

Full Funding for Promise Neighborhoods! **A Guide to Setting Up District Meetings**

March 2011

Thank you for your interest in meeting with your Congressional members while they are in their home states or districts. It's important to convey your strong support for the Promise Neighborhoods program to your representatives.

President Obama proposed \$210 million in his FY 2011 Budget for Promise Neighborhoods program, and \$150 million in his FY 2012 Budget. Congress has yet to complete the FY 2011 budget, and while we do not know the final outcome, we know it will be dramatically reduced from what the President requested. **We must continue to advocate for funding for FY 2011, while simultaneously locking in commitment for \$150 million for the Promise Neighborhoods Program in FY 2012.** (FY 2011 is from October 1, 2010 to September 30, 2011; FY 2012 begins October 1, 2011.)

The information below outlines how to schedule, prepare for, and follow-up on district meetings with your Senators and Representatives, or their staff.

If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact Kisasi Brooks: kbrooks@policylink.org, 510-663-4340.

Setting Up Your Meeting

1. **Determine which members of Congress to visit.** Members will be back in their home states or districts during the following time periods:
 - **March 21-25** (House/Senate)
 - **April 18-29** (House/Senate)
 - **May 16-20** (House)
 - **May 30-June 3** (Senate)
 - **June 6-10** (House)
 - **July 4-8** (Senate)
 - **July 18-22** (House)
 - **August 8-September 2** (House/Senate)
 - **September 26-30** (House/Senate)

- **October 17-21** (House)
- **October 24-28** (Senate)
- **November 7-10** (House)
- **November 21-25** (House)

2. **Schedule a meeting by calling your Senator or Representative's state or district office.**

Find your representatives at whoismyrepresentative.com/, and visit your representative's website to find district office phone numbers. Follow these steps when making the call:

- Ask to speak to the **district scheduler**.
- Let the scheduler know that you are a constituent who would like to set up a meeting with your Senator or Representative while they are home for a State Work Period.
- Let the scheduler know that the purpose of the meeting is to talk about Promise Neighborhoods program funding, and explain why this program is important to your district and/or state.
- Ask for the name and contact information of your Senator or Representative's appropriations staffer. While the appropriations staffer is based in the D.C. office, it is important for them to know that constituents care about Promise Neighborhoods. If you are having difficulty finding the appropriations staffer, contact PolicyLink and we can help.
- You will likely be asked to email or fax a meeting request letter with the following information—your name and contact information, dates/times you are available to meet, and the topic for discussion. See below for a sample request letter. Copy your Senator or Representative's appropriations staffer on your request.

Staff are Important!

You should push to meet directly with your Senator or Representative—especially since the State Work Periods are times for members to hear directly from their constituents—but if it's not possible to meet directly with your Congressional representatives, you should still meet with the staff person. They can be your best advocate!

3. **Follow up on your request.** You may not be able to get an appointment right away, so you may need to make several calls to set a meeting date and time. Keep calling! It's important for your representative to hear your voice.

4. **Let PolicyLink know about your meeting.** Please tell us who you're meeting with, and when. We'd be happy to help you prepare for the meeting.

Preparing for the Meeting

1. **Determine who to bring.** It is effective to bring diverse stakeholders who support Promise Neighborhoods in your state or district (e.g. a service provider, local official, private funder, young person who has participated in a local program, faith leader, teacher, local business owner, or board member), as well as a community member who would be served by a Promise Neighborhood. But don't overwhelm the meeting with too many people. While there are no "rules" around this, try to limit meetings with Representatives to no more than five people (you can bring a larger group to a Senate meeting).
2. **Have a prep meeting.** Determine who will lead the meeting. Make sure each person delivers his or her message, stays within the designated time, and that the Senator or Representative is asked to support Promise Neighborhoods. Plan on saying everything you need to say in 15 minutes, but be ready to elaborate if you're given more time.
3. **Assemble your "leave behind."** Prepare several packets of materials that you can leave with the Member and/or staffer that you meet with. We suggest the following materials:
 - Fact Sheet on Promise Neighborhoods. See Promiseneighborhoodsinstitute.org for fact sheet.
 - Letter of Support from your organization or coalition. See below for a sample letter to adapt.
 - Information about local programs that could benefit from Promise Neighborhoods funding.
4. **Confirm the meeting.** Call the office a few days prior to confirm your meeting. The scheduler will likely ask you for the names of everyone attending the meeting.

Consider Organizing a Site Visit

It can be very powerful for your Congressional representatives to see first-hand the work being done to break the cycle of generational poverty in your community.

Consider inviting your member of Congress to do a site visit to your program to demonstrate the positive efforts underway that could be supported by the Promise Neighborhoods program.

During the Meeting

1. **Thank the member for the meeting and provide brief (1-2 minute) introductions.** Clarify who you are, who you represent, and why you're there.

2. **Go right into “the ask.”** Make clear that you are looking for them to support the Promise Neighborhoods program at \$150 million for FY 2012—and underscore this message with key points. See below for sample talking points.
3. **Exchange contact information.** Make sure to get staff business cards and leave contact information for everyone in the meeting.
4. **Stay on message.** The member or staffer might ask about other issues or make small talk. It’s fine to briefly touch on other issues, but stay focused on funding for Promise Neighborhoods. Get your key points in about why it’s important for your state or district.
5. **It’s okay not to have all the answers.** Your representative or his/her staffer may ask you a question you do not know how to answer. That’s perfectly fine. Just let them know you’ll find out the answer and get back to them.

Meeting Follow-Up

1. **Send a thank-you note.** It is important to send a note thanking the member and any staffers for their time. In the note, reiterate your support for full funding (\$150 million for FY 2012) for Promise Neighborhoods. This letter should be sent within a week of the meeting.
2. **Gather and send follow-up information.** If there were any requests for further information, or questions that were not answered, follow up with that information. *Please contact PolicyLink if you need help with this.* These materials should be sent within a week of the meeting.
3. **Share what you learned.** Please give PolicyLink a brief update on how the meeting went, and what you learned, to help inform ongoing advocacy efforts. Contact Kisasi Brooks at kbrooks@policylink.org, or 510-663-4340.

Sample: Meeting Request Letter

[Your Letterhead or Logo]

[Date]

For a Representative:

The Honorable [insert full name]

U.S. House of Representatives

[Insert District Office Address]

or

For a Senator:

The Honorable [insert full name]

United States Senate

[Insert State/District Office Address]

Re: Request for a Meeting

Dear **[Representative or Senator insert last name]**:

I am writing to request a meeting with you while you are back in **[insert state/district]** during the **[insert time frame]** to discuss the Promise Neighborhoods program.

[Insert personal paragraph here—introduce yourself, your organization, and summarize what you do, who you represent in the district or state, and who you anticipate would accompany you to the meeting.]

During our meeting with you, we would like to talk about our work and share our views on the importance of the Promise Neighborhoods Program to **[your state or district]**.

I will call your **[insert name of community where office is located]** office to confirm receipt of this letter and to speak with your scheduler about a specific meeting date and time. Thank you in advance for the opportunity to meet with you.

Sincerely,

[Your name and organization]

cc: _____ **[insert name of appropriations staffer in DC]**

Sample: Support Letter (to leave behind)

[Your Letterhead or Logo]

[Date]

For a Representative:

The Honorable [insert full name]

U.S. House of Representatives

[Insert District Office Address]

or

For a Senator:

The Honorable [insert full name]

United States Senate

[Insert State/District Office Address]

Dear **[Representative or Senator insert last name]**:

We write in strong support of the Promise Neighborhoods program and urge you to include \$150 million in funding for FY 2012.

Housed at the Department of Education, Promise Neighborhoods is a competitive grant program that seeks to improve the educational and life outcomes for children living in the most distressed urban, suburban, rural, and tribal communities by wrapping children in health, social, and educational support from cradle to college. Promise Neighborhoods' place-based approach is a tremendous step forward in our country's attempt to break the cycle of generational poverty by helping children—and communities—learn, grow, and succeed.

There is strong community support **[in your state/district]** for Promise Neighborhoods. **[Insert a paragraph about your community and the importance of Promise Neighborhoods.]**

Nationally, more than 940 communities submitted Letters of Intent to Apply for planning grants made available in the FY 2010 budget—representing every state and including 48 tribal areas and 170 rural communities. 339 communities submitted an application for the first 21 planning grants.

We strongly urge you to support full funding for Promise Neighborhoods at \$150 million in the FY 2012 budget so that our nation can begin to address the long-term needs of the 14 million children living in poverty in the United States.

It is a smart investment in our nation's future economic health.

Sincerely,

[Your name and organization]

Suggested Talking Points on Promise Neighborhoods:

The purpose of meeting with your Congressional delegation is to express to policymakers that **there is a *strong demand* for and a *great need* to fully fund Promise Neighborhoods at \$150 million in the FY 2012 budget to *break the cycle of generational poverty* by improving school achievement and community conditions in poor neighborhoods. *All children deserve a Promise Neighborhood.***

By bringing your local voice and information to policymakers, we can impact their understanding of what Promise Neighborhoods is and what it would mean for low-income children and families across the country. Your role is to not only provide this information but give a ***face*** to the hundreds of communities that are passionate about this program.

General Tips

- If you cannot meet with the legislator, meet with the staffer. Staffers are highly influential in decision making.
- Use data and statistics from your local area, state, and the country to help make your case.
- Your own personal or professional story can be very powerful in communicating to your Congressional representatives and their staffers about the importance of full funding for Promise Neighborhoods. Give examples from your community to illustrate the importance of the program, including local data and specific outcomes.
- Keep it simple and clear.

Introductions

Begin your visit with a brief introduction from each person:

I'm [your name] and I am one of your constituents from [place and/or your organization/ department/ affiliation]. I wanted to share with you the work that we have been doing to increase academic achievement and improve poor communities ...

Following introductions, the designated team member(s) should share the two core messages:

1. **Communicate the strong support that exists for Promise Neighborhoods and the importance of the program to your community.**
2. **Urge them to fully fund the Promise Neighborhoods program at \$150 million in the FY 2012 budget.**

Helpful Talking Points

1. There is strong interest in the Promise Neighborhoods program.

- The Department of Education received 941 Intents to Apply, [xx] from [your state].
- 339 applications were submitted, representing 48 states, [xx] from [your state, including my organization/neighborhood/school]. For information on the highest scoring applicants, visit PromiseNeighborhoodsInstitute.org/meet-the-grantees/.
- This large number of applications shows the real interest and excitement surrounding the program. [Insert personal anecdote about your community's experience].
- 21 Promise Neighborhood 2010 grantees and 17 additional high scoring applicants have already seen great success in their place-based, comprehensive efforts to improve their neighborhoods. See Promiseneighborhoodsinstitute.org/meet-the-grantees/ for details.

2. We want you to know more about the experiences of poor children and communities in our area, and how Promise Neighborhoods can address these issues.

- Describe some of the innovative local programs that could be supported by Promise Neighborhoods funding.
- Briefly share pieces of data, statistics or information that show the challenges poor children face. Some examples from national data:
 - **1 in 6** children in America live in poverty¹
 - **The U.S. spends approximately 500 billion dollars** yearly to support these children (nearly 4% of GDP)²
 - The average middle-class child enters 1st grade with 1,000-1,700 hours of one-on-one picture-book reading; **a child from a low-income family averages 25 hours.**³
 - By 4th grade **only 17% of poor children score at or above proficient** in reading and 22% on math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).⁴ You can insert local or state test scores here as available.
 - Following years of frustration and failure, students drop out of school at alarming rates: **more than 500,000 dropped out of grades 9-12** in 2005.⁵
 - Health: Compared to high-income children, **low-income children are more than 1.5 times as likely to miss 10 or more school days a year due to illness or injury**; are more than twice as likely not to have seen a doctor for two years or to have delayed medical care due to cost; and are almost three times as likely to be uninsured and to have no regular site for health care.⁶ **They also have higher rates of asthma,⁷ hospital admissions, disabilities, and fatalities.**⁸
 - Systemic inequities in disadvantaged neighborhoods have led to what the Children's Defense Fund terms The Cradle to Prison Pipeline[®], where "about 580,000 black males are serving sentences in state or federal prison, while fewer than 40,000 black males earn a bachelor's degree each year. **One in 3 black men between 20-29 years old is under correctional supervision or control.**"⁹

3. The Promise Neighborhoods program is crucial to improving outcomes for poor children because it:

- Wraps children in health, social, and educational support from cradle to college to break the cycle of generational poverty;
- Requires that a nonprofit or university with deep ties to the community lead the project, and that at least one school be a main partner;
- Targets all types of communities—urban, suburban, rural, and tribal—with high levels of academic and neighborhood distress;
- Leverages federal, local and philanthropic dollars.

4. We urge you to fully fund the Promise Neighborhoods program at the \$150 million level in the FY 2012 budget.

- Due to the incredible interest and success shown by different types of communities throughout the district [**restate the number of district applicants**] and the nation, and the need to address the issues of academic achievement and community supports in low-income communities, I urge you to fully fund Promise Neighborhoods.

Ending the Meeting

- Ask if they have any questions. It's okay if you don't know the answer; tell them you don't have the information at this time but will find out and get back to them. This will give you the opportunity to follow up at a later point—make sure you do!
- Give them the fact sheet, letter of support, and other materials you may have.
- Let them know you will be in touch about the briefing and with any updates.
- Thank them for their time.
- Following your visit, be sure to send them a thank you note, and the response to any lingering questions.

Please contact Kisasi Brooks at PolicyLink and let us know how the meeting went:
kbrooks@policylink.org • 510-663-4340.

¹ U.S. Department of Commerce (2003). *Poverty in the United States: 2002*. Retrieved on February 10, 2010 from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p60-222.pdf>.

² Harry Holzer, Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, Greg J. Duncan, and Jens Ludwig. *The Economic Costs of Poverty: Subsequent Effects of Children Growing Up Poor*. (Washington D.C.: The Center for American Progress, 2007).

³ Marilyn Jager Adams. 1990. *Beginning to read: thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

⁴ Children's Defense Fund. *The State of America's Children 2005*. (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 2005.)

⁵ National Center for Education Statistics. December 2007. "Numbers and Rates of Public High School Drop-Outs 2004-2005."

⁶ The State of America's Children 2005. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund.

⁷ Nicholas, SW, Hutchinson, VE, Ortiz, B, Klihr-Beall, Jean-Louis, B, Shoemaker, K, Singleton, C, Credell, J, and Northridge, M. 2005. "Reducing Childhood Asthma Through Community-Based Service Delivery – New York City, 2001-2004, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report." Washington, DC: Center on Disease Control Vol. 54, No. 1.

⁸ Wood, David. 2001. "Effect of Child and Family Poverty on Health in the United States, Pediatrics." Elk Grove Village, Illinois: American Academy of Pediatrics Vol. 112:711-717.

⁹ Children's Defense Fund, Cradle to Prison Pipeline. 2007. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund.