

ADVOCACY HANDBOOK:

TOOLS TO UNDERSTAND PUBLIC HEALTH
ADVOCACY PROCESS, STRATEGY,
AND ENGAGEMENT

MAY 2023



ASPPH ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOLS & PROGRAMS
OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Dear ASPPH Member,

We are living in a time where our public health system continues to face many challenges both domestically and globally. The COVID-19 pandemic shined a light on the inefficiencies we have witnessed for years in the public health community. As a public health professional, graduate, or student, it is important for you to be engaged in public health advocacy now more than ever. Policymakers need to hear from public health experts like you to better understand the complexities of our field, especially as we strive to combat misinformation and disinformation. Your participation in advocacy is essential to advance policy goals that can benefit the entire academic public health community.

This handbook provides various resources to help make your engagement with federal policymakers successful. While advocacy is broadly defined, this guide focuses heavily on congressional advocacy due to the current state of our legislative branch. The Congress is divided, and the public health profession is under attack, creating many barriers in public health advocacy.

ASPPH's Advocacy Team developed this handbook with the hope that you will become more involved in advocacy efforts to advance priorities for academic public health.

This handbook is meant to provide you with:

A better understanding
of the federal
government

Options for engaging
with your Members of
Congress

Tools for advocacy
strategy development,
congressional outreach,
and communicating with
policymakers

Other
helpful resources

We hope you will use these resources to promote the important role of academic public health with your congressional delegation, as well as spread awareness on critical federal public health programs and policies. We recently released a [Resource Guide](#) that will also be helpful at the state level. Your voice is important, and we hope you will use it to inform our nation's decision-makers.

Sincerely,



Tim Leshan

Chief External Relations and Advocacy Officer,
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health



Boris Lushniak

Chair, ASPPH Advocacy Committee and
Dean and Professor,
University of Maryland School of Public Health

Table of Contents

Overview of Federal Government	3
Overview of Congress	3
Congressional Committees	3
The Legislative Process: Appropriations vs. Authorization	4
Executive Branch	5
Judicial Branch	5
Congressional Advocacy and Outreach Basics	6
Understanding the Difference: Advocacy vs. Lobbying	6
Understanding Advocacy and Its Importance	7
How Do I Learn More about My Members of Congress?	7
What Are the Best Ways to Engage with My Members of Congress?	8
How Do I Make a Meeting Request with My Member?	9
How Do I Prepare for a Congressional Meeting?	9
How Do I Conduct a Congressional Meeting?	10
Empowering Policymakers to Become Supporters of and Invest in Public Health: A Campaign and Resource Guide	11
Resources	12
ASPPH Resources	12
Other Resources	13



OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The US Federal Government is a system of institutions and agencies divided into three separate branches that work together to provide for the needs of the American people. The three branches include: the legislative branch, executive branch, and the judicial branch. Each has a unique responsibility regulated by a system of checks and balances to ensure equality between the three institutions. The federal government also includes a network of agencies, departments, and bureaus that serve specific functions related to national defense, education, law enforcement, and public health. The federal government serves a critical role in shaping policies and programs that affect the lives of all Americans.

Overview of Congress

Congress funds government functions and programs, holds hearings to inform the legislative process, and oversees the executive branch. It consists of a bicameral (two chamber) legislature that is divided into two equal institutions: the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Senate includes 100 members who serve a six-year term before they can run for reelection, while the House of Representatives includes 435 members who serve two-year terms before they can run for reelection. While their powers are equal, their responsibilities can differ. For example, the House of Representatives has the power to impeach government officials, but only the Senate can conduct impeachment trials. The Senate is also responsible for approving treaties and presidential appointments. The two institutions work together to pass legislation.

Congressional Committees

There are approximately 250 committees and subcommittees in Congress that are responsible for investigating, debating, and reporting on legislation.

When talking about advocacy, we emphasize the importance of the Appropriations Committee to fund or “appropriate” federal public health agencies and programs. The House and Senate Committee on Appropriations and Subcommittees pass appropriations bills that regulate expenditures of the government. They have full jurisdiction over the annual appropriations process, which consists of reviewing the President’s budget request, hearing testimony from government officials and witnesses,

and allocating federal funds to government agencies, departments, and organizations for the upcoming fiscal year.

There are twelve appropriations subcommittees that assist in the process of drafting spending plans for the following fiscal year. ASPPH and its members work most closely with the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (Labor-HHS-ED) Appropriations Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over the main public health federal agencies including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), and other Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) agencies. Other appropriations subcommittees to note include the Agriculture Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

The twelve appropriations subcommittees are:

Agriculture*	Commerce, Justice, and Science	Defense	Energy and Water
Financial Services	Homeland Security	Interior and Environment	Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education*
Legislative Branch	Military Construction and Veteran Affairs	State and Foreign Operations*	Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development

*Committees we work closely with

The subcommittees must work together to develop a singular appropriations bill that includes funding for departments and activities within each jurisdiction for the upcoming fiscal year.

