienced legislative staff?

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[6] Results are shown in Table 2. Staff data are available from the 103rd through 113th Congresses. However, as noted above, we drop observations from the 103rd and 104th Congresses in order to limit measurement error of the independent variable of interest.

Legislative Staff Experience and Committee Chairs

Committee leaders exert substantial control over the legislative agenda. With the ability to grant preliminary consideration to legislation (or not), chairs sit at the first and most dramatic winnowing point in the legislative process (Krutz 2005, Adler and Wilkerson 2013). Chairs also advance their own legislation much more consistently than do rank-and-file members of similar seniority (Berry and Fowler 2018, Volden and Wiseman 2014). And chairs can also draw on a specialized committee staff whose hiring and duties are largely at their discretion (Deering and Smith 1997). Thus, chairs have substantial advantages in advancing their proposals through the lawmaking process.

Complementing these advantages, we find (see Methodological Appendix, Table 3) that committee chairs benefit from experienced legislative staff much more so than do other legislators. Among committee chairs, a one-standard-deviation increase in personal legislative staff experience is associated with a full one-point rise in LES, equivalent to doing the work of an entire additional lawmaker or to shepherding another "substantive and significant" bill into law.[7] Legislators who are not committee chairs, however, do *not* appear to experience increased legislative effectiveness from retaining experienced legislative staff. Indeed, when committee chairs are excluded from the full sample that is analyzed above, the meager and suggestive effect of legislative staff experience on a Representative's LES collapses further toward zero. On average, lawmakers who do not hold institutionally privileged positions do not benefit from having experienced legislative staff.

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[7] The average staff legislative experience for committee chairs is 13.7 years, with a standard deviation of 7.52 years. The relevant calculation for impact on LES is $(-0.0006 + 0.134) \times (7.52) \approx 1.003$.

Can Legislative Staff Experience Overcome Lawmaker Inexperience?

As the newest members of the House, freshmen Representatives face some of the toughest obstacles to effective lawmaking. Lacking the legislative expertise, political networks, and knowledge of congressional folkways possessed by their more senior peers, freshmen may choose to supplement their inexperience by hiring more experienced legislative staff. However, relatively few choose (or are able) to do so. In fact, the average level of aggregate legislative staff experience for freshmen (6.4 years) is less than half that of non-freshmen (13.3 years). Do freshmen who invest in experienced legislative staff benefit from doing so?

To engage this question, we replicate our analyses on subsamples of legislators at different levels of seniority, and we find (in results reported in Tables 4 and 5 in the Methodological Appendix) a strong positive association between legislative staff experience and legislative effectiveness for freshmen and sophomore Representatives. However, that association becomes much weaker for Representatives beyond their first two terms in Congress. For a freshman, a five-year increase in total legislative staff experience is associated with a 10.7% increase in her LES.[8] This trend is illustrated in the left-most panel in Figure 1, with a large positive slope in the association between legislative staff experience and a Representative's predicted Legislative Effectiveness Score. That score increases by over 50% for new lawmakers who hire staff with 20 years of legislative staff experience, compared to those Representatives who instead hire their campaign workers to serve as their legislative staff. Moving left to right across Figure 1, this slope remains sharply positive in the second term before flattening out in the third and fourth terms. This is indicative of no additional lawmaking benefits from experienced

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[8] Freshmen have an average LES of 0.611 over the time period examined here. The relevant LES calculation is therefore $(0.0131) \times (5) / 0.611 \approx 10.7\%$. The 95% confidence interval around this estimate ranges from just above 0% to 21%.

