POLITICS, POLICY, AND LOBBYING SKILLS PROFILE

August 2020
SUMMARY

By reading this profile we hope that you can build a better understanding of whether seeking to develop politics, policy, and lobbying expertise seems like one of the best ways for you to use your time in order to help animals.

HOW DOES THIS WORK HELP ANIMALS
You can encourage changes and improvements in legislation, regulation, and enforcement, redirect government spending, and shift social norms and attitudes in ways that are more favourable to animals.

WHO IS THIS WORK A GOOD FIT FOR
Generalists with good communication skills, people skills, and critical thinking skills. You have to be willing to work with people who don’t care about animals as much as you do.

HOW MUCH DO WE NEED MORE EXPERTISE IN THIS AREA
We could benefit a lot from more people exploring some of the many promising opportunities in politics and policy. There are few lobbying roles in animal advocacy, though there could be more in the future.

WHAT OPTIONS WOULD YOU HAVE IF YOU WERE TO LEAVE THIS PATH
There are lots of opportunities for switching between various roles in politics, policy, and lobbying. The generalist skills you develop could easily be applied to other animal advocacy roles.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR POLITICS, POLICY, AND LOBBYING ROLES
Focus on building up relevant networks and getting your foot in the door as early as possible. Familiarity with politics and political institutions helps. Graduate degrees can be helpful, especially in law, economics, public policy, or political science. Sometimes specialist PhDs are necessary.
INTRODUCTION

GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS CAN MAKE CHANGES THAT FOCUS ON ANIMAL WELFARE, ANIMAL-FREE FOODS, THE REGULATION OF ANIMAL PRODUCTS, OR WILD ANIMAL ISSUES.

So a career in politics — either as a politician or as a staff member — could give you an excellent platform to help animals. There are also less “political” roles within government institutions that still have an influence on laws and regulations. You certainly don’t have to work for a charity to advocate for animals, though some animal advocacy nonprofits do have roles focused on pressuring governments.

There’s a lot of overlap between the activities and required skills for people in these types of roles, so we’ve grouped them together in a single profile on politics, policy, and lobbying (PPL).

In this profile, we will share insights with you from the experiences of people working in PPL (via 12 interviews), plus interesting research findings.
DOES THIS WORK HELP ANIMALS?

If you’re interested in helping animals effectively through your career, you should prioritise work that has high potential for impact.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT IN POLITICS

Politicians can propose, encourage, or discourage new legislation and redirect lots of government spending. Some research suggests that political leaders have important effects on society. They can also make consideration of animals’ interests seem more normal and mainstream in politics and in public political discussion.

Support staff may be able to help and encourage politicians to help animals. Helping to get an animal-friendly candidate into political office could also be effective.

Cory Booker is a US politician who has proposed a major bill to restrict factory farming in the US.

OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP ANIMALS IN POLICY

There are many policy roles within government institutions that aren’t as explicitly “political.” The opportunities depend on the institutional setup in the country, but these are often roles in the bureaucracy of the “executive branch” of government or civil service.

Opportunities for helping large numbers of animals could come from fleshing out the details of policies or just by gradually changing the culture in policy-making institutions.

Maneka Gandhi is an Indian politician and animal rights activist who has encouraged government action to help animals.
Advocates can help animals if they manage to persuade politicians to support favourable new legislation and regulation or protect and enforce favourable existing legislation. There are some promising initial findings from research on lobbying to help animals, and wider academic studies.

However, some lobbying is ineffective and some failed lobbying efforts could entrench attitudes or reduce the credibility of other advocates.
OTHER FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE POTENTIAL OF DIFFERENT ROLES

‣ The idea of “replaceability” is one argument that makes “insider” political or policy roles seem more promising than “outsider” lobbying and advocacy roles in nonprofits. If you don’t apply for political or policy roles, often the person who gets the job instead won’t be as focused as you on using their position to help animals. So that role probably won’t do much good for animals unless you get it. By comparison, for every lobbying role at an animal advocacy nonprofit, there will probably be a lot of applicants focused on helping animals.

