2026 Edition

COSSA

CONSORTIUM *of* SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

Advocacy Handbook *for* Social & Behavioral Science Researchers

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1. COSSA Advocacy Handbook *for* Social & Behavioral Science Researchers

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I. Introduction

COSSA is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to promote sustainable federal funding for and widespread use of social and behavioral science research. We serve as a united voice for a broad, diverse network of organizations, institutions, communities, and stakeholders who care about a successful and vibrant social science research enterprise. The COSSA membership includes professional and disciplinary associations, scientific societies, research centers and institutes, U.S. colleges and universities, and organizations representing various users of social and behavioral science research.

This handbook provides COSSA members with an introduction to the federal policymaking process and offers basics and best practices for advocating successfully for the social and behavioral sciences.

COSSA's Advocacy and Outreach

COSSA monitors the full range of federal issues impacting the social and behavioral science community, from funding for research grants to new federal policies and directives.

In particular, COSSA advocates during the annual appropriations process for sustained federal funding for social and behavioral science research programs administered across the federal agencies. We also advocate for non-funding legislation that reflects the importance of these sciences to policymaking. Within the Executive Branch, COSSA weighs in on regulatory and policy issues by submitting comments in response to formal requests for information and otherwise engaging directly with federal government officials to promote our science.

We strive to both proactively educate the government and the public about the value of social and behavioral science research and to defend our sciences against cuts and attacks.

For matters of particular significance to the COSSA community we issue **Action Alerts** (cossa.org/action-center) that call on the social and behavioral science community to contact their Members of Congress. We also keep our members informed about emerging issues so they may take action on their own at any time.

The Critical Role You Play

COSSA's team of policy experts and advocates work every day to communicate the importance of social and behavioral science research to policymakers. But ultimately, the most powerful stories come from those who can speak from experience about what it is like to apply for a federal grant, conduct research, or watch as their findings reach a broader audience.

In a survey conducted by the Congressional Management Foundation[1], 94 percent of Congressional staff say that in-person visits from constituents have "some" or "a lot" of influence on an undecided Member of Congress—more than any other strategy for communicating with Congress. And social and behavioral

[1] http://www.congressfoundation.org/projects/communicating-with-congress/citizen-centric-advocacy-2017

scientists are not just any constituents—they bring valuable scientific expertise on a wealth of important issues facing our nation.

Educating policymakers about social and behavioral science research—and its contributions to sound public policy—is especially important because these sciences are not always well-understood on Capitol Hill or in some federal agencies.

Am I *allowed* to advocate?

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

--First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

We all know that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides for freedom of religion, speech, press, and assembly. However, we tend to hear less about the right to "petition the government for a redress of grievances." The right to make your needs and opinions known to your elected officials is written into our founding documents, but, unfortunately, is not exercised by many. Everyone in this country has the right to engage with those elected to represent them.

II. Congress and the Policymaking Process

This section provides a high-level refresher on the basics of Congress and how laws are made. See section *V. Resources* for specifics about the makeup of the current Congress.

Congress 101

Congress, the lawmaking branch of the U.S. government, is divided into two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives. A "Congress" is two years in duration and is defined by the election cycle. Each new Congress begins on January 3 of every odd-numbered year. Each year of a Congress is called a "session," referred to as either the first or second session of the Congress (e.g., 2024 was the 2nd session of the 118th Congress and 2025 is the 1st session of the 119th Congress).

The Senate

The Senate is often referred to as the "upper chamber" and is comprised of 100 members, with two Senators representing each state. Senators serve six-year terms with staggered elections, so about one-third of the Senate is up for reelection every two years. The longer serving Senator from each state is referred to as the "senior" Senator, and the more recent arrival the "junior" Senator. The Senate is solely responsible for confirming high-level federal positions (such as cabinet secretaries) and ratifying international treaties. The Vice President of the United States presides over the Senate but he or she may only vote in cases of a tie. In his or her absence, the *president pro tempore*, who is selected by the chamber (typically the most senior member of the majority party), assumes those duties. At the beginning of every new Congress, Senators of each party elect a Majority and Minority Leader who manage their party's legislative agenda.

The House of Representatives

The House of Representatives has 435 voting members, each representing a single Congressional district. Districts are allocated to states in proportion to their populations, with a guarantee of at least one district per state. Each Congressional District represents approximately 761,169 people[2]. Members of the House serve two-year terms; thus, the entire chamber is up for reelection every two years. Sometimes referred to as "the people's house" because Representatives are considered "closer" to the people electing them (constituents), the House of Representatives is responsible for choosing the President of the United States if the Electoral College is tied. In addition, all spending bills must originate in the House. Members elect a Speaker of the House at the start of every term to preside over the chamber. Like the Senate, House Members elect Majority and Minority Leaders to guide each party's legislative agenda.

Congressional Committees

Much of the work of developing and refining legislation happens through Congressional committees and subcommittees. Therefore, it is important that advocates reach lawmakers serving on committees whose jurisdictions impact the social and behavioral sciences (see pages 24-25 for a list of the committees most relevant to the social and behavioral sciences). Committees are led by a Chair (from the majority party) and the Ranking Member (from the minority party). Most Members of Congress sit on multiple committees.

[2] https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2021/2020-census-apportionment-results.html

The Legislative Process

How a Bill Becomes a Law

House **Senate**

A Member of the House of Representatives or Senate introduces a bill, which is given a number (e.g. H.R. 123 or S. 45) and assigned to the appropriate committee and/or subcommittee.

Subcommittee Work

If the bill is referred to a subcommittee, the subcommittee may hold hearings to inform Members' consideration of the bill. It may also conduct a "markup," in which Members can revise the bill's language through amendments. The subcommittee will "report out" the bill and send it to the full committee.

Committee Work

The full committee may also hold hearings and make changes to the bill. If the committee approves the bill, it will be reported to the full chamber and placed on the legislative calendar. The bill "dies" if it does not receive a majority of the committee's votes, or if the committee fails to vote on it before the legislative term ends.

House Rules Committee **Senate Leadership**

The House Rules Committee determines when and how a bill will be debated on the House floor. In the Senate, the Majority Leader determines when a bill will be considered. They each control the floor calendar for their respective chambers.

Floor Debate & Vote

The bill is debated on the floor of the chamber in which it was introduced. The Senate does not have rules limiting debate on bills. This allows Senators to "filibuster" a bill by prolonging debate as a stalling tactic. A filibuster can be ended if the Senate invokes cloture, which requires a two-thirds vote. In the House, the rules on debate are much stricter; the time allowed for debate is limited and amendments must be germane to the bill under consideration (amendments in the Senate generally do not need to be germane). If the bill passes, it moves to the floor of the other chamber for a vote. Often the House and Senate work on different versions of a similar bill concurrently. If the bills passed by the House and Senate differ, a Conference Committee is formed to negotiate a final product.

Conference Committee Work

A conference committee, comprised of Members of both the House and Senate, work together to adjudicate differences in the versions of the bill passed by each chamber. Generally, the conference committee produces a "conference report," which includes the compromise legislative language and a section-by-section explanation of the agreement. Both chambers must approve the revised, identical versions of the bill.

President

If passed by both chambers, the conferenced bill is sent to the President for his signature, which turns the bill into law. If Congress is not in session and the President does not sign the bill within ten days, the law is not enacted; this is called a "pocket veto" and is fairly rare. The President can also veto a bill, which sends it back to Congress. If two-thirds of each chamber votes in favor of the bill, the veto is "overridden" and the bill becomes law. While not common, if the President does nothing, the bill becomes law after ten days so long as Congress is still in session.

Law

Deciding How to Vote

A wide variety of factors affect lawmakers' decisions on how to vote on a given measure. These considerations range from the Members' own personal beliefs, to their party's position, to information received from staff, colleagues, constituents, interest groups, and the media. The two main political parties in Congress have become increasingly polarized over the past several years, so legislators are likely to vote with their party most of the time. However, Members do deviate from the party line sometimes, and it is often because their constituents feel strongly about a given issue.

PRO TIP: As constituents with expertise in social and behavioral science, you can play an important role in giving Members and their staff the background information they need to make informed decisions. And because staffers and Members regularly share information with other offices, you should encourage the office you meet with to share your materials with their colleagues.

Implementing Non-Appropriations Legislation at Agencies

Once a law is enacted, responsibility falls to the federal agencies within the Executive Branch to interpret and implement the law. This is generally accomplished through regulations, which ensure uniform implementation across the federal government by explaining how the law should be applied. All federal agencies follow the same general set of procedures for writing regulations (also referred to as "rules"). Notices of draft and final regulations are published in the Federal Register[3] for public consumption.

Federal Agency Rulemaking Process

Advanced Notice of Proposed Rule Making

- An agency issues an **Advanced Notice of Proposed Rule Making** to explain the agency's rationale for writing regulations and to request comments from the public, usually giving a 30 to 90 day window (though these may be extended).

