

DEEP POVERTY INITIATIVE

Community Engagement Action Guide



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

Being involved in the community is a great way for psychologists to apply their knowledge and skills to contribute to social change and deep poverty reduction. [The Community Tool Box](#)¹ is a website featured on [APA Division 27's SCRA site](#)² that provides practical guidance, tips, tools, and how-to-do-it information on a wide variety of community skills. This guide, in addition to the Community Tool Box, can help you on your path to becoming a community-engaged psychologist.

Educate Yourself

- Learn the facts about poverty and the poverty rates in your community using online resources such as [Ideas42](#),³ [Talk Poverty](#),⁴ [Spotlight on Poverty & Opportunity](#),⁵ [Urban Institute](#),⁶ and the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#).⁷
- Identify local programs and organizations working on poverty issues
 - Check local health department or mayor's office websites for lists of local programs and initiatives (e.g., [100 Resilient Cities](#))⁸
 - Search online for local [community action groups](#),⁹ [urban leagues](#),¹⁰ [charities](#),¹¹ and [organizations](#)¹²
- Leverage Your Network
 - Ask friends, colleagues, and other psychologists about their involvement with poverty-related community organizations, groups, programs, and initiatives (hereafter referred to as organizations) and how you can get involved.
- Bolster your [competency](#)¹³ to be involved in the community and read about [community-involved practice](#).¹⁴
- Listen to community members discuss their needs. Begin to build relationships and connections with individuals in deep poverty and organizations that serve those in deep poverty by first hearing what they identify as important to them. Do not approach these conversations with a predetermined agenda, but rather with the goal of listening and learning. This can be achieved by attending local events to learn about your community's needs and meet local stakeholders by attending sessions, events, meetings, and townhalls held by local organizations.
 - Before attending events, practice your active listening skills by aiming to gain knowledge first, rather than demonstrating your expertise or what you hope to achieve through the

partnership (e.g., see <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/active-listening-a-skill-that-everyone-should-master.html> and <https://psychcentral.com/lib/become-a-better-listener-active-listening/>).

- Get your students involved in learning about community needs by considering how you can incorporate community engagement into your courses (see “Deep Poverty Initiative Educator’s Guide” for more information). Before sending students into the community, however, make sure they are also educated, competent, and active listeners by providing them with time and opportunity to practice these skills.

Communicate Your Interest

- Contact stakeholders in the organization (e.g., staff, leadership, board members)
 - See example email attached for how you might make first contact
 - If appropriate, ask to attend a staff/board/community meeting to learn more about the organization
 - Let organizations know you are interested in offering your skills and expertise, but that you want to learn about them before discussing what you might bring to the partnership
- During the meeting:
 - Continue to practice your active listening skills by asking about barriers to achieving organizational goals
 - Highlight what technical skills you can contribute to the organization’s poverty efforts (Consider examples found below), with emphasis on skills that they have identified needing and that further the organization’s capacity to do their work
 - Discuss what your role with the organization would be (e.g., volunteer, [board member](#),¹⁵ expert consultant, grant writer, etc.)

CAPACITY BUILDING: LEND YOUR EXPERTISE

Technical

- Support and consult with emerging local leaders in their planning and implementation of actions to address deep poverty-related issues
- Work with local leaders to interpret the issues they are facing, and the differing factions, stakeholders, and priorities involved in those issues
- Orient organizations to think about and address deep poverty in the local community. This could include:
 - Designing or redesigning program activities identified by the organization as needing support
 - Creating an organizational initiative to address deep poverty
 - Identifying appropriate deep poverty-related variables to include in the organization’s surveys/questionnaires

- Help the organization maximize their impact
- Work with stakeholders to update/create theory of change and logic models
- Offer to conduct a [needs assessment](#)¹⁶ and assist with asset mapping
- Offer to evaluate the organization or one of their programs
- Provide research evidence and tools to strengthen the organization's assessments, activities, and the resources they provide
- Provide statistical expertise by analyzing data and interpreting results
- Identify variables for data collection and define appropriate data selection criteria
- Review/write [grants](#) with a psychology lens
- Provide pro bono services and consultations to individuals involved in the organization (e.g., staff or clients)