‣ The salaries for insider roles come from taxpayers, while the salaries for outsider roles come from donations.

‣ In less democratic political systems, policy-makers pay less attention to public preferences, but are more able to introduce sudden and radical policy change without opposition. This makes insider careers seem more promising than outsider lobbying and advocacy in those countries.

‣ The balance of power between different parts of government varies by country, which affects which specific roles are most promising.

‣ In local politics, the potential for impact will also vary. For example, some states and cities have much larger populations than others.

‣ Some roles may be highly bureaucratic and not give you opportunities to help animals. The risk of this seems lower in political and lobbying roles than in policy administration roles.

Our guess is that, despite national differences, political or policy careers will often still be promising options. Whichever PPL roles you pursue, it’s important to be strategic in the specific roles that you take.
IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

The information in this section is intended to help you assess whether you will have good personal fit with PPL roles. Your "personal fit" with a role or career path is how well-suited you are to it and your chances of really excelling at it. We think this is one of the most important factors in impact-focused career strategy.

If you already have substantial policy or political expertise and are reading this profile to decide whether you should seek to apply your expertise to animal advocacy, you might like to skip this section.
WHAT DO PEOPLE WORKING IN THIS AREA DO?

We asked our interviewees, “What does a typical day involve?” Their replies included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLITICS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging with the media.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication with various other institutions and employees involved in government.</td>
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<td>Communication with constituents and the general public.</td>
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<td>Communication and outreach to relevant professionals and potential advocacy allies.</td>
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<th>POLICY</th>
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<td>Meetings, including any management responsibilities.</td>
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<td>Research into relevant problems.</td>
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<td>Engaging with other departments to build agreement behind policy proposals.</td>
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<td>Cost-benefit analyses.</td>
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<td>Time for “pet projects” that are more directly relevant to animal advocacy efforts.</td>
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<th>LOBBYING</th>
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<td>Mobilising supporters and activists.</td>
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<td>Campaign planning and research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging with the media.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging with supportive legislators, staffers, and policy-makers, such as providing them with information on forthcoming topics, or seeking their help on specific issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging with and project managing other supportive stakeholders, including other nonprofits, to coordinate action.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actively lobbying to encourage the passage of specific legislation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organising events to encourage discussion and political interest.</td>
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<td>Drafting, editing, and submitting formal public comments and feedback on laws or regulations.</td>
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Of course, this doesn't cover all of the activities of people in PPL roles.

Lobbyists at smaller organisations tend to have more varied, generalist roles, whereas lobbyists with larger policy teams might have more specialised roles. Lobbying roles would presumably look quite different at different sorts of organisations.
WHAT MAKES GREAT CANDIDATES FOR POLITICS, POLICY, AND LOBBYING ROLES?

We checked with our interviewees and several other sources what makes people great in PPL roles.

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<tr>
<th>GREAT POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL SUPPORT WORKERS...</th>
<th>GREAT POLICY WORKERS AND CIVIL SERVANTS...</th>
<th>GREAT LOBBYISTS...</th>
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<tr>
<td>› Have good social skills and are able to connect people to make progress on shared goals.</td>
<td>› Are efficient and effective.</td>
<td>› Are resilient and determined to keep going, despite rejections and indifference.</td>
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<td>› Are good at public speaking.</td>
<td>› Have good social skills and are able to build consensus.</td>
<td>› Are comfortable talking to people and have good people skills.</td>
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<td>› Are persuasive.</td>
<td>› Have good analytical and critical thinking skills.</td>
<td>› Are persuasive.</td>
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<td>› Can write well.</td>
<td>› Can work independently, with low amounts of structure and support.</td>
<td>› Understand the set-up of key players and institutions, plus the division of power and responsibilities between them.</td>
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<td>› Have the desire to get things done.</td>
<td>› Are hard-working.</td>
<td>› Have good critical thinking skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>› Are loyal to those that they work with.</td>
<td>› Can work independently, with low amounts of structure and support.</td>
<td>› Are passionate about the cause.</td>
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<td>› Are willing to stand out from the crowd and take risks to get ahead.</td>
<td>› Can manage social media.</td>
<td>› Are knowledgeable about the topic area and use relevant evidence to support their claims.</td>
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<tr>
<td>› Are able to complement the skillset of the politicians or support staff that they work with.</td>
<td>› Are loyal to those that they work with.</td>
<td>› Are able to talk to and find common ground with stakeholders with different priorities and beliefs to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>› Can manage social media.</td>
<td>› Are willing to stand out from the crowd and take risks to get ahead.</td>
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Several interviewees emphasised the idea of needing to seek out non-obvious opportunities for impact. So independence, creativity, and entrepreneurialism may be helpful in policy and politics.

There also seems to be a distinction between more or less technical PPL roles. People skills seem more important to generalist PPL roles, whereas technical knowledge and qualifications may be crucial for more specialist lobbying, policy-making, or regulatory roles.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER REASONS YOU MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT BE A GOOD FIT?

- You have to be willing to work in an environment where your colleagues are not motivated to help animals. This could be socially and emotionally draining.
- What's more, in policy and political roles, you have to be willing to accept that you'll be working for an institution that regulates and maintains animal agriculture in your country.
- Since policy change can be slow, it's important to be patient and be willing to work on an issue for several years without seeing much progress. You may have to spend lots of time working on topics that have no good opportunities to help animals.
- Politics and policy careers are riskier than some other career options; there's a chance of amazingly high impact, but there's also a risk that you will never be able to achieve very much for animals.
- One positive of civil service and policy administration careers is that the work-life balance seems likely to be quite good, staying close to a standard 40 hour working week. In contrast, our impression is that political roles can involve high time commitments beyond usual working hours.
- Civil service and policy administration roles seem likely to be a good back-up option, perhaps later in your career, especially if you have a generalist skillset. However, entering late in your career seems to be difficult in Germany.
- 80,000 Hours note that “US Government jobs have substantially lower pay than corporate options” and “most jobs are located in Washington, D.C., so you’ll probably need to move to get a good job if you live outside D.C.” Though there may be opportunities to work in local or state politics, many PPL opportunities will be clustered around capital cities.
HOW CAN YOU ASSESS YOUR PERSONAL FIT?

- Look honestly at your previous success in related work that uses the skills described above.
- Look at your interest and performance in relevant subjects, such as political science.
- Join party-affiliated youth or student groups.
- Get involved politically as a citizen, such as by joining local community politics or governing institutions.
- Get involved in grassroots political campaigns organised by others, lobbying your legislators on relevant issues, and building up your understanding of how other organisations run campaigns.
- More broadly, get involved with grassroots animal advocacy — this can teach you how to talk about relevant issues to people who see them as less important than you do. You could focus especially on tasks that require similar skills to PPL roles, such as campaigning or fundraising.
- Ask for a meeting with a political representative and do independently organised lobbying.
- Try to meet the needs of a politician and become their trusted adviser.
- Volunteer for political campaigns.
- Look for internships and entry schemes into PPL roles.
WHAT IS THE SITUATION LIKE CURRENTLY IN THE ANIMAL ADVOCACY MOVEMENT?

A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE LANDSCAPE OF THE ANIMAL ADVOCACY MOVEMENT MIGHT HELP YOU UNDERSTAND SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF WHETHER YOU ARE WELL-SUITED TO WORK IN THIS AREA.

It’s also important for understanding how your strengths compare to other members of the animal advocacy movement who might plausibly do similar roles. This determines your comparative advantage — the job or path that is highest-impact for you, taking into account the possibility of coordination with others in the animal advocacy movement. This is something we can talk through with you if you apply for a one-to-one careers advice call with us.
HOW MUCH DOES THE MOVEMENT NEED MORE EXPERTISE IN THIS AREA?

Members of the animal advocacy movement seem to believe that expertise in politics, policy, and lobbying is an important bottleneck in the animal advocacy movement at the moment:

- In our survey of animal advocacy nonprofits, 5 out of 12 respondents selected “government” as “the biggest talent gap in the animal movement.”
- We found similar results in another short survey of nonprofit staff.
- In a 2019 survey of effective altruism organisations by the Centre for Effective Altruism, “Government and policy experts” was rated as the most needed skill or ability for effective altruism as a whole community.

There is evidence suggesting that PPL expertise is not currently needed extensively within paid roles in animal advocacy nonprofits:

- Animal Charity Evaluators found that the largest US farmed animal advocacy organisations only spent 7% of their resources on influencing policy and the law in 2016.
- In our spot-check of 27 animal advocacy organisations, we found only 14 roles (2% of the total) clearly focused on lobbying.
- Some of the other questions in our surveys of animal advocacy nonprofits seemed to suggest that PPL expertise wasn’t important for many current roles.
- In the Centre for Effective Altruism's survey, though they saw “Government and policy experts” as important for the effective altruism community, few respondents said that their own organisation needed this sort of expertise.

However, PPL expertise may be more needed for roles in animal advocacy nonprofits in the future.

More importantly, much of the important work for animal advocates developing this general category of expertise will probably be done while working directly in politics or in public bureaucracies. Our impression is that few people currently work in government and policy roles with a targeted focus on supporting the animal advocacy movement, but there are thousands of possible roles worldwide.
WHERE CAN YOU FIND ROLES?

Every national government presumably has at least a handful of full-time policy roles focusing on farmed animal issues. There may be one department that is most obviously relevant, such as DEFRA in the UK, the USDA in the US, and the Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture in Germany. If you include national politicians, local politicians, assistants, staffers, and non-political policy staff, the total number of insider roles that have promising opportunities to help animals is quite high; probably hundreds in any one country.

By contrast, there are probably fewer than 100 roles in nonprofits focused on political engagement for animals worldwide. There may be some other relevant roles in think tanks that do not focus exclusively on animal advocacy or animal-free food.

ARE THERE LESS COMPETITIVE OPTIONS?

80,000 Hours have discussed the entry requirements for various roles in politics and policy in the US. Suffice to say that many of the roles at the top level are highly competitive. For example, they have estimated that for graduates of top US law schools who try to become members of Congress, the chances of success are around
1 in 10 or lower. If you didn’t go to a top university that has good links with political institutions, your chances are probably much lower.

However, there are lots of roles with some relevance to PPL, including some less competitive options. For example, our first UK civil service interviewee believed that “the civil service is pretty easy to enter from almost any academic background.” Our second UK civil service interviewee believed that it is relatively easy to “jump in at lower levels” and recommended looking up the entry requirements for specific roles online.

For lobbying roles, the formal entry requirements might not always be high, though they sometimes are, and meeting the entry requirements does not necessarily mean that your application would be competitive. Of our 7 interviewees in lobbying roles, 5 had direct experience in PPL roles prior to their current role.

Roughly in order of our guess at their competitiveness, options include:

- Politician in national or international institutions,
- Local or state politician,
- Political appointee in the government,
- Staffer or assistant for a politician,
- Researcher at a prestigious think tank or advisory body that occasionally focuses on relevant policy issues,
- Professional lobbyist,
- Researcher at a think tank focused on animal advocacy or animal-free food,
- Policy-focused civil servant,
- Part-time or voluntary adviser or consultant to a politician,
- Researcher at another academic or nonprofit organisation that occasionally focuses on relevant policy issues,
- Part-time local councillor,
- Other campaigns roles at an animal advocacy nonprofit,
- Administrative roles in national or international institutions,
- Administrative roles in local governmental or party politics,
- Volunteer political campaigner or canvasser,
- Member of a political youth or student group,
- Volunteer activist for an animal advocacy nonprofit with some involvement in PPL.
WHAT OPTIONS WOULD YOU HAVE IF YOU WERE TO LEAVE THIS PATH?

THOUGH IT VARIES BY COUNTRY, IT IS RELATIVELY EASY TO TRANSFER BETWEEN ROLES WITHIN POLICY BUREAUCRACIES. THERE ARE OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSFER WITHIN POLITICAL AND POLICY ROLES, SUCH AS FROM A ROLE AS A CONGRESSIONAL STAFFER TO JOINING THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OR BECOMING A MEMBER OF CONGRESS.

There's quite a lot of evidence that people with experience in politics and policy roles will become better lobbyists than those without this experience. There are some limitations of this research, such as its focus on competitive roles in US politics, but several of our interviewees also believed that experience in politics and policy roles would be useful experience for those seeking to have lobbying roles. The main benefit of these roles seems to be the connections that they help you build.

More widely, PPL careers seem likely to help you develop various communication skills and people skills that can be applied to non-PPL career paths in animal advocacy nonprofits, such as in fundraising roles or management and leadership. That said, some of the specialised knowledge, networks, and credentials that you
gain through PPL roles or preparation might have little value for advocacy roles that are not focused on lobbying.

If you want to work in politics or policy roles, then it is unclear whether a past experience of animal advocacy would overall be helpful or not. It might help you to stand out from other candidates in some unusual circumstances, such as if you are applying to work directly with a politician who has a strong interest in animal issues. There may also be a lot of overlap in some of the required skillsets. However, animal advocacy experience could make people think that you are unable to fulfill your public role impartially. For example, our interviewee at the USDA believed that there was an attitude “in certain circles” that farmed animal advocates are “politically toxic” and that having had animal advocacy experience could “actively hurt you in getting the job.” Additionally, various internship options and the fast stream in the UK civil service seem more readily available for recent graduates, so working in animal advocacy roles first might limit your options.

If you are supportive of the ideas of effective altruism but are not confident that you want to focus your career on helping animals, then PPL careers are a good option, since career capital is fairly transferable between PPL roles.

INTERESTED IN POLITICS, POLICY, OR LOBBYING ROLES TO HELP ANIMALS?

If you need to do some career planning, 80,000 Hours’ “Tips on Making Career Plans” will likely be helpful.

If you’re considering whether you’d like to focus on developing PPL expertise or bringing your existing PPL expertise to support the animal advocacy movement, we might be able to help you talk through your options.

You can apply for a one-to-one careers advice call with us.
HOW TO PREPARE FOR WORK IN THIS AREA

SO FAR, THIS PROFILE HAS FOCUSED ON INFORMATION TO HELP YOU DECIDE WHETHER SEEKING TO DEVELOP PPL EXPERTISE WOULD BE A HIGH-IMPACT USE OF YOUR TIME. THE INFORMATION BELOW IS MORE FOCUSED ON HELPING YOU DECIDE WHAT YOU COULD DO NEXT IF YOU DECIDE THAT YOU DO WANT TO FOCUS ON THIS.

WHAT SORTS OF EXPERIENCE ARE MOST USEFUL FOR POLITICS, POLICY, AND LOBBYING EXPERTISE?

Our interviewees and various other sources we identified in our research frequently emphasised the importance of connections and networks in PPL, both for securing roles and for making progress on your goals once you’ve secured a role. So seeking out experiences that can help you build your PPL network should be top priority.
Beyond this, for political roles, having had a wide range of experiences is helpful, especially within the broad area of PPL. Experiences that develop relevant social skills seem useful.

Our interviewees in non-political policy roles agreed that getting your foot in the door of the policy bureaucracy as soon as possible was usually much more helpful than building up skills externally.

Useful experience in preparing for lobbying roles includes:

- Experience working for the body or institution you’re planning to lobby, or experience that helps you build connections within those institutions.
- Experience with law and public policy.
- Experience in other kinds of advocacy work, such as in grassroots campaigning, self-organised lobbying, or professional litigation.
- Experience in other roles where you are asking people to change their behavior, such as in sales, marketing, or fundraising.
- Some kind of experience with animal advocacy issues, perhaps built up through volunteering.
- Some kind of experience that teaches you useful generalist skills, such as in the corporate sector.
- Long-term familiarity with politics and political priorities, such as by reading the (political) news every day.

80,000 Hours argue that “policy careers involve moving between different types of roles and institutions.” Experience in academia, think tanks, or various parts of the food and agriculture industry (especially the meat industry) could be relevant options as part of some PPL careers.

Another option is to seek experience in “public affairs agencies,” lobbying agencies and consultancies that are not cause-specific. This could enable you to build useful career capital (skills, connections, and credentials) without the downsides of animal advocacy lobbying experience, though you wouldn’t be helping animals and might end up lobbying for interests that are harmful.
WHAT SORT OF ACADEMIC TRAINING IS RELEVANT?

Unlike some nonprofit roles, it seems important to get at least a relevant undergraduate degree if you're considering PPL careers. The expectations vary by role and location, but doing a master’s in a relevant subject may help to speed up your PPL career progress too. Three of our interviewees believed that graduate degrees can help with connections though are not always necessary. Five of our interviewees emphasised that they could be helpful or necessary for some roles, especially technical roles. If you'd like to keep open the option of switching between academia or think tanks and policy roles, then consider doing a PhD. The importance of educational credentials may vary by country.

The most common recommendations for academic specialisms that we found were:

- Agricultural economics or general economics,
- Law,
- Political science,
- Public policy,
- A specialist, technical subject of relevance, such as veterinary science, environmental science, agro-ecology, agricultural science, nutrition, or environmental studies.

Other suggestions included engineering and degrees that help you to develop good writing and critical thinking skills.
USEFUL RESOURCES

Resources that were created in the making of this profile:

‣ The interview findings spreadsheet,
‣ The results of our brief research on lobbying and the “revolving door”,
‣ An initial list of policy-focused animal advocacy think tanks.

‣ For further information about specific countries and institutions, you will need to identify resources yourself with more specific information. Here are some starting points:
  For the UK civil service, see our interviews from two individuals in the UK civil service, the resources by former UK civil servant Sam Hilton, 80,000 Hours’ profile, and these two websites.
  For UK politics and lobbying, see 80,000 Hours’ profile and find jobs and internships at this site.
  For the USDA, see our interview with an employee.
  For US political actors and opportunities, see the relevant content by 80,000 Hours (here, here, here, here, and here), our interviews with someone who works for a US local politician, plus Courtney Fern, Chris Holbein, and Mark Onley
  For European institutions, see our interview with Alexandra Clark.
  For UN institutions, see our interview with Raphaël Podselver.
  For Chinese PPL, see these two reports and our interviews (from another skills profile) with Jeff Zhou and Jian Yi.
  For Indian PPL, see this report and our interview with Amey Deshmukh.
  For Brazilian PPL, see this report. We also had interviews with several people (Catalina Bustamante here and various others here) from other parts of Latin America that touched on PPL.
  For German PPL, see this report.

Note that we asked interviewees about the “key players and institutions” in their country.

For those focused on policy and politics, rather than working for nonprofits, it may be helpful to engage with the wider community focused on helping animals effectively, to reduce the risk that your values drift and to think about how you can help animals the most:

‣ Perhaps connect with someone who can be your “accountability buddy” to keep you focused on your goals. There are other suggestions in this post on “Concrete Ways to Reduce Risks of Value Drift and Lifestyle Drift.”
You could participate in various conferences and events, including those organised by existing local effective altruism groups and animal advocacy groups, though you might want to avoid publicity about this in case it damages your credibility with your colleagues.

Join the effective animal advocacy community directory (add your details here) — you can keep your name anonymous and use anonymous email forwarding if preferred.

Follow discussions in the public Effective Animal Advocacy - Discussion Facebook group.

Other useful resources:

- We haven’t read them ourselves, but there seem to be various books, blogs, and reports related to effective lobbying. There are also large amounts of resources on what makes good politicians and policy-making.
- 80,000 Hours’ advice on “how to get a job.”