staff once the Representative herself has accrued a moderate level of experience, apart from the
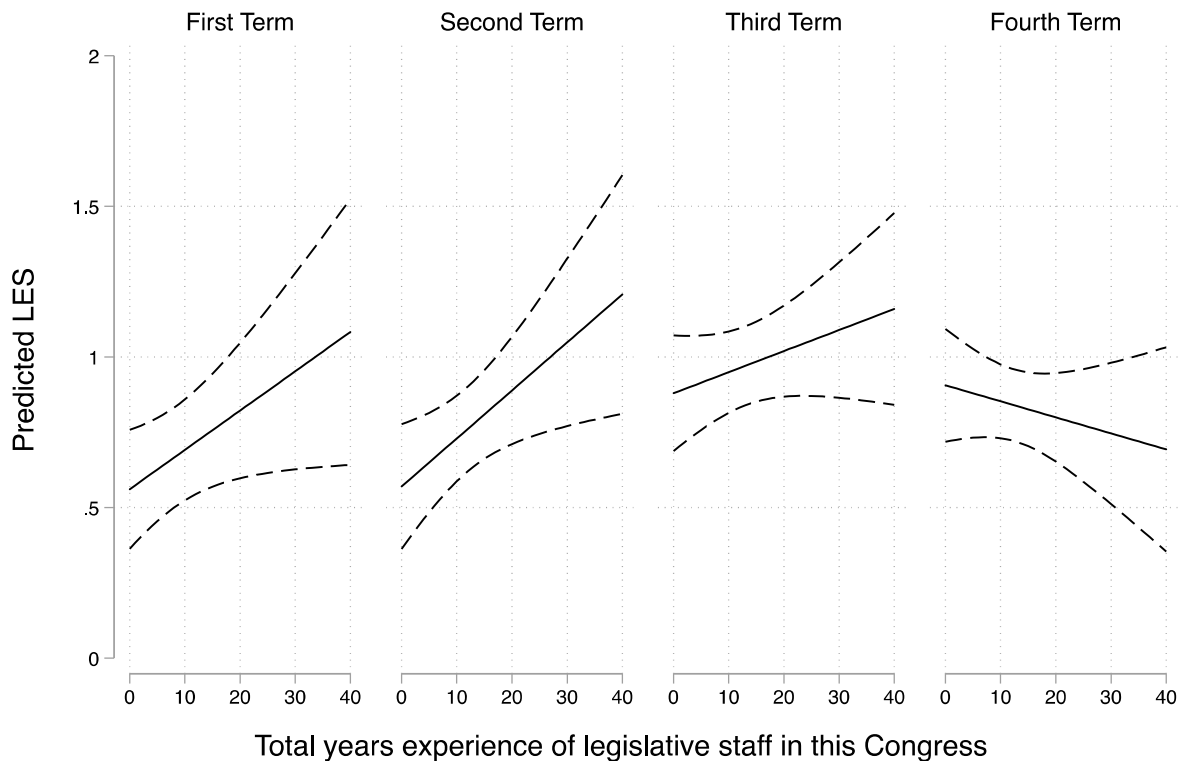
findings for committee chairs noted above.[9]

Figure 1. The positive and statistically significant slopes in the first two panels of the figure show the extent to which increased staff experience boosts the predicted Legislative Effectiveness Score (LES) of freshman and sophomore Representatives. As legislator experience increases further, the effect of staff experience becomes insignificant. All results shown here are based on models in Table 4. Graphs include 95% confidence intervals (dashed lines).

These results suggest that legislative staff experience can supplement legislator

inexperience. However, as a Representative gains more experience, which likely corresponds

with her developing more expansive political networks, she gains less of a benefit from her

legislative staff's experience. This finding may reflect the existence of a kind of ceiling on the

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[9] Table 5 shows the results of combining all lawmakers in their first through fourth terms together into a single analysis, and interacting the Total Legislative Staff Experience variable with Seniority. Consistent with the separate models and Figure 1, the benefits of additional staff experience are felt for low-seniority members but diminish quickly thereafter (shown by the negative coefficient on the interaction term).

degree to which experienced staff can make up for legislator inexperience. Alternatively, it could be the case that the benefits that most Representatives receive from more experienced legislative staff come only after a steep staff learning curve, and that many staff members depart Congress before such returns on investment can be realized.

The Benefits from Retaining the Most Experienced Legislative Staffers

Perhaps the largest human resources challenge facing Congress is the retention of high quality staff. Even a handful of years on the Hill affords a staffer enough experience and personal connections to render him or her a potentially valuable asset to lobbying firms and interest groups. Moreover, current staffers often cite poor working conditions and lower salaries as the main reasons that many of their colleagues have departed the Hill to work as lobbyists (Drutman et al. 2017). Above, we demonstrated that, apart from committee chairs and new members, lawmakers do not benefit on the whole from a more experienced staff.