Notice of Proposed Rule Making

- After reviewing comments, the agency publishes proposed regulations in a **Notice of Proposed Rule Making**. It will again solicit public comment, which it will take into consideration as it revises the rules. Though the agency is not required to make all suggested changes, it must demonstrate that it has considered them.

Public Hearings

- Agencies often but are not necessarily required to hold **public hearings** both before and after the publication of the Notice of Proposed Rule Making to collect additional comments from the public. Opinions expressed at public hearings become part of the official record.

Notice of Final Rule

- Once all comments have been reviewed, the agency issues the finalized regulations in a **Notice of Final Rule**. The President has the opportunity to review the regulations prior to their inclusion in the Code of Federal Regulations.

[3] https://www.federalregister.gov

Implementing Appropriations Legislation at Agencies

The rulemaking process described above is not used when implementing appropriations (or funding) legislation. For all intents and purposes, when Congress enacts a spending bill its work is done, and action turns to the affected federal agency. Generally speaking, while Executive Branch agencies are required to adhere to the spending levels included in the annual appropriations bills, Congress often provides broad authority when crafting the bills. This gives federal agencies some flexibility and control in determining how to allocate resources. For example, in the case of the National Science Foundation (NSF), Congress will appropriate a pot of funding for "research" but allow NSF leadership to determine how to divvy the funding up among its various research activities.

That being said, enacted appropriations bills usually come with accompanying report language that can provide specific directives from Congress on how the appropriated funds should or should not be spent. Because these directives are included in an accompanying report and not the actual bill, they are not legally binding. However, they do generally reflect the "sense of Congress" and tend to be followed by agencies.

III. Communicating with Congress

There are many ways to interact meaningfully with your Members of Congress:

- Meeting directly with your Member or their staff in-person, either in Washington or in your home district.
- Writing to your lawmakers.
- Calling your Member's office.
- Engaging with your Member on social media.
- Attending a local event like a Town Hall Meeting.

This section provides tips for how you can get started engaging with your elected officials.

Finding Your Members of Congress

If you are not sure who your elected officials are, you can easily find them by searching your address on www.house.gov and www.senate.gov. When searching for your House Representative, you can use both your home and work addresses to expand your reach.

Once you have identified your delegation, you can do a little background research to aid in your advocacy efforts. You might want to find out what committees and subcommittees they serve on or if they belong to any relevant caucuses (informal groups of Members formed around issues of mutual interest). Each Member of Congress maintains a website where you can find detailed information on their legislative priorities and policy positions.

Crafting Your Message

No matter what method you choose to reach out, knowing ahead of time *what* you want to say and *how* to say it will make your advocacy most effective—and easier!

The ASK

The first thing you need to determine is what you are asking your Member to do—for example, increase funding for the NIH, vote "no" on amendments that interfere with peer review, reach out to colleagues in support of social and behavioral science, etc. This is called your "ask" and should be front and center in your advocacy message.

The WHY

Next, you should be prepared to explain *why* the lawmaker should take action. You can highlight examples from your own work or other federally funded social and behavioral science research—but if possible, be sure to tie the findings or potential impact to real world problems.

- **Lives and Money.**
  A particularly effective way to frame your message is to relate the implications of research to (1) saving or improving lives, or (2) saving money. Under the first category, you can discuss research that touches on public health, national security, disaster resilience, education, etc. When talking about saving money, you can cite research that focuses on improving government efficiency and effectiveness, generating revenue, creating jobs, or informing decision-making.

Keep it Local

Whenever possible, try to relate your discussion to your lawmaker's state or district and the people whose interests he or she was elected to represent. You can talk about the federal research dollars going to the local universities, the impact of research findings on the local economy, or improvements to local programs that are the result of evidence-based policymaking.

PRO TIP: The COSSA website houses factsheets on the amount of research funding going to each state. Use them to help make your messages local: www.cossa.org/social-science.

Make it Relevant

When crafting your message, take into consideration the priorities of the Members of Congress you are communicating with, which committees they sit on, and what is important to the district or state. By discussing your research in a way that is accessible to a non-specialist and explaining why you care about your work, policymakers will better understand how social science research is relevant to them.

PRO TIP: You can use resources found on COSSA's website to help explain what social and behavioral science is and its benefits society: www.cossa.org/social-science.