The Legislative Process: Appropriations vs. Authorization

The federal appropriations and budget process is an important aspect of advocacy. Each year, the President submits a fiscal year (FY) budget that contains estimates and recommended funding levels for federal government income and spending for the upcoming fiscal year. The President's budget is typically released in March and includes three spending areas: mandatory spending, discretionary spending, and interest on the national debt. Mandatory spending includes funding for social security, Medicare, veterans' benefits, and other spending required by law.

The second area, discretionary spending, includes federal agency funding levels which Congress sets each year. When bills are introduced to the floor and proceed to be authorized, Congress must appropriate funds to implement programs in the authorization bill. Authorized bills establish and set rules for programs while appropriations bills provide funding for the programs. It's important to note that authorization levels are not binding; Congress may appropriate funds above or below authorized levels. Regardless, all authorized programs must receive an appropriation.

FEDERAL BUDGETING & APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS



Executive Branch Process

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) gives guidance to federal agencies on funding priorities

President submits fiscal year (FY) budget request to Congress



Legislative Process

House & Senate determine spending levels

House & Senate Appropriations Subcommittees hold hearings regarding budget requests

House & Senate Appropriations Committees mark up & pass spending bills

Spending bills are negotiated, amended, and passed on the House and Senate Floor



Finalization of Budget

Once a spending bill passes both chambers, it is sent to the President for signature

If Congress cannot agree on a spending bill before October 1, a continuing resolution (CR) is required to avoid a government shutdown

Executive Branch

The executive branch includes the President and his or her Cabinet, the advisory body that consists of the heads of the 15 executive departments and agencies, as well as the Vice President. The advisory body is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The President is responsible for executing and enforcing laws created by Congress, which include but are not limited to, signing legislation into law, vetoing bills enacted by Congress, overseeing international relations, extending pardons, and issuing executive orders. The Vice President is primarily responsible for assuming the Presidency if the President is unable to perform their duties due to temporary incapacitation, death, or resignation. The cabinet is made up of various departments that oversee operations in agriculture, commerce, defense, education, health, housing, and much more.

Judicial Branch

The judicial branch includes the Supreme Court, Courts of Appeals, District Courts, and Bankruptcy Courts. The Supreme Court resides above 94 district level trial courts and 13 courts of appeals. Together, they determine the constitutionality of federal laws and resolve disputes related to federal laws and bankruptcy cases. The Courts of Appeals hears challenges to district court decisions and appeals from decisions from federal agencies. The district court resolves legal disputes by applying constitutional principles to decide an outcome. Lastly, bankruptcy courts exclusively oversee personal, business, or farm bankruptcy cases.

The judicial branch of government has become increasingly important in public health matters in recent years. The emergence of new and complex health challenges, the increasing importance of individual rights and freedoms, and the use of litigation as a tool for advocacy and policy change have caused courts to engage in complex issues that have significant impacts for both individual and public health.



CONGRESSIONAL ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH BASICS

Understanding the Difference: Advocacy vs. Lobbying

While advocacy comes in different forms, it is important to understand the difference between advocacy and lobbying. **All lobbying is advocacy but not all advocacy is necessarily lobbying.**

Advocacy can generally be defined as the act of building awareness around a particular cause or policy through education and information sharing. There is no limit to the amount of advocacy by an individual.

Lobbying is any attempt to influence a policymaker or public official on a specific piece of legislation.

For example, telling a Member of Congress how a particular issue or policy impacts their constituents by sharing examples is considered advocacy; whereas, asking a Member of Congress to vote for or against a particular bill is considered lobbying.

There are also different forms of lobbying including grassroots lobbying and direct lobbying.

Grassroots Lobbying

When the general public is encouraged to contact a policymaker to bring attention to a legislative issue

Direct Lobbying

Any attempt to influence new or existing legislation through direct contact and correspondence with a policymaker

Understanding Advocacy and Its Importance

- Advocacy is any action taken by an individual or group aiming to educate policymakers and influence decisions on a particular policy.
- Members of Congress represent the interests of individuals residing in their state, district, or territory known as their “constituency.”
- Policymakers value direct engagement with their constituency, and this informs their positions on certain public policies.
- Congress expects advocates to provide information about why funding is needed, how programs work, and what they accomplish. How strong support for a particular program or policy is among constituents is also an important factor in Congressional decisions.
- ASPPH members who engage with their federal policymakers play an important role in spreading awareness of the importance of academic public health, as well as promoting funding and policy priorities on behalf of the community.
- Advocacy is the only way to bring an important policy matter to the attention of a policymaker and in turn, influence action on the cause.
- Don’t assume someone else is speaking up for programs that are your priority.
- Advocacy is a long, drawn-out process – persistence and consistency are key ingredients for success.