However, there may be a significant qualitative difference between the large numbers of young staffers with just a few months or years of experience and the small number of very experienced legislative hands who are immensely valuable in the lawmaking process. Do these most long-serving legislative staffers contribute to their bosses' lawmaking success in a meaningful way? To answer this question, we replicate our staff experience analysis, but we replace the *Total Legislative Staff Experience* variable with a new variable, measuring the tenure of each Representative's *Most Experienced Legislative Staffer.* Engaging in this analysis enables us to determine if highly experienced staffers contribute to Representatives' lawmaking successes more so than less experienced staffers.

Whereas total legislative staff experience is associated with only a weak increase in overall legislative effectiveness, those Representatives whose most senior legislative staffer is

among the most experienced in the House appear to benefit greatly from having them on their payroll (see Table 6 in the Methodological Appendix). Specifically, an increase in five years of experience in a Representative's most experienced legislative staffer is associated with a 17% increase in her LES.[10] Similar to our earlier findings on the relationship between aggregate staff experience and legislative effectiveness, we see that committee chairs benefit more so than non-chairs from retaining a highly experienced legislative staffer. For a committee chair, a three-year increase in the experience of her most experienced legislative staffer is associated with a full-point increase in her LES, which roughly corresponds to one more "substantive and significant" bill being passed into law.

While chairs benefit tremendously from retaining these highly experienced legislative staffers, substantial benefits also accrue to rank-and-file members for retention of high-end staff, as shown in Model 6.3 of Table 6. For a non-chair, a five-year increase in the experience of her most experienced legislative staffer is associated with nearly a 14% increase in her LES.[11] Hence, even those Representatives who do not hold committee chairs can benefit (in their legislative effectiveness) by having a highly experienced staffer in their offices.

This targeted investment in highly talented and very experienced legislative staff differs dramatically from more blunt instruments, such as attempts to increase the overall experience levels of the thousands of congressional staff members, to expand those ranks substantially, or to pay them all significantly more. Above, we showed that an overall increase in staff experience has little impact on lawmaking effectiveness for the average representative, with benefits accruing only to new representatives and to committee chairs. In Models 6.4 and 6.5 of Table 6

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[10] The relevant LES calculation is $(0.0336) \times (5) / 1.00 \approx 16.8\%$. The 95% confidence interval around this estimate ranges from 5% to 29%.
[11] The relevant LES calculation is $(0.0223) \times (5) / 0.818 \approx 13.6\%$. The 95% confidence interval around this estimate ranges from 3% to 24%.

in the Methodological Appendix, we show that such null results extend also to staff spending levels and staff size. Specifically, we replicate our analysis on a Representative's LES from the full sample, but we replace *Total Legislative Staff Experience* with *Total Legislative Staff Spending* (which measures each Representatives' total annual expenditures on her legislative staff) and *Total Legislative Staff Size* variable (which measures each Representative's average legislative staff size in each Congress). Neither of these variables is associated with higher levels of LES. Hence, those Representatives who are unable to hire or retain highly experienced staffers cannot compensate for this shortcoming by simply spending more money or hiring more (relatively inexperienced) legislative staffers.

Taken together, these results point to the importance of a Representative's ability to retain her most experienced legislative staff. To the extent that a Representative can do so, she can expect a substantial boost in her ability to advance her legislative agenda. Clear illustrations of this pattern emerge from a casual perusal of the data. In the 113th Congress (2013-14), for example, freshman Republican Matt Salmon (AZ-5), hired a staffer with more than a dozen years of Hill experience, the most senior staff member among freshmen Representatives. Consistent with our large sample analysis, Representative Salmon's LES was 1.18, twice as high as the average freshman in the entire dataset. Moving beyond freshman legislators, minority-party Democrat Bennie Thompson (MS-2) had a staff member in the 112th Congress (2011-12) who had served on the Hill for more than 14 years. Thompson's LES in that Congress was 1.69, more than three times the value of the average LES of all minority-party legislators in our dataset. The large sample evidence also implies that this positive return to experienced legislative staff is particularly pronounced for committee chairs. Consistent with this analysis, Republican Ed Royce (CA-39) served as Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the 113th

Congress and had a personal staffer with 15 years of Hill experience. His LES in that Congress was 6.75, which was substantially higher than the average score of all committee chairs in our data set.

Congressional Capacity and Legislative Effectiveness: Implications and Conclusions

Congressional staff contribute in many ways to the job performance of Representatives, from aiding constituents, to communications, to lawmaking. We focus on the extent to which legislative staff, in particular, help to enhance Representatives' effectiveness at moving their proposals through the legislative process and into law. We find that the experience of legislative staff serves does seem to improve legislative effectiveness, particularly when an experienced staff includes especially long-serving individual staffers. However, such experience does not benefit all members of Congress equally.