Modes of Communication

IN-PERSON MEETINGS

In-person meetings with Members of Congress and their staff can be one of the most effective forms of advocacy. Each Member of Congress has an office in Washington, DC and in their Congressional district or state. You can set up a meeting in either office. When deciding whether to meet in Washington or locally, you should consider the following:

Timing

Congress periodically breaks for recess so Members can return to their states or districts to work locally with constituents (for example, Congress is generally not in session in August or in the weeks surrounding federal holidays). Recess periods are an excellent time for a meeting with your Member in your home district. These meetings tend to be more relaxed since the regular demands of Washington are minimized. Recess schedules can be found on the House and Senate websites.

Your Message

Whether to meet in Washington, DC or locally can depend on your message. Congressional staff in Washington work on specific sets of legislative issues (e.g. science, health, education, or defense). Members of Congress rely on policy staff to keep them up to date on developments in their issue areas.

In district offices, staff members are experts on what is going on locally—topics constituents are concerned about and the local impact of federal programs—and relay this information to the Senator or Representative. Thus, if you are meeting to discuss upcoming legislation, such as appropriations for the Census Bureau, your message is likely better suited for a meeting with Washington, DC staff. However, if you would like to discuss, for example, the impacts of federal research and development funding on the local economy, requesting to meet in the district would also be appropriate.

PRO TIP: Unsure about the best course of action? Ask COSSA! If you choose to come to Washington, consider reaching out to COSSA, your professional association, or your university's government relations office, who can help you schedule your meeting, provide educational materials to bring with you, and perhaps even accompany you.

How to Request a Meeting

Once you have decided to meet with your elected official, the next step is to request an in-person meeting by calling the Member's Washington or district office (the telephone numbers will be on the Member's website). You can make your request over the phone or ask for the name and contact information of the scheduler and request a meeting by email.

While it is always worth trying to schedule a meeting with the Member of Congress, you will more likely be scheduled to meet with a member of the staff—do not be discouraged! Congressional staff are crucial to keeping the Member informed about the topics in their portfolio and may actually be more knowledgeable about the particulars of the issue you have come to discuss. In Washington, request to meet with the staff member who handles "science issues." For meetings in the district, request to meet with the district director.

Below is a template email for requesting a meeting in Washington. You can also use it as a script to request a meeting over the phone.

Dear **Ms. Smith [relevant staff member or scheduler]**,

I am a constituent and **professor of political science at COSSA University**. I will be in Washington on **March 10** and would like to set up a meeting with **Representative Jones** or a staff member who handles science and research issues to discuss the importance of federal support for social and behavioral science research in **Virginia**.

I can be reached at this email address or **555-555-5555**. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,
Jane Doe

Before Your Meeting

Before your meeting, do a little background research on the Member whose office you are visiting. You should know what committees they serve on and how they have voted on legislation you care about. A quick Google search or scan of the Member's website can give you important information on where the Member's priorities lie. If you are meeting with staff, you may be able to find information about their responsibilities or background (such as where they went to school), although this information is not always readily available.

Make sure you know ahead of time what you plan to say (see the earlier section on "Crafting Your Message"). Prepare and organize any written materials you plan to leave behind. COSSA's website (www.cossa.org/advocacy/resources) has a number of "one-pagers" that you may use during your visit

(e.g. state-specific fact sheets on social and behavioral science funding). You may want to put them in a folder so the staff member can keep everything together after you have left.

A Typical Congressional Office – Washington DC

Chief of Staff

The most senior staff position in a Congressional office, the chief of staff, reports directly to the elected official and is responsible for evaluating the political outcome of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. He/She/They are also in charge of overall office operations, including assigning work and supervising the staff.

Legislative Director (LD)

The legislative director monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations to the Member on the pros and cons of each issue.

Legislative Aide/Assistant (LA) or Legislative Correspondent (LC)

Legislative aides, assistants, and correspondents are assigned to work on a portfolio of issues related to the Member's responsibilities and interests. LAs and LCs assist with research and accompany the Member to meetings and hearings. They are also the staff members often assigned to meet with constituents and interest groups.

Fellow

Countless national organizations, including several in the social and behavioral sciences, sponsor fellowship programs that provide opportunities for experts from a given field to work temporarily in a Congressional office, often for one year. These experiences allow the fellow to learn about the legislative process firsthand and, importantly, apply their expertise to the efforts of the Congressional office or committee. Having a meeting with a Congressional fellow can often mean that they have more familiarity with your issue than typical policy staffer, which can make for deeper conversations.

Press Secretary/Communications Director

The press secretary or communications director builds and maintains open and effective lines of communication between the Member, his/her constituency, and the general public. He or she works with both print and electronic media to promote the Member's views or positions on specific issues.

