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Google employees have enjoyed revolving door during Obama administration

“If they have access to information on competitors and they go to Google...then you have to wonder if Google is getting an unfair advantage over others in their market,” he said.

By Johnny Kampis Aug 8, 2016

More than 250 people have moved from Google and related firms to the federal government or vice versa since President Barack Obama took office.

The Google Transparency Project, the work of Campaign for Accountability, poured over reams of data to find 258 instances of “revolving door activity” between Google or its associated companies and the federal government, national political campaigns and Congress since 2009.



Much of that revolving door activity took place at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, where 22 former White House officials went to work for Google and 31 executives from Google and related firms went to work at the White House or were appointed to federal advisory boards by Obama. Those boards include the President’s Council on Science and Technology and the President’s Council on Jobs and Competitiveness.

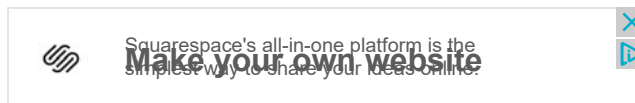
Regulation watchdogs may be just as keen about the moves between Google and the Federal Communications Commission and Federal Trade Commission. Those government bodies regulate many of the programs that are at the heart of Google’s business, and there have been at least 15 moves between Google and its lobbying firms and those commissions.

U.S. BUREAU OF STATISTICS

The research also shows that 25 officials in national security, intelligence or the Department of Defense joined Google, and three Google executives went to work for the DOD.

Eighteen former State Department officials became Google employees, and five Google staffers became employed at the State Department.

The complete list can be downloaded via Excel file [here](#).



Friends in high places

Former Google employees occupy several key slots in the federal government. These include:

- Megan Smith, vice president new business development at Google 2003-12, vice president of Google 2012-14, chief technology officer at the Office of Science and Technology Policy 2014-present.
- Alexander Macgillivray, deputy general counsel at Google 2003-09, general counsel at Twitter 2009-13, deputy chief technology officer at OSTP 2014-present.
- Nicole Wong, vice president and deputy general counsel at Google from 2004-11 and deputy chief technology officer at OSTP 2013-14.
- Jannine Versi, product marketing manager in Middle East and North Africa for Google 2010-2012, White House National Economic Council 2013-14, chief of staff International Trade Administration at U.S. Department of Commerce 2014-present.
- Michelle Lee, deputy general counsel at Google 2003-12, under secretary of commerce for intellectual property and director of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office 2012-present.
- Mikey Dickerson, site reliability manager at Google 2006-13, administrator U.S. Digital Service 2014-present. Dickerson also assisted with election day monitoring and modeling with Obama's 2012 re-election campaign and helped repair the broken HealthCare.gov website.

At least 18 former Google employees work or have worked for the U.S. Digital Service and its General Services Administration sidekick, 18F. USDS operates under the Executive Office of the President, consulting on big federal information technology projects.

The door revolves



Scott Amey, general counsel for the Project on Government Oversight, a nonpartisan group that exposes abuses of power in government, said it's hard to know for sure how more than 250 people moving between Google and the federal government since 2009 compares to other corporations, but "it sounds like it's a very significant number."

"It's very hard to get information about the quantity of people who go in and out of government service," Amey told Watchdog.org.

Google didn't return an email seeking comment for this story.

Analysts at Google Transparency Project compiled the revolving-door data by using public information that includes lobby disclosure records, news stories, LinkedIn profiles and reports from Open Secrets. Campaign for Accountability notes the analysis is "an evolving representation of the scale of the revolving-door relationship between Google and government" rather than a comprehensive tally.

In other words, the total could be higher.

The project's analysis included affiliates of Google, such as YouTube, as well as key law firms and lobbyists.

It also includes Civis Analytics, whose sole investor is Eric Schmidt, executive chairman of Google parent company Alphabet Inc.

At least 27 people who worked on Obama's 2012 presidential re-election campaign went to work for Civis Analytics after the election. Google Transparency Project said "those employees are then deployed by the White House to work on President Obama's top policy priorities."

Those policies include federal technology acquisition reform, national security matters and health care reform – Civis Analytics employees worked with Google engineers to fix the broken HealthCare.gov website in 2013, Campaign for Accountability reports.

White House visitor logs showed that Civis Analytics executives met with White House officials at least 51 times since Obama took office.

RELATED: Visitor logs show Google’s unrivaled White House access

The company received more than \$3.5 million in payments from Democratic campaigns in the last two presidential election cycles, Campaign for Accountability found.

Going from government to Google

The door has swung open the other way, as well, with prominent federal employees taking high-ranking positions at Google. These include:

- Caroline Atkinson, head of global public policy for Google beginning this year, previously White House economic affairs adviser.
- Sameer Bhalotra, cybersecurity at Google in 2014, senior director for cybersecurity at White House, 2010-2012.
- Will Hudson, senior advisor for international policy at Google 2015-present, director for international cyber policy at National Economic Council, 2014-15. Hudson previously served as a counsel advising government clients on cyber law.
- Regina Duncan, head of Google’s advanced technology and products division 2012-present, director of Defense Advance Research Projects Agency, 2009-12.
- Michele Weslander Quaid, chief technology office for public sector at Google 2011-15, chief technology officer at National Reconnaissance Office, 2009-11.

Then there is the curious case of the FTC. Joshua Wright, senior counsel at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati (Google’s most trusted antitrust law firm) since January, served as FTC commissioner from 2013-15 after being appointed by Obama.

But Wright had to recuse himself from deciding on issues related to Google while on the FTC because he had co-authored papers urging the commission to not file suit against the company. Those papers were indirectly funded by Google.

The FTC previously investigated allegations that Google manipulated search results to benefit its own companies, but the FTC ruled in 2013 that wasn't the case. This, despite FTC staff saying Google's practices cause "real harm to consumers and to innovation."

Meanwhile, the European Commission is expected to slap a record fine on Google for the same allegations the FTC dismissed.

RELATED: Google could face record fine in Europe after skating by in U.S.

"Google loses its friend at the FTC," Fortune wrote when Wright decided to take a job as professor of law at George Mason University, a position he still holds.

Wright is just one of several former high-ranking FTC officials who have since been employed at Google or its law firms. Others include former commissioner Julie Brill, who went to work for Hogan Lovells as partner and co-director of privacy and cybersecurity in March. That law firm has represented Google on a variety of issues.

Matthew Bye, who advised the FTC on antitrust issues, went to work for Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati before moving to Google. He has been the company's director of legal competition since November 2015.

In late 2012, months before the FTC settled with Google in its antitrust investigation, FTC Office of General Counsel attorney Robert Mahini took a job as Google's senior policy counsel.

Some key FCC officials have moved from the commission to Google or its associate law firms, or vice versa. Johanna Shelton, who has visited the White House 128 times since Obama took office, was an FCC attorney from 1998 to 2001.

Renata Hesse, a member at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosata from 2006-11, became senior counsel to the chairman for transactions at the FCC later in 2011. She is now a deputy assistant attorney general in the Department of Justice's antitrust division.

Austin Schlick has been Google's director of communications law since 2012. Before that,

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