Figure 2 concisely summarizes our results with respect to how legislative staff experience influences Representatives' Legislative Effectiveness Scores—a comprehensive measure of their abilities and activities in advancing new policies. The figure illustrates the percent increase in lawmaking effectiveness upon attaining five more years of experience among a legislator's staff.[12] The first result displayed shows the lack of any statistically significant effect of more staff experience on all lawmakers in the House grouped together. This finding, combined with the evidence reported above of no systematic lawmaking benefit from greater staff spending overall or from larger staffs, argues against a wholesale investment in congressional lawmaking capacity via legislative staffs.

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[12] The figure is based on the empirical models discussed above and shown in detail in the Methodological Appendix.

Percent Increase in Legislative Effectiveness with Five Years More Staff Experience
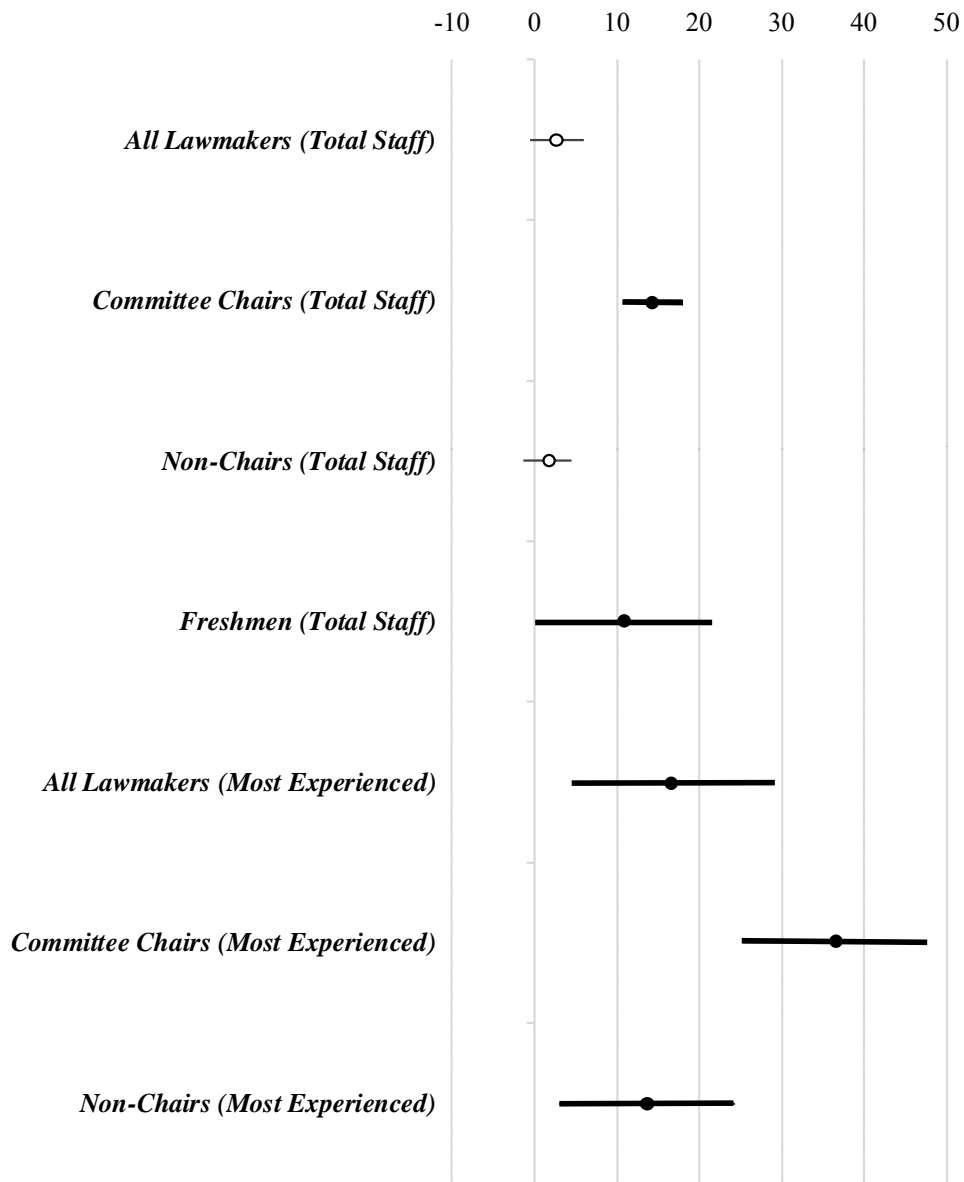
Figure 2. Illustration of enhanced Legislative Effectiveness Scores for various groups of lawmakers upon receiving five more years of legislative staff experience. Calculations are percentage increase in LES relative to the average LES for the group, based on models shown in Tables 2-6. Point estimates and 95% confidence intervals shown, with **bold** indicating statistically significant differences from zero. Results labeled (Total Staff) are based on the Total Legislative Staff Experience variable from Models 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, and 4.1, respectively. Results labeled (Most Experienced) are based on the Most Experienced Legislative Staffer variable from Models 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3, respectively.

