

11 ways to staff a Midwestern legislature

Data on staffing levels show wide variety in level — and type — of resources provided to region's legislators

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The way individual state legislatures structure themselves can depend on a number of varying factors, and chief among those is the use of staff.

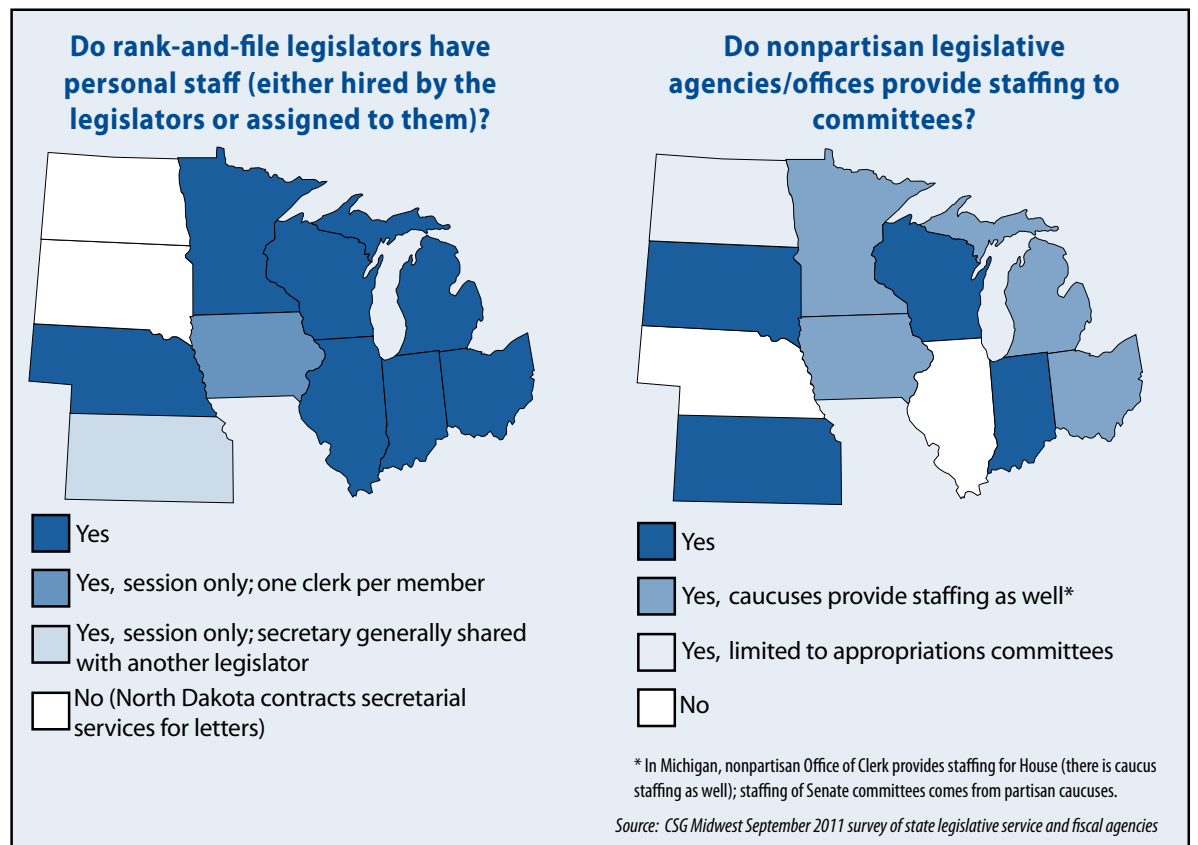
Staffing patterns in the Midwest's 11 state legislatures differ greatly — with variation seen in everything from the total number of people employed by the legislature, to the size of personal and partisan caucus staffs, to the staffing of committees.

In North Dakota and South Dakota, for example, legislators are not provided with personal staff. Iowa and Kansas legislators have staffing assistance limited to when they are in session. In contrast, each Nebraska lawmaker is able to hire two full-time, year-round employees, while in many of the region's larger states, legislators have access to the assistance of personal and partisan caucus staff.

But one common thread among all states is the importance of nonpartisan legislative agencies and the individuals that they employ: They are the primary vehicle for maintaining the day-to-day operations of the legislature, with functions that often include bill drafting, fiscal analysis, legislative research and committee staffing.

"Probably as much as anything else, professional staffing is the linchpin of the professional legislature," Alan Rosenthal, a professor at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, writes in his 2008 book "Engines of Democracy: Politics and Policymaking in State Legislatures."

The modernization of legislatures began in the latter half of the 20th century, as the result of myriad factors: the growing complexity of state government, court decisions on reapportionment and the subsequent redistricting work required of states, and a



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desire to better balance powers between the executive and legislative branches.

The result was longer, more frequent sessions (in the late 1960s only half of the states held annual legislative sessions); a reduction in the size of legislatures; an increase in legislative pay; and additional space and facilities for legislatures to do their work.

One of the most distinguishing — and lasting — characteristics of this "professionalization movement" was to increase the use and number of permanent legislative staff.

"[It] provided the single greatest boost to legislative capacity," Rosenthal says.

In addition to modernizing day-to-day operations, this change has provided lawmakers with more information and research — independent of the executive branch and/or legislative leadership.

The larger legislative support agencies are generally found within "full-time" legislatures that meet throughout or during most of the year (generally larger-populated states).

In the Midwest, legislatures in Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin employ the largest numbers of non-

partisan staff. North Dakota and South Dakota have the smallest nonpartisan staff agencies, currently employing 34 and 22 permanent staff, respectively. (Some legislatures — primarily those that meet only for a few months — also often employ additional staff who work only while the legislature is in session.)

In some states, the number of people working to support the legislature and its members grows quite large when partisan staff is taken into account.

With the exception of Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota, all of the region's legislatures use partisan staff that work directly for the caucus and its leaders or for individual members. These individuals support members by handling duties such as communications, constituency services and research; they also sometimes provide committee support.

In the region's six largest states — Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin — partisan staff outnumber nonpartisan staff.

The use of staff to assist with the work of committees also varies in the states. In Indiana, Kansas, South Dakota and Wisconsin, the staffing of committees comes from the nonpartisan legislative agencies. In Iowa, Michigan and Minnesota, staffing comes from both the partisan caucuses and nonpartisan staff. (Nonpartisan staff is provided to the Michigan House, but not the Michigan Senate.)

In Illinois, Nebraska and North Dakota, the nonpartisan legislative agencies do not provide committee staffing. ★

Staffing of legislatures in Midwest			
State	Number of nonpartisan staff	Nonpartisan staff added during session?	Number of partisan staff
Illinois	150	No	844, caucus and personal staff
Indiana	81	Yes, 4	147, caucus and personal staff ⁴
Iowa	100	Yes, 4	51 caucus staff; 150 clerks for individual members for session only ⁵
Kansas	126	Yes, 215 (includes 115 secretaries for legislators)	22 caucus leadership staff
Michigan	260 ¹	Year-round session	526, central caucus and personal staff
Minnesota	176	Yes, 43 ²	255 ⁶
Nebraska	228	No ³	None (131 nonpartisan personal staff)
North Dakota	34	Yes, 6	None (caucus leaders have assistants)
Ohio	246	No	377, personal and caucus staff ⁷
South Dakota	22	Yes, 27	None ⁸
Wisconsin	342	No	377 (personal staff categorized as partisan)

¹ Includes House staff and Senate staff, as well as staff from Michigan Legislative Council
² A number of these positions are not full-time
³ Three to four part-time positions are added to the clerk's office during session
⁴ Number of staff is increased to approximately 200 during session
⁵ Clerks are not necessarily "partisan"
⁶ 61 staff positions added during session
⁷ Includes 106 part-time, intermittent positions
⁸ 22 interns considered partisan staff assigned by size of chamber and party split

Source: CSG Midwest September 2011 survey of state legislative service and fiscal agencies