

# DEEP POVERTY INITIATIVE

## *In-District Visit Action Guide*



AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

To alleviate the complex issue of deep poverty, efforts must bolster policy change to confront macrosystemic structures that reinforce income insecurity. The [APA Deep Poverty Initiative](#)<sup>1</sup> is committed to “shaping political decision-making to combat ineffective/inequitable policies and build support for safety net and other scalable programming that benefit those living in deep poverty and effective strategies for improving socioeconomic circumstances.” Attending in-district meetings with your Congressional representatives is one way that psychologists can work to change the socioeconomic status quo and make a difference in the community. This guide will help you schedule and prepare for a meeting about deep poverty with your Congressional representative. More exhaustive guides can be found on APA’s [website](#)<sup>2</sup> and on Division 17’s [website](#).<sup>3</sup>

*“Psychology’s expertise as a behavioral science is essential to effectively address society’s most pressing concerns. ...For our expertise to be appreciated, psychologists must engage in policy debates and enter the political arena.”*

*– DeLeon, Loftis, Ball, and Sullivan (2006)<sup>4</sup>*

### Psychology and Advocacy

The Deep Poverty Initiative (DPI) recognizes that policy solutions, both federal and local, are necessary to address deep poverty. The DPI is seeking Congressional support for a resolution (“Resolution for Addressing Deep Poverty”) which calls for a federal strategic plan to end deep poverty in the United States. A great way to raise awareness on deep poverty and advocate for the resolution is to schedule in-district meetings with your Members. In-district meetings allow psychologists to provide research and information on pertinent issues to policymakers<sup>5</sup> and are the most effective way to influence the policy process.<sup>6</sup> Many psychologists do not receive training in policy or advocacy, so you may have a few questions, such as the ones below:

- **Is advocacy within the realm of psychology?** Yes!
  - APA is involved in advocacy efforts and encourages psychologists to do the same. Read this [webpage](#)<sup>7</sup> to learn more about APA’s advocacy efforts related to socioeconomic status.
  - Watch this [video](#)<sup>8</sup> and read [Be an Advocate for Psychology](#)<sup>9</sup> to learn more about why sharing your expertise is important.
- **Is advocacy the same as lobbying?** Not quite.
  - Lobbyists support a *specific policy* and work to get that policy passed. On the other hand, advocates support a *specific cause* and may have general policy goals in mind, such as funding programs or initiatives.

## Requesting a Meeting

- [Identify who represents you](#)<sup>10</sup> in the Senate and House of Representatives.
- Choose which Member you want to schedule a meeting with. Things to consider:
  - Location of the Member's office
  - The Member's current legislative interests and priorities
- Investigate the Member's website for information on how to schedule a meeting. More details about how to schedule can be found [here](#).<sup>11</sup> There are a couple things to keep in mind:
  - Don't limit yourself to just meeting with the Member. Staffers are also knowledgeable and if you can make your case to staff, they'll likely pass it up the chain.
  - Don't be discouraged if it takes a few contact attempts to get a meeting, or if your meeting is rescheduled. Staffers juggle a constantly changing schedule, and Members' travel plans can change quickly if they must stay in D.C. longer than anticipated.
- To maximize the impact of your visit, schedule the meeting to coincide with a Congressional recess and important dates for poverty awareness, such as September 10<sup>th</sup> (when the US Census Bureau releases the national poverty indicators in 2019) and October 17<sup>th</sup> (World Poverty Day).
  - Congress is in session from October 15<sup>th</sup> to November 22<sup>nd</sup>.
  - You can also check [Congressional calendars](#)<sup>12</sup> for alternative recess dates

## Before the Meeting

- Learn the facts about poverty in the Member's jurisdiction. Members want to know if the issue is important to, or could impact, their constituents.
  - Senators will likely prioritize [state-level data](#)<sup>13</sup> whereas representatives might prioritize [district-level data](#)<sup>14</sup> or a data from a city in their district.
  - Familiarize yourself with local examples of deep poverty to discuss during the meeting. Local examples humanize any statistics you present.
- Create a brief handout (1-2 pages) that summarizes your main points to give to the member or staff.
- Research the Member to learn about their recent accomplishments and current policy efforts.

## During the Meeting

- Begin the meeting by introducing yourself and what you do in the district. Members care that you are a constituent and that you are contributing to the community. Also use this opportunity to show off your knowledge about the office by mentioning the Member's work.
- Discuss deep poverty, using both statistics and the local examples that you researched, and the Resolution for Addressing Deep Poverty.

- Clearly state that you want the Member to support the Resolution for Addressing Deep Poverty and commit to ending deep poverty in the United States.
- Give the meeting attendee the handout that you prepared.
- Read [Visiting a Member of Congress](#)<sup>15</sup> for additional guidance on how to effectively meet with your legislator.

## After the Meeting

- Always send a thank you note! Refer to APA's [A Psychologists' Guide to Federal Advocacy](#)<sup>16</sup> for a 'thank you' letter/email template.
- Maintain the relationship with the Member and their office.<sup>17</sup> Policymaking is a slow process and it's important to continue contact as that process goes along. A meeting is just a first step!
- Encourage colleagues to become more involved. Lots of people may want to engage the political process, but they just don't know how to begin. You can help!
- Keep up-to-date on federal legislative issues by joining APA's [Federal Action Network](#).<sup>18</sup> Socioeconomic topics are grouped in the "Public Interest" area.
- Engage with APA. Our team of advocacy professionals may be able to help and advise during your advocacy efforts. Always feel welcome to reach out to us!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.apa.org/about/governance/president/deep-poverty-initiative>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.apa.org/advocacy/guide>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.div17.org/home-slideshow/community-advocacy-a-psychologists-toolkit-for-state-and-local-advocacy/>

<sup>4</sup> DeLeon, P. H., Loftis, C. W., Ball, V., & Sullivan, M. J. (2006). Navigating politics, policy, and procedure: A firsthand perspective of advocacy on behalf of the profession. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 37, 146-153. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.37.2.146>

<sup>5</sup> Maton, K. I. (2016). Psychologists in the policy arena: Policy process, use of research, vantage points, methods, and skills. In *Influencing social policy: Applied psychology serving the public interest* (pp. 26-60). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.congressfoundation.org/projects/communicating-with-congress/citizen-centric-advocacy-2017>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.apa.org/advocacy/socioeconomic-status/index>

<sup>8</sup> <https://youtu.be/n24sTYqpqDM>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.apa.org/advocacy/guide>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.apa.org/advocacy/guide/who-to-contact>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.apa.org/advocacy/guide>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/Calendars+and+Schedules>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.nccp.org/profiles/demographics.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/45-children-in-extreme-poverty-50-percent-poverty?loc=1&loct=2#ranking/113/any/true/871/any/326>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.apa.org/advocacy/guide/visit>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.apa.org/advocacy/guide/federal-guide.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Oliver, K., Innvar, S., Lorenc, T., Woodman, J., & Thomas, J. (2014). A systematic review of barriers to and facilitators of the use of evidence by policymakers. *BMC Health Services Research*, 14(2), 1-26.

<https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6963-14-2>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.apa.org/pubs/newsletters/access/2014/02-11/federal-action>