However, the overall effect illustrated at the top of Figure 2 masks the specific conditions under which staff experience is particularly beneficial. The next finding in the figure shows that staff experience is especially helpful for committee chairs, with five more years of staff expertise associated with about a 14% increase in the LES for chairs. The size of this effect is remarkable if we consider the baseline effectiveness of chairs. On average, the committee chairs in our dataset receive an LES of 4.66, accomplishing five times as much in the lawmaking space as the average score across all lawmakers. The 14% increase in effectiveness for these lawmakers, then, is approximately another 0.7 LES points. Volden and Wiseman (2014, 27) point out that one point is equivalent to introducing and shepherding into law one additional major (what they call "substantive and significant") piece of legislation. This is, indeed, quite a large return on the expertise of legislative staff. Committee chairs also have access to committee staff, whose expertise undoubtedly enhances the lawmaking activities of all committee members, but especially the chair.[13]

Excluding chairs, these aggregate results show few additional benefits from legislative experience. One clear exception to this pattern, however, is for freshmen and sophomore lawmakers. New members of the House of Representatives face a steep learning curve to putting their first bill in the hopper and steering it through committee, to passage in the House, and into law. Having an experienced hand among their legislative staff members may seem invaluable to these novice lawmakers. Quantifying such experience, we find an approximately 11% increase in legislative effectiveness among first-term lawmakers who have staff with five more years of experience than among those assisting an average freshman.

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[13] Future research exploring how experienced committee staff members further enhance lawmaking effectiveness would be valuable.

The bottom three results in the figure show perhaps an even more attractive way to boost lawmaking effectiveness through a reliance on legislative staff. These results focus on the most experienced legislative staffer in each Representative's office. In the most recent Congress in our dataset (2013-14), the longest-serving legislative staff member in an average office had seven years of prior experience. A little under a quarter of Representatives employed a staff member with at least a decade of legislative experience. Those who did tended to enjoy a significant boost in their lawmaking effectiveness.

As shown in Figure 2, an increase of five years in the experience of a Representative's most senior legislative staffer is associated with a 17% rise in her Legislative Effectiveness Score. That boost is about 14% for those who do not chair a committee, and a whopping 36% for committee chairs. Indeed, even a three-year increase in a chair's most senior legislative staffer's experience is equivalent to the capacity of guide one additional substantive and significant piece of legislation through the policymaking process and into law.

One may respond to this finding (and the rest of those throughout this chapter) by arguing that members of Congress who have an interest in lawmaking will hire more legislative staff and be sure to retain them for a longer period of time, relative to Representatives without such policymaking interests. However, the fixed-effects analysis used throughout this chapter fully counters that argument: all of the findings presented here are on the basis of variance within each Representative's staff over time, rather than across Representatives. Moreover, the analyses control for the Representative's own seniority, which has an independent and positive influence on effective lawmaking. Legislative staff experience is strongly linked to effective lawmaking, especially for new legislators and for committee chairs.