How Do I Learn More about My Members of Congress?

Before engaging with any policymakers and their offices, it is important to identify your Members of Congress. You can find this information by visiting the official websites for **the House of Representatives** and **Senate** and entering your zip code. This is what determines your constituency.

After you identify who your two Senators and House Representative are, you should conduct more research to learn more about their personal background, Committee and leadership assignments, priority issue areas, and other relevant information.

The best way to gather this information is by:



Browsing the Member’s
Official Website



Checking Member’s Social
Media Feeds (Instagram,
Facebook, LinkedIn, and
Twitter)



Searching for Recent News
Articles or Press Clips

This information will equip you with appropriate contextual information before engaging with your Congressional offices.

What Are the Best Ways to Engage with My Members of Congress?

There are a number of ways in which you can engage with your congressional offices. Some best practices in engaging with federal policymakers include:

Meeting with your Member and/or Congressional Staff:

We encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity. Not only is it an exciting experience to meet with your delegation on Capitol Hill, but it is also the most effective way to build relationships with Members of your delegation. Members of Congress are very busy, so you might meet with their staff. They are very knowledgeable and will inform the Congressperson about your meeting. Your university government relations office should be able to assist you with arranging a meeting.



Written Correspondence:

Writing to your Member can be an effective way to elevate a policy request or concern. You can view and use this [sample form letter](#) to effectively reach out to Congress members. There are also “sign-on” opportunities spearheaded by organizations, coalitions, and other stakeholders in the community. This is also a good way to endorse a particular policy request along with other members of the public health community. ASPPH will alert you to some opportunities to sign on to these letters through our Policy and Advocacy Newsletter. (If you would like to receive this newsletter, please email advocacy@aspph.org to be added.)



Attending State/District Telephone or In-Person Town Halls and Other Events:

Often Members of Congress hold events in their State/District to provide more opportunities for constituent engagement. Some Members have a calendar of upcoming events posted on their website. When you attend such events, consider asking questions regarding public health and taking the time to introduce yourself to your member. You are their constituent, and by getting to know them, they are more likely to advocate for your cause.



How Do I Make a Meeting Request with My Member?

By now you should have identified your Member of Congress/Senator by visiting the official House and Senate websites. Next you should:

Find Your Member's Office Phone Number	Find the Correct Staffer	Send an Email to the Staffer
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ House of Representatives: Click on the Rep.'s name on the official House website, which will redirect you to his/her website.▪ Senators: The official Senate website includes phone numbers.	Call the office and ask for the name/email address of the staffer working on "health" or "public health issues."	Email the staffer (most likely the Health Legislative Assistant/Advisor) with a meeting request.

Sample Congressional Meeting Request

"Subject: Meeting Request – Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program

Dear **XXXXXX**,

As a constituent and public health professional/student, I am writing on behalf of _____. I would like to request a meeting on [_____ **and list times available**] to discuss support for the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program.

I hope your time and interest will allow you to meet with me. Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,
[Name] "

How Do I Prepare for a Congressional Meeting?

When preparing for your meeting it is important to keep a few things in mind. In addition to coming prepared with talking points and getting your "ask" across during the meeting, remember that you are also attempting to build a relationship with your Member of Congress and their staff. You must know your audience and be able to talk to them about how your position on a particular policy matter fits with their values and beliefs, as well as what is in it for them and their constituents. Additionally, you should be prepared for the policymaker and their staff to come to the meeting emphasizing their own talking points. Think about what those points may be and how you can merge them with your own talking points.

CONGRESSIONAL OUTREACH PREPARATION











Schedule Meeting	Speaking Roles	Do Your Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine best meeting date and time Set up meeting Send calendar invite/confirmation email to staffer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine speaking roles Review background materials and talking points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct research on Rep./Sen. Check website, social media feeds, press releases, other news outlets

How Do I Conduct a Congressional Meeting?

- Thank the Member or Staffer for taking time to meet with you.
- Introduce yourself by highlighting who you are, where you are from, why you are there, make a connection to the district/state, and give a hint about the “ask.”
- Remember that many universities have Government Relations (GR) offices who want to be aware of congressional meetings and often want to help support these meetings. If your GR representative cannot attend the meeting, it may be worth mentioning their name upfront especially if they have a pre-existing relationship with that office.
- Make the “ask” and keep it brief! You are more likely to be impactful when you get right to the point.
- Stick to your main points (1-3 points max) and be willing to speak to both sides of the aisle.
- Justify the request by highlighting personal stories, specific examples, and sharing impact data.
- You can also link to broader information so there is room to follow-up with the congressional staffer on more specifics.
- Identify next steps such as filling out a form, sending additional materials, inviting them to your school or program, and offering yourself and ASPPH as a resource.
- Thank them for meeting with you.

You can view a sample meeting [script](#) on how a congressional meeting should flow.

MEETING DOS AND DON'TS

Research the Member's website for interests		Don't be late for the meeting	
Email materials prior to the meeting (Press releases, bio, committee memberships)		Don't use acronyms of local programs or agencies	
Listen carefully and take good notes		If you don't know the answer to a question, don't answer it	
Allow time for questions		Don't use too much technical jargon	
Offer to serve as a resource, especially if there are any next steps		Don't interrupt, even if you disagree	



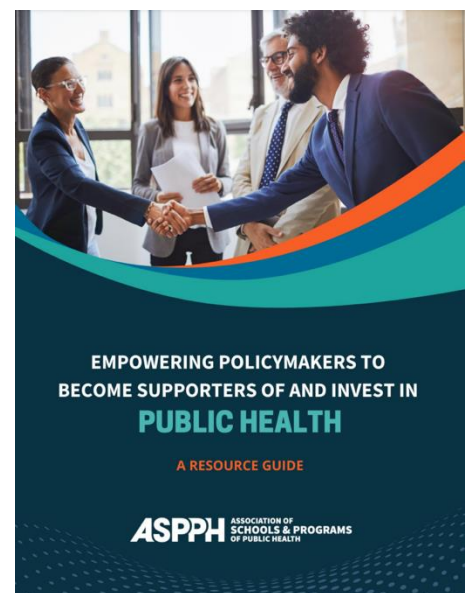
EMPOWERING POLICYMAKERS TO BECOME SUPPORTERS OF AND INVEST IN PUBLIC HEALTH: A CAMPAIGN AND RESOURCE GUIDE

In response to the great need for public health communications tools, we created a public health awareness resource guide aimed at increasing support for investments in public health.

In this [resource guide](#), we provide key messaging and resources that ASPPH members and other schools and programs of public health can use when talking with the public, as well as local and federal policymakers, to advocate for sustained public health investments.

Academic institutions of public health play a vital role in advancing health in their communities, including partnering with state and local health departments, community health practice programs, and research collaborations. We believe that investing in public health is investing in the health and well-being of our communities.

The need for sustained public health funding has never been greater than in this era of disinformation, a significant public health threat itself. We urge you to join us in this advocacy effort to create a healthier world by downloading and using our [resource guide](#).





RESOURCES

Here you will find several resources to guide you through the process of reaching out to policymakers as well as congressional services that are crucial in expanding public health programs and initiatives.

ASPPH Resources

ASPPH Take Action Webpage	ASPPH Policy & Advocacy Newsletter	ASPPH Sample Letter to Congress
<p>Here you will find ASPPH's annual funding priorities, policy briefs on key federal academic public health programs, ASPPH's letters to Congress on proposals impacting public health, and comments in response to various federal requests for information.</p>	<p>Get weekly updates on federal news, be in the know about new federal funding opportunities, and learn more about ASPPH's advocacy activities by signing up for ASPPH's Policy and Advocacy Newsletter here.</p>	<p>Use this sample letter as a guide to write letters to policymakers about pressing public health issues.</p>

ASPPH Advocacy Strategy Worksheet	Sample Script for Congressional Meeting	ASPPH Empowering Policymakers Resource Guide
<p>You can use this chart to help with framing priorities before you meet with Congressional members. It provides an outline of drafting goals, targets, and more when considering the public, stakeholders, and policymakers.</p>	<p>This template offers a model script with what to say in congressional meetings and how the meeting should flow.</p>	<p>This resource guide offers key messaging and resources to be used when talking to the public, local, and federal policymakers to advocate for public health investments.</p>

Other Resources

- Find your Member of Congress or Senator: [House.gov](https://www.house.gov) or [Senate.gov](https://www.senate.gov)
- Status of Legislation and Voting Record: [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov)
- Congressional and Federal Agency Directories:
 - [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality \(AHRQ\)](#)
 - [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)
 - [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#)
 - [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#)
 - [Health Resources and Services Administration \(HRSA\)](#)
 - [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#)
 - [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)
 - [US Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#)
 - [US Department of Health and Human Resources \(HHS\)](#)
- Public Health and Voting
 - Healthy Democracy Healthy People (HDHP) [Voting Guides](#)
 - Health and Democracy [Index](#)