

Interview Questions

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1. *What are your responsibilities at the Texas Solicitor General's Office?*

I primarily handle appeals involving the State of Texas and its agencies before the Texas and federal appellate courts. I also review potential appeals and participate in moot arguments to help other Office of Texas Attorney General attorneys prepare for appellate arguments.

2. *Please describe your organizational structure (e.g., what department are you in, who do you report to, etc.).*

I am in the Solicitor General Division of the Office of the Texas Attorney General. I report to the Solicitor General and our two Deputy SGs.

3. *What do you find most challenging in your position?*

As an appellate practitioner I specialize in appellate procedure but am a generalist in terms of substantive law. When I get involved in an appeal in a type of case that is novel to me, I first have to familiarize myself with the underlying subject matter involved. Almost every appeal brings something new and challenging. For example, in two appeals I handled recently, I had to learn about class-action laws and payment systems because they were relevant to those appeals.

4. *It is sometimes said that attorneys who make the transition from a firm to an in-house position may struggle when they are required to manage people because firms do not train lawyers to be good managers. Do you agree with this? Do you have any advice for improving management skill development?*

Not really. My situation regarding managing others is similar to what I experienced in private practice, in that I still share a secretary and a paralegal with several other lawyers.

5. *What do you most enjoy about your position?*

I enjoy crafting the argumentative briefs, which is the meat and potatoes of what I do. It's a challenge to present a narrative that is at once succinct, compelling, and firmly grounded in the record while still getting your client's perspective across. Working for the Attorney General's Office provides a wide variety of appeals with interesting legal issues, including constitutional issues that are harder to find in private practice. I also really enjoy presenting oral argument when the occasion arises.

6. *What do you wish you had known earlier in your career?*

I wish I had recognized earlier that I should trust my instincts about the types of legal work I find interesting. I think many young lawyers feel a lot of pressure to take the highest-paying job they can find, often because they have school loans to repay. In the long run I think it's most important to make a living doing something you find satisfying. However, my early experiences were helpful to me in many ways and I'm glad things happened the way they did. I had some really good mentors in private practice who I remain friends with today.

7. *Is there anything in particular you think a young attorney should consider before moving to a government position?*

Young attorneys should think critically about the end game. For example, where do they want to be in five years, ten years, at the end of their career? Recognizing that your plans may change over time doesn't mean you shouldn't make long-term plans.

8. *Can you compare working as a government attorney to working with a firm?*

I have more autonomy than I did when I worked at a law firm, although that may be due in part to the fact that I have much more experience now. In most of my cases now I am primarily responsible for the final brief product, although I solicit input from the attorney who handled the case below and my governmental "clients," and my division also has a process in which all briefs undergo peer review before filing.

Another difference is that there is not the same focus on billable hours as exists in private practice. I sometimes work weekends and holidays here, but only to meet a pressing appellate deadline. I find that it's easier for me to put in extra hours when I'm the person signing the brief.

9. *In general, what can an attorney expect compensation-wise in an entry-level governmental position? Is the compensation comparable to compensation with a large firm?*

I don't really keep current on what the large firms pay their young associates, but in general I would think a government attorney should expect one-half or less compensation compared to large, "BigLaw" law firms. There is also some variation depending on the type of government employer involved (i.e., municipal, county, state, or federal).

10. *What opportunities does a young attorney have for career development or advancement with-in your organization?*

The opportunities for advancement all depend on what governmental organization or division you are in. In some places there are lots of people moving in and out,

coming and going, and this brings opportunity for advancement. In general I think government employment tends to offer lots of opportunities for young attorneys to gain valuable experience and demonstrate their merit.

- 11. *Sometimes lawyers within firms express a desire to go in-house or to a government position because of the perception of better work-life balance. How is your work-life balance?***

My work-life balance is pretty good. Appellate law tends to be fairly conducive to balance, because most deadlines are predictable and scheduled weeks or months in advance. Also, government lawyers are busy because they carry a heavy caseload, not because they face hourly billing expectations.

- 12. *Has the change in the economy affected your job? And if so, how?***

Not much so far, thankfully. Our agency has undergone budget cuts like all agencies have, but my daily work is not greatly affected. One change is that our division's CLE budget has been greatly reduced, so I look for free CLE whenever I can find it.

- 13. *What advice would you give young attorneys about seeking out a position with a governmental agency or organization, either in a legal or non-legal position?***

Young attorneys should focus on what experience they want to have and create a plan for making sure they get it. They should find good mentors within the agency or organization. But I think the same advice would apply in private firms as well.