Scheduler

The scheduler maintains the Member's calendar and is responsible for allocating the Member's time for hearings, meetings, staff responsibilities, and constituent requests. You must go through the scheduler in order to secure a meeting with the Member of Congress. Meetings with staff are scheduled directly with staff members.

Following Up

Always send a follow-up email to anyone with whom you have met. Thank them for taking the time to meet and provide any additional information or answers to questions that came up during the meeting. The goal of these emails is not just to be polite; you want to establish a line of communication between you and the Member or staffer in hopes that they will reach out to you and draw on your expertise in the future.

Find organic ways to stay in touch. No one wants to receive frequent unsolicited emails, but you could send updates about your research from time to time if they seemed interested or forward the occasional press release or news story highlighting research in their district. Local connections are always appreciated.

PRO TIP: In addition to following up directly with the Member or their staff, get in touch with COSSA and tell us how your meeting went. COSSA can always follow up later to reinforce your message or to share additional information with the office.

Meeting Tips

- ✓ **Be on time and be patient**. It's important to arrive on time for your meeting, but schedules on the Hill are tight and constantly changing, so try to be understanding if your meeting starts late.
- ✓ **Bring plenty of business cards**. You may be asked to provide one when you check in at the front desk or swap cards with the staff member you are meeting.
- ✓ **Say thank you**. Begin the meeting by thanking the Member of Congress or staff member for taking the time to meet. Congressional offices are incredibly busy; acknowledging this is always appreciated.
- ✓ **Take notes**. You may want to jot down points you would like to follow up on later as well as any questions you could not answer during the meeting. Just be sure to stay engaged and maintain eye contact with the staffer.
- ✓ **Be brief and focused**. Most meetings with staff are quite short and last 15 to 20 minutes (although some may go as long as an hour). Meetings with Members can be even shorter, as quick as five minutes. It is important to be concise and to stay on message.
- ✓ **Engage in dialogue**. Try not to let your meeting turn into a lecture. Instead aim to have a conversation. Give them room to jump in and ask them questions. Also ask if they have any questions for you.
- ✓ **Use personal anecdotes**. Telling a story from your own personal experience is generally more powerful—and more memorable—than reciting generic talking points or hypotheticals. Stories that come firsthand from constituents generally carry more weight with lawmakers.
- ✓ **Be informed, but don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."** Make sure you have researched the issue you are planning to discuss. However, if you are asked a question you are not sure how to answer, it is perfectly appropriate to say, "I don't know" and offer to follow up later.
- ✓ **Be polite**. Even if you strongly disagree with the Member's position, it is important to be professional and respectful. You never know when you might need the Member's help in the future. Focus on building a relationship that can be sustained, regardless of your respective positions.
- ✓ **Avoid jargon**. Assume you are speaking to someone unfamiliar with the details of the topic you are discussing. Try not to use acronyms without explaining what they are. They will let you know their level of familiarity with an issue, at which time you can elevate the conversation if needed.
- ✓ **Offer to be a resource**. Let your audience know that you are willing to answer questions their office may have in the future.
- ✓ **Say thank you!** End the meeting the way it began—by thanking them for their time and thoughtful consideration of your requests.

SENDING A LETTER OR EMAIL

You may elect to write a letter to your Senator or Representative. Most offices keep tallies of how many letters they receive on a given issue, so writing to your Member of Congress is one way to literally make your views "count." You can either send a letter by email or through the mail, which may take up to three weeks to reach the office but is more likely receive a response (albeit a form letter is most common). Information on where to send your letter or email will be posted on your Member's website.

When writing your letter, follow the principles discussed in the "Crafting your message" section above. Be sure to state that you are a constituent and include your job title and affiliation. Make clear why you are writing (i.e. your "ask") and make concise arguments in support of your position. Draw from your own personal experience and try to relate your points back to the district. Keep the letter brief—it should not be longer than one or two pages.

COSSA ACTION

COSSA's **Action Center** website makes it easy for you to respond to COSSA's Action Alerts on particular bills and issues important to the social science community. While our alerts provide all the information you need to send an effective message, we highly recommend you take a moment to personalize it before sending (see the earlier section on "Crafting Your Message").

Check out COSSA's alerts: www.cossa.org/action-center

PRO TIP: Forward a copy of your letter to COSSA. We may be able to use it in our own advocacy efforts.

CALLING YOUR CONGRESSPERSON'S OFFICE

Calling your Member's office is particularly useful when you are focusing on an immediate issue that has a tight timeline, such as an upcoming vote. You can find your Member's Washington office phone number on their website or by calling the Capitol Switchboard (202-224-3121) and providing the name of your Senator or Representative. Once connected, ask to speak with the staff member who handles science issues.

