

# The Role of an Executive Assistant in Australia Today



*The role of the Executive Assistant has become one of the most important and well-rewarded across a wide variety of organisations around Australia.*

Working at the senior level of an organisation, EAs play a pivotal role in supporting managers, CEOs, directors, and other high-level executives, ensuring the smooth and efficient functioning of organisations, including businesses and not-for-profit entities.

## **What's Involved?**

The EA plays a key organisational role and is responsible for scheduling meetings, organising agendas, taking and relaying messages, coordinating travel, and generally assisting key executives in fulfilling their managerial duties. Depending on the level of seniority, the EA may also find themselves arranging board meetings and even representing the executive at meetings.

## **How is the Role of the EA Evolving?**

Organisations everywhere face growing and complex demands from customers, shareholders, and a diverse group of stakeholders. Boards, CEOs, and senior executives face enormous daily challenges to meet a host of obligations, rules, and regulations, KPIs, and customer demands, both internal and external.

As pressure on executives grows, the demands on professional support staff, especially EAs, have become critically important. The EA needs to provide administrative support to the executive and frequently becomes an important link between executives and boards, as well as with other senior executives.

Increasingly, the role of the EA is central to organisational success. High-performing EAs play a crucial part in improving the functioning of organisations, solving problems, and leading projects. Their role goes far beyond administrative support.

Operational areas that were once the province of dedicated executives increasingly cross over into the realm of EAs – especially for C-suite EAs. Areas such as corporate governance, regulatory compliance, and issues associated with diversity, inclusion, and employee wellbeing have all taken on elevated importance. EAs need to understand and be watchful for corporate risks. They are frequently the last line of defense in complex and diverse organisations.

The ability to think and work strategically with CEOs and senior executives is one of the keys to success and career progression.

## **What are the Skills Required?**

In such an important role, the EA must juggle a myriad of tasks and responsibilities. This requires a range of competencies, including computer skills, high-level communications, highly effective time management, and increasingly, project management and digital skills.

One of the critical requirements is the ability to multitask, because EAs find themselves juggling many duties, often in a dynamic and fast-moving environment. Planning and time management skills are vital, but unscheduled events demand flexibility, adaptability, and a capacity to prioritise.

Technology is a key enabler, and the best EAs are attuned to new and emerging tech tools that can streamline mundane tasks and enhance productivity. Generative AI is the most recent innovation with the capacity to free EAs from routine work and allow them to focus on high-value tasks. High-level assistants are embracing and leading the charge into these new frontiers.

## How to Secure and Excel in an EA Role

There are several possible pathways into an EA role. One of the more common is through commencing as an administrative officer – undertaking tasks such as managing office supplies and filing systems, handling contacts with clients and staff, booking meeting rooms, and preparing office budget reports.

It's possible to undertake study through either vocational or tertiary education to both prepare for such a role and rise to the next level.

One VET qualification is the Certificate III in Business Administration, which can be studied at TAFE or a college and which provides the skills and knowledge to complete a range of administrative tasks. At a higher level, the Certificate IV in Business Administration adds to the administrative skills and includes leadership components.

There is also the option to study at university with a degree such as the Bachelor of Business Administration, which covers a broader range of business skills across areas such as marketing, accounting, and strategic planning, and opens the door to a variety of career paths.

To stand out for the next opportunity or promotion, EAs should continually seek to expand their skill set, take on additional responsibilities, and demonstrate their ability to contribute to the strategic goals of the organisation. Networking, seeking mentorship, and being proactive in professional development are essential steps for career advancement.

## Addressing Gender Imbalance and Stereotypes

The position of EA has traditionally been dominated by women. While this remains the case, there are more men entering the field. The stereotypes that once accompanied EA and PA roles have rapidly fallen away. Gender need not be a barrier to career progression, as there are many formal and informal mentoring and professional networks where EAs can discuss their work and career aspirations.

## Maximising AI in the EA Role

High-level assistants are embracing and leading the charge into new frontiers, such as generative AI, which can free EAs from routine tasks and allow them to focus on high-value work. Understanding and leveraging AI tools can significantly enhance productivity and efficiency, making EAs more valuable to their organisations.

## Emerging Job Titles

Alongside traditional EA roles, we are seeing emerging job titles such as Chief of Staff, Executive Business Partner, and Strategic Assistant. These roles often encompass broader responsibilities and strategic functions, reflecting the evolving nature of executive support positions.

## An Exciting and Rewarding Career

Over time, the role of the EA has evolved into a valued and skilled position in many organisations. EAs find themselves working alongside some of the most respected figures in business and the not-for-profit sector.

Those who succeed in these roles are highly sought and well rewarded. Salaries vary by industry and region, but on average, starting salaries sit at around \$75,000 per annum and can rise above \$120,000. Positioning oneself for salary increases involves demonstrating value, taking on more significant responsibilities, and continuously improving one's skill set.

EAs have a front-row seat on business organisations, leaders, and leadership. They are in a prime spot when it comes to learning from the most successful managers, executives, and directors. In the process, they get to develop unique personal and professional skills, hone their leadership capabilities, and play a key role in shaping the organisations in which they operate.



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