In sum, these findings offer four main takeaways for the cultivation of expert legislative staff in Congress. First, experienced legislative staff are among the important factors that help explain which lawmakers succeed in advancing their legislative agendas and which fail. Second, the largest bang-for-the-buck comes from experienced staff aiding committee chairs. Due to their powerful institutional positions, chairs sponsor much more legislation that moves through the legislative process and into law than do others. Whether those bills are being put forth on behalf of the chair herself, the committee, or the majority party, having expert staff to aid in the lawmaking process yields significant returns. Experienced personal legislative staff seem to add to the beneficial design of staff tasked to specific committees. Third, at the other end of the spectrum, early-career lawmakers benefit substantially from hiring experienced legislative staff, as opposed to hanging on to campaign staff who lack experience within Congress. And, finally, proposals to increase congressional capacity for lawmaking need not be massive overhauls. Our analysis shows that a targeted effort to retain the most long-serving legislative staff would likely be much more effective than would broad (and highly costly) attempts to increase staff size or staff compensation across the board.

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Methodological Appendix

The findings described throughout the chapter derive from a series of regression models, presented here. Summary statistics, descriptions, and sources for all variables are given in Table 1. "Other Controls" refers to variables that, while not central to our analyses here, are known to be associated with effective lawmaking, and thus are controlled for in our models. As appropriate for the specific model in question, "Other Controls" includes the following: whether the legislator is a member of the majority party; the member's seniority (number of terms served in their current chamber); whether the legislator is a majority leader; whether the legislator is a minority leader; whether the legislator is a committee chair; whether the legislator is a subcommittee chair; whether the legislator serves on one of the House's so-called "power committees"; the absolute distance between the legislator's ideological score (DW-NOMINATE) and that of the median member of the House; the size of the legislator's home state's House delegation; the vote share won in the legislator's last election, and the square thereof. These variables' impacts are explicitly reported in Table 2. In Tables 2, 3, and 6, the depicted results are the estimates of linear regression models with legislator fixed effects. In Tables 4 and 5, legislator fixed effects are inappropriate due to the limited number of terms examined. Rather, the reported results are the estimates of linear regression models, with standard errors clustered by legislator where appropriate.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

Variable Name	Description	Mean	Std. Dev.
LES[a]	Member's Legislative Effectiveness Score	1.003	1.532
Total Legislative Staff Experience[b]	Total years of congressional service by member's legislative staff	12.18	8.111
Most Experienced Legislative Staffer[b]	Total years of congressional service by member's most experienced legislative staffer	4.775	2.910
Total Legislative Staff Spending[b]	Average annual spending on legislative staffers employed by member ($100,000 increments)	2.899	1.835
Total Legislative Staff Size[b]	Average number of legislative staffers employed by member	5.675	1.856
Majority Party[a]	Equals "1" if member is in majority party	0.542	0.498
Seniority[a]	Number of terms served by member in Congress	5.367	4.202
Majority Leader[a]	Equals "1" if member is in majority-party leadership	0.023	0.149
Minority Leader[a]	Equals "1" if member is in minority-party leadership	0.023	0.150
Committee Chair[a]	Equals "1" if member is a committee chair	0.048	0.214
Subcommittee Chair[a]	Equals "1" if member is a subcommittee chair	0.211	0.408
Power Committee[a]	Equals "1" if member serves on Rules, Appropriations, or Ways and Means	0.258	0.438
Distance from Median[a]	|Member i's DW-NOMINATE score – Median member's DW-NOMINATE score|	0.444	0.275
Size of Congressional Delegation[a]	Number of districts in state congressional delegation	19.01	15.10
Vote Share[a]	Percentage of vote received in previous election	66.69	12.97

[a]Data from Volden and Wiseman (2014) and www.thelawmakers.org.
[b]Data from Crosson, Furnas, and LaPira (2018).

Table 2: Experienced Legislative Staff Do Not Improve Average Lawmaking Effectiveness

	(2.1)
Sample:	Full
Dependent Variable:	LES
Total Legislative Staff Experience	0.00539
	(0.00335)
Majority Party	0.424**
	(0.144)
Seniority	0.0109
	(0.0124)
Majority Leader	0.479**
	(0.170)
Minority Leader	-0.0446
	(0.164)
Committee Chair	3.292***
	(0.120)
Subcommittee Chair	0.452***
	(0.0716)
Power Committee	-0.262**
	(0.0953)
Distance from Median	-0.215
	(0.273)
Size of Congressional Delegation	-0.0363
	(0.0261)
Vote Share	0.0390*
	(0.0184)
Vote Share Squared	-0.000251*
	(0.000120)
Constant	-0.193
	(0.863)
Legislator Fixed Effects?	Y
R^2	0.367
AIC	8681.5
BIC	8761.2
F	118.6
N	3391

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.
Model 2.1 shows that the total years of legislative staff experience has a statistically insignificant effect on the average Representative's Legislative Effectiveness Score upon controlling for other factors.

Table 3: Benefits of Experienced Staff Accrue to Committee Chairs

	(3.1)	(3.2)
Sample:	Full	Non-Chairs Only
Dependent Variable:	LES	LES
Total Legislative Staff Experience	-0.000597	0.00257
	(0.00335)	(0.00248)
Committee Chair	1.155***	
	(0.250)	
Total Legislative Staff Experience	0.134***	
× Committee Chair	(0.0138)	
Other Controls?	Y	Y
Legislator Fixed Effects?	Y	Y
R^2	0.391	0.225
AIC	8555.7	6087.6
BIC	8641.5	6160.6
F	120.9	60.66
N	3391	3230

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.
Model 3.1 shows that legislative staff experience has a positive and statistically significant effect on the legislative effectiveness of committee chairs, based on the interaction term. The main effects in Models 3.1 and 3.2 show no significant impact of legislative staff experience on the lawmaking effectiveness of non-chairs.

Table 4: Inexperienced Members Benefit from Experienced Staff

	(4.1)	(4.2)	(4.3)	(4.4)
Sample:	1st Term	2nd Term	3rd Term	4th Term
Dependent Variable:	LES	LES	LES	LES
Total Legislative Staff Experience	0.0131*	0.0160*	0.00700	-0.00532
	(0.00656)	(0.00664)	(0.00547)	(0.00587)
Other Controls?	Y	Y	Y	Y
R^2	0.166	0.191	0.275	0.237
AIC	1027.6	987.6	871.4	788.6
BIC	1066.0	1024.6	907.5	823.4
F	12.97	13.02	18.87	13.32
N	529	449	407	352

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.
Models 4.1 and 4.2 show a positive and statistically significant effect of experienced legislative staff on subsets of Representatives in their freshmen and sophomore terms. Models 4.3 and 4.4 show that this effect diminishes and becomes statistically insignificant beyond their second term in office.

Table 5: Benefit of Legislative Staff Experience Declines beyond Freshman Term

	(5.1)
Sample:	Non-Chairs, First Four Terms
Dependent Variable:	LES
Total Legislative Staff Experience	0.0255***
	(0.00763)
Seniority	0.102**
	(0.0329)
Total Legislative Staff Experience × Seniority	-0.00704**
	(0.00255)
Other Controls?	Y
R^2	0.212
AIC	3660.6
BIC	3731.5
F	23.27
N	1737

Notes: Standard errors, clustered by legislator, in parentheses. $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$. Model 5.1 shows a positive and statistically significant effect of legislative staff experience on new members' legislative effectiveness that declines as their seniority increases.

Table 6: Influence of Most Experienced Staffer, Staff Spending, and Staff Size

	(6.1)	(6.2)	(6.3)	(6.4)	(6.5)
Sample:	Full	Full	Non-Chairs	Full	Full
Dependent Variable:	LES	LES	LES	LES	LES
Most Experienced Legislative Staffer	0.0336**	0.0159	0.0223*		
	(0.0124)	(0.0124)	(0.00887)		
Committee Chair	3.696***	1.370***		3.270***	3.285***
	(0.142)	(0.322)		(0.104)	(0.104)
Most Experienced Legislative Staffer × Committee Chair		0.324***			
		(0.0405)			
Legislative Staff Spending				0.0108	
				(0.0104)	
Legislative Staff Size					-0.00168
					(0.0117)
Other Controls?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Legislator Fixed Effects?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
R^2	0.422	0.443	0.264	0.397	0.399
AIC	6472.0	6379.9	4322.9	11158.1	11183.5
BIC	6548.0	6461.7	4392.5	11240.7	11266.1
F	103.9	104.4	51.98	172.1	173.6
N	2549	2549	2426	4233	4240

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.
Models 6.1 to 6.3 show that a longer-serving most experienced staff member contributes significantly to the lawmaking effectiveness of committee chairs and non-committee chairs alike. Models 6.4 and 6.5 show no effect from greater spending or larger legislative staffs on lawmaking effectiveness for the average Representative, respectively.