Make sure you have thought through what you wish to say before you call the office (see the earlier section on "Crafting Your Message"). You may want to write out a script or talking points to help organize your thoughts. As always, begin by noting that you are a constituent and explain who you are before moving on to your "ask." It is very important to be concise, so limit yourself to three or four brief points. If you are connected to voicemail, leave your message and contact information in case they would like additional information. You usually do not need to speak with anyone directly for your request to be registered with the office.

PRO TIP: If you would like to continue engaging with the staff member you spoke to, you can ask them for their email address so you may follow up. If you forget, COSSA can help you access this information.

CONGRESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has become an important way for constituents to voice their opinions to their representatives in Congress. Every office uses social media differently, but nearly every Member of Congress has a Twitter/X, LinkedIn, Instagram, or Facebook account. Some Members use these accounts personally, and some accounts are maintained by staff. Most offices monitor social media chatter about their Members to get a sense of where public opinion stands.

If you are already active on social media, using your accounts could be a good way increase the visibility of your advocacy efforts. When reaching out to your Member on social media:

- **Keep your messages simple and concrete.** Character limits obviously necessitate this on Twitter/X, but it is a good strategy regardless. Asking your Member to vote yes or no on a particular bill or thanking them for remarks in favor of your issue are examples of simple outreach strategies. Be sure to tag the appropriate handles in your message.
- **Do some quick platform research.** Some platforms want to help you engage with a Member of Congress. For example, Facebook has a **badge**[4] you can enable on your profile to signal to an official that you are a constituent, increasing the chances of them engaging with you. Take a quick moment to see if other platforms have options to help you interact with officials.
- **Engage with your community.** Sometimes catching the attention of a Member on social media works best in numbers. Engage in conversation with other Advocates that rally around your similar views to create a bit more of a larger dialogue. Not only could this result in more eyes on your cause, but also the creation of a community to help continue the work.
- **Don't expect a direct response from your Member—but you may be surprised.** Members receive a lot of messages from constituents on social media, so not receiving a reply is normal. However, some Members are known for actively engaging with constituents on social media. If you do receive a reply from a Member, don't forget to keep the conversation going! Find out who you can use as a point of contact outside of social media, or even where you can send additional materials to help the office learn a bit more about your cause.

PRO TIP: Tag COSSA in your social media communications so we can amplify your message:
#WhySocialScience
@COSSADC (Twitter/X)
@COSSA1981 (Instagram)
@COSSADC (LinkedIn)
@SocialScienceAssociations (Facebook)
@cossa.bsky.social (Bluesky)

[4] https://www.facebook.com/help/157047021494292

IV. Timing Your Advocacy

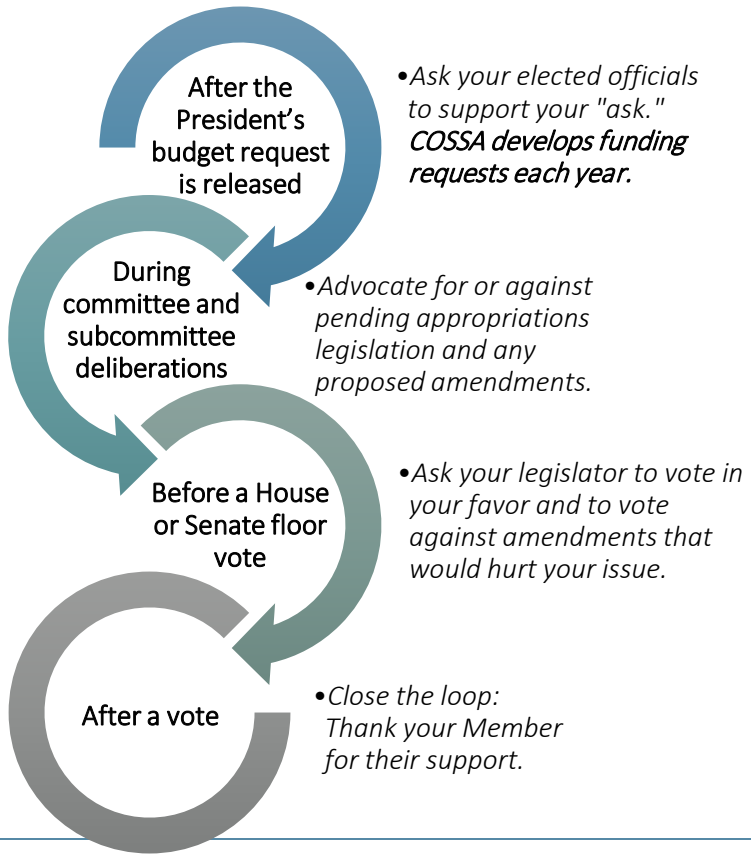
When focusing your advocacy on a particular piece of legislation, it is important to pay attention to where the bill is in its "life cycle." If it has just been introduced, asking your legislator to co-sponsor it might make the most sense. Generally, the most effective time to advocate is when the Member's office is weighing the pros and cons of the legislation—after it has been introduced, but before it has been voted on. The days leading up to a vote, whether in the subcommittee, committee, or on the floor, are a good time for constituents to reach out and ask Members to vote for or against the bill or to support an amendment. And if the Member votes in your favor, sending a note thanking them for their support is always appreciated—and can lay the groundwork for your next interaction.

PRO TIP: Unsure about the best timing for your action? Ask COSSA or your professional association.

Advocacy and the Appropriations Process

A perennially important topic for social and behavioral science advocates is funding for research, which is tied to the annual appropriations process. "Appropriations season" begins when the President releases a budget request in February (though it has been known to come out later in the year). The Appropriations Committees in the House and Senate then hold hearings and begin to move drafts of the individual appropriations bills through the subcommittees. The Committees generally aspire to send the bills to the floor before the month-long August recess, but in recent years that has been the exception, not the rule. In fact, the last time all 12 appropriations bills were passed on time was 1996; generally, Congress will pass a short-term (or longer) Continuing Resolution (CR) to maintain funding in the absence of final appropriations laws, otherwise, the government would "shutdown."

Key opportunities for advocacy during the appropriations process include:



V. Resources

Glossary of Common Advocacy Terms

Act — Legislation that has been passed by both chambers of Congress and signed by the President, thus becoming a law.

Amendment — A proposed or actual change to a piece of legislation or another amendment. Amendments may strike, insert, or strike *and* insert bill text.

Appropriations — Type of legislation to provide the money required to fund governmental departments, agencies, and programs previously established by authorizing legislation. There are 12 annual appropriations bills, which must be passed by the start of each fiscal year. Failure to pass appropriations results in the need for Congress to pass a temporary funding measure to avert a shutdown of government operations.

Authorization — Type of legislation that establishes and authorizes funding for a federal program or agency. It specifies the program's general purpose, how that purpose is to be achieved, and may recommend a funding ceiling for the program.

Bill — A proposed law. All formally introduced bills are assigned a number and denoted "H.R." if they originate in the House and "S." if they originate in the Senate (e.g., H.R. 123 or S. 45)

Chair — Member of the majority party—often the most senior Member—who presides over the work of a committee or subcommittee.

Committee — A subgroup of Members assigned the responsibility to hold hearings and consider legislation within their jurisdiction.

Committee Report — A committee's written statement about a given piece of legislation. It includes recommendations for enforcement and implementation.

Conference Committee — An ad hoc committee consisting of Members from both chambers tasked with reconciling differences in legislation that has been passed by both chambers.

Continuing Resolution — A joint resolution that appropriates money to fund agencies (often at the level of the previous fiscal year) whose funding bill has not yet been passed at the start of the new fiscal year.

Filibuster — A procedural tactic in the Senate whereby a Senator refuses to relinquish the floor in an attempt to delay or prevent a vote.

Majority Leader — Leader of the majority party in each chamber, elected by Members of the majority.

Markup — The process by which committees and subcommittees debate, amend, and rewrite proposed legislation, usually ending with a vote to send the approved legislation to the floor for a final vote.

Minority Leader — Leader of the minority party in each chamber, elected by members of the minority.

Omnibus Bill — Legislation that packages two or more bills into one, often used to pass several appropriations bills with one vote.

Ranking Member — Senior Member of the minority party on a committee or subcommittee.

Recess — A temporary break in Congressional business.

Sponsor — The Member of Congress who introduces a bill. Other Members may show support by becoming "cosponsors."

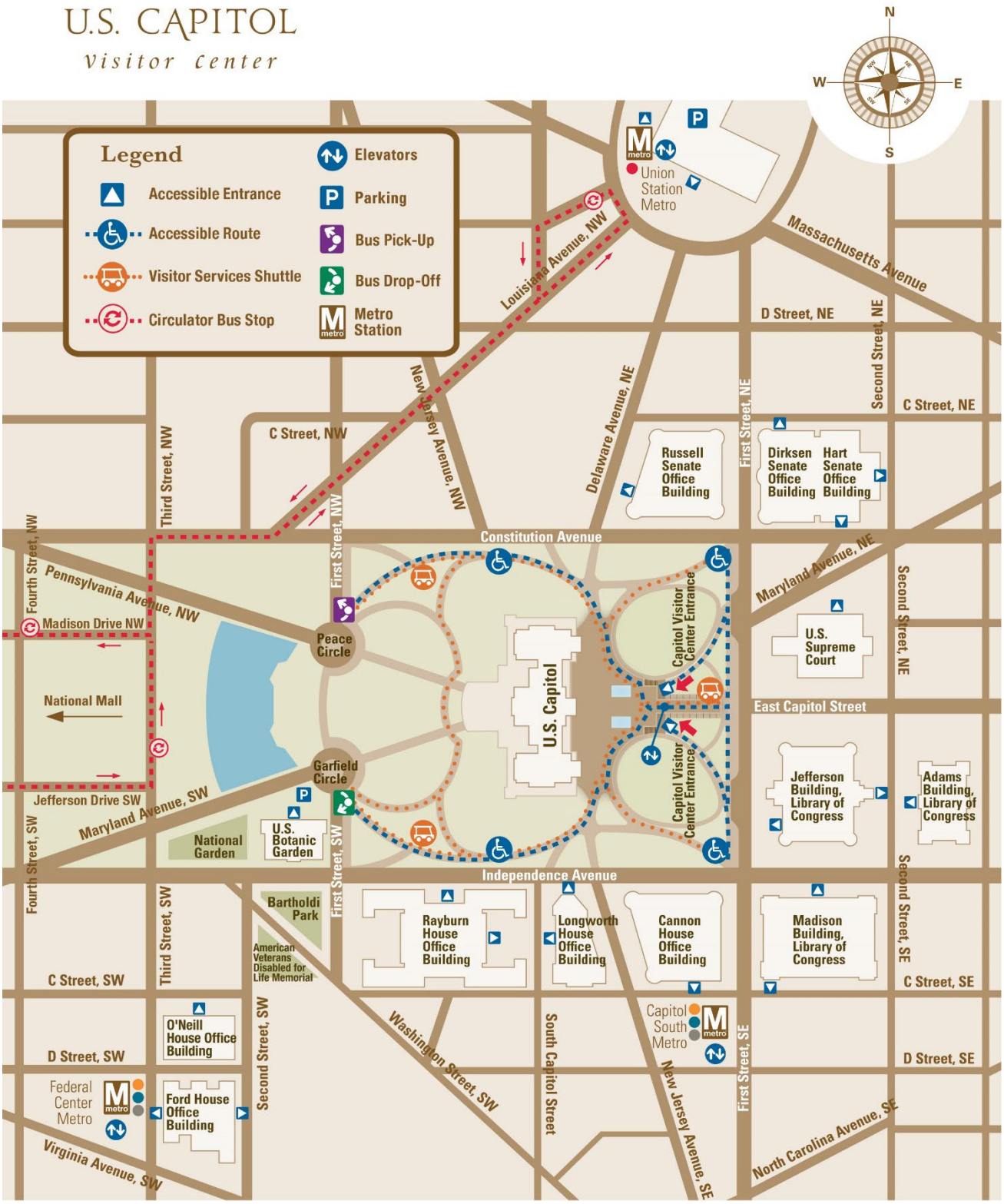
Subcommittee — A subset of a larger committee assigned with reviewing particular bills and issues and making recommendations to the full committee.

Veto — The procedure by which the President refuses to sign a bill, thus preventing it from becoming law. It may be overridden by a two-thirds majority vote in both the Senate and House.

Acronyms & Abbreviations

CBO	Congressional Budget Office
CHOB	Cannon House Office Building
CJS	Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee/Bill
CR	Continuing Resolution
FY	Fiscal Year
HELP	Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
LA	Legislative Aide/Assistant
LHHS	Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee/Bill
LC	Legislative Correspondent
LD	Legislative Director
LHOB	Longworth House Office Building
OMB	White House Office of Management and Budget
OSTP	White House Office of Science and Technology Policy
RHOB	Rayburn House Office Building
SD	Dirksen Senate Office Building
SH	Hart Senate Office Building
SR	Russell Senate Office Building

Getting Around Capitol Hill



Credit: U.S. Capitol Visitor Center

House Office Buildings

Members of the House of Representatives have offices in one of three buildings located on the southwest of the Capitol. The buildings are connected by a tunnel that runs through the basement level. If you need a quick caffeine boost or a place to sit between meetings, the buildings have coffee shops and cafeterias on the lower levