# POSITION DESCRIPTION

# Head of public affairs

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| **OVERVIEW** | |
| Position Type | Varies, but typically noncareer appointment (NA) or presidential appointment (PA)[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Position Overview | The assistant secretary or director of public affairs serves as the principal communications advisor to the agency head, and directs public affairs and external communications for the department on a broad array of issues.[[2]](#endnote-2) |
| Compensation | Varies[[3]](#endnote-3) |
| Position Reports to | Agency head |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** | |
| Management Scope | This appointee typically manages a permanent career staff as well as a political staff. The staff varies depending on the agency’s size. |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Serves as the secretary's principal counsel on public affairs, providing executive leadership, policy direction and management strategy for the department’s public affairs programs and activities * Handles internal and external communications * Serves as the principal point of contact for communications and press issues * Ensures coordination among public affairs components * Manages public affairs issues and special activities that cut across operating division lines * Leads the planning, development and implementation of difficult incident communications strategies and activities for the department[[4]](#endnote-4) * Employs a wide range of media platforms; provides historical perspective; and conducts public outreach * Manages the department's website * Answers questions from the public[[5]](#endnote-5) |
| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** | |
| Requirements | * Subject-matter expertise, in social media more than ever * Strong management experience * Strong relationships or ability to form relationships with relevant stakeholders |
| Competencies | * Ability to communicate complex matters simply and accurately * Strong communication and interpersonal skills * Leadership skills * Ability to work under high pressure * Ability to handle sensitive matters * Excellent negotiation skills * Ability to work in a matrixed structure * Ability to communicate across partisan line * Imagination |
| **PAST APPOINTEES** | |
| Kevin Griffis (HHS): Senior Advisor in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, HHS; Communications Director for Sen. Cory Booker; Communications Director and Senior Advisor for Sen. Booker’s 2013 special election[[6]](#endnote-6) | |
| Eben W. Burnham-Snyder (Department of Energy): Deputy Director, Office of Public Affairs, Department of Energy; Director of Strategic Communications, Office of Sen. Ed Markey; Deputy Staff Director for Communications, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives[[7]](#endnote-7) | |
| Natalie Wyeth Earnest (Department of the Treasury): Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, Department of the Treasury; Spokeswoman for International Affairs, Department of the Treasury; Spokeswoman for the Presidential Inaugural Committee of then-Sen. Obama's 2008 presidential campaign in Colorado[[8]](#endnote-8) | |

1. 2016 plum book [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.treasury.gov/about/organizational-structure/Pages/natalie-e.aspx> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. 2016 plum book [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <http://www.hhs.gov/about/agencies/aspa/aspa-organization/index.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/leadership/kevin-griffis/index.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Leadership Directories [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.treasury.gov/about/organizational-structure/Pages/natalie-e.aspx> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)