Change the Narrative

- Hold educational sessions (e.g. panels, [public forums and listening sessions](#),¹⁷ brown bags, [webinars](#), and workshops)
 - Approach local organizations and offices addressing deep poverty and/or poverty indicators to host or co-host the sessions
 - Promote the sessions to local interest groups, universities, businesses, government officials, and press
 - Emphasize the need to act – deep poverty is not an intractable social problem, but reducing it will require the actions of many
 - Maintain an RSVP list to continue contact with attendees post-event
- Distribute APA's intersectional-sectional poverty [factsheets](#)¹⁸ or other resources from the “5 Week Deep Poverty Challenge”
- Content coverage ideas:
 - Define deep poverty
 - There are many ways to [measure and define poverty](#).¹⁹ Essentially, poverty is a “form of chronic scarcity that shapes behavior in predictable ways” ([ideas42](#)³)
 - Explain the impact of deep poverty in your community
 - Magnitude and severity of deep poverty
 - Effect of social determinants on populations
 - Review good practice in communicating with individuals living in deep poverty
 - Emphasize the importance of using simple, clear language and demonstrate to attendees [how to check document readability](#)²⁰

- Write concisely and highlight important, actionable items to reduce readers' [cognitive costs](#)³ (p. 17)
- o Discuss benefits and services
 - Explain to attendees the benefits, services, and interventions (e.g., [safety nets](#)²¹) available to individuals or families with low incomes and/or living in deep poverty
 - Identify who provides the benefits or services (e.g., community programs, city/state/federal governments, etc.)
 - Compare/contrast the availability, accessibility, and utilization of services in the community
 - Discuss the negative effects of the [“strings” attached to receiving services](#)³ (p. 25)

SAMPLE EMAIL

Dear [COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION NAME],

I am [YOUR NAME], a psychologist at [YOUR ORGANIZATION NAME], and I am participating in The American Psychological Association's 2019 Deep Poverty Initiative which proposes to move beyond understanding causes and consequences of poverty by using psychological science as a catalyst to address deep poverty. In particular, the Deep Poverty Initiative encourages psychologists to establish ongoing collaboration between themselves and their local communities to end deep poverty.

In exploring our community, I am interested in better understanding [COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION NAME]'s mission and the work you do. I would then like to discuss how I can help support your efforts.

Would you be available in the next two weeks for either a phone call or in-person meeting to discuss your organizations work and how I might be able to support/collaborate/partner with you?

Thank you for the work you do on behalf of our community, and for your time and consideration of my request.

Sincerely,
[NAME]
[Ph#]

P.S., If you are interested, you can find more information about the larger initiative here:
<https://www.apa.org/about/governance/president/deep-poverty-initiative>

This document is a product of the American Psychological Association Deep Poverty Initiative Working Group.

¹ <https://ctb.ku.edu/en>

2 <https://www.scra27.org/resources/resources-community-members/>
3 http://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/142_PovertyWhitePaper_Digital_FINAL-1.pdf
4 <https://talkpoverty.org/poverty>
5 <https://spotlightonpoverty.org/states/>
6 <https://www.urban.org/research/data-methods/interactive-maps>
7 <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/45-children-in-extreme-poverty-50-percent-poverty?loc=1&loct=2#ranking/2/any/true/871/any/326>
8 <https://www.100resilientcities.org/cities/>
9 <https://communityactionpartnership.com/find-a-cap/>
10 <http://nuli.iamempowered.com/in-your-area/affiliate-list>
11 https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?keyword_list=poverty&bay=search.results
12 <https://talkpoverty.org/local-state-groups/>
13 <http://www.scra27.org/what-we-do/practice/18-competencies-community-psychology-practice/>
14 http://www.scra27.org/index.php/what-we-do/practice/practice-council-initiatives/community-practice-bulletin?&sortBy=title&pageSize=10&doc_q_8748=&filterByKey=&filterByVal=&page=2
15 <https://boardsource.org/resources/joining-nonprofit-board/>
16 <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/develop-a-plan/main>
17 <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-public-forums/main>
18 <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications>
19 <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/webinars>
20 <https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Get-your-document-s-readability-and-level-statistics-85b4969e-e80a-4777-8dd3-f7fc3c8b3fd2>
21 <https://poverty.ucdavis.edu/post/safety-net-enables-faster-more-permanent-exit-deep-poverty>