

# 1L CAREER STRATEGY AND TOP FAQs FROM 1LS PURSUING PUBLIC SECTOR OPPORTUNITIES

By Jamie Reisman



**F**or law school career advisors, every year brings the excitement of a new 1L class, along with intense planning to provide robust support for first-year students. At Penn Carey Law, the majority of our 1Ls work in the public sector during their first summer. Here are a few strategies our office has recently employed to serve students, and guidance to commonly asked questions.

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In past years, our office started counseling ILs in mid-October. Last fall, we moved up the date and found students very receptive to the change. Opening communication earlier helped us to drive the conversation, allay student anxiety, and convey important information about available resources, researching employers, the summer hiring timeline, and submitting applications.

For student communications, our team began using Canvas, a course portal that students use for their coursework. We created a course page for all ILs, which covered summer opportunities across sectors, including at non-profit organizations, law firms, government agencies, international organizations, in-house companies, and judges' chambers. Since students are already familiar with Canvas and use it regularly, it made our resources and communications easily accessible.

In terms of the hiring timeline, some public sector employers are opening their processes earlier. However, a lack of uniformity has stretched out the timeline further – forcing students to navigate a potential offer before a top choice employer has opened their summer application. With this context,

here are some frequently asked questions (FAQs) that I hear from ILs regarding their public sector summer job search, along with guidance on potential responses to those students.

**1 I don't know where to start.**

Ask big questions to help focus your research to find potential organizations. Think about what brought you to law school, what substantive areas of law you would like to explore, the clients and communities that you'd like to work alongside, and the skills that you hope to develop. Do you like research and writing? Do you want to work alongside clients? Do you want to attend court hearings? Learn more about the different stages of litigation? Are you interested in legislative and policy work?

**2 Help! I'm behind already. Will I be missing out if I can't start my job search in the Fall semester?**

Starting to consider your first legal job search can bring up feelings of "FOMO" (fear of missing out). Classmates,



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particularly upper-level students, can be an amazing resource, and we encourage you to reach out to students who worked at positions that might be of interest to you. This is hopefully an exciting time where you can focus on YOUR individualized path, centered on

your interests and career goals, while not comparing yourself to classmates who have different interests. If you have a dream job, check out the timing of their application process. If the deadline is early, consider whether you have the bandwidth to update your resume and work on one cover letter to send when the application period opens. If you don't have a dream job, but are open to many possibilities, then it's fine to start putting your materials together over winter break. Many opportunities will be available to you come January.

**3 I have a background in a certain area of public interest law – should I dive deeper or try something else?**

Your IL summer is an ideal time to push out of your comfort zone, challenge yourself to engage in new tasks, and either develop new skills or strengthen skills in a legal environment. If you are working in an area of public interest law where you have experience, how will the projects and assignments at your summer internship build on (and not repeat) your previous experience? Trying out a new area of law where you could potentially see yourself can help you decide if it's work that you would like to pursue after graduation.

**4 How many applications should I submit?**

There is no magic number; I love a spreadsheet for keeping track of employers, noting timelines and the status of each application.

After you've researched substantive areas of law and organizations that you're interested in, start with the

organizations that you're most excited about – make sure you know when the application period opens. If employers are reviewing applications on a rolling basis, it can be helpful to submit materials early in the application period. After sending out a batch of applications, if you receive a number of interviews – terrific! Focus on preparing for those interviews. If you haven't heard back from employers, consider sending out another batch of applications.

Your IL summer provides a tremendous opportunity to work on issues that you care about, interact with clients, develop relationships with lawyer mentors, and grow as an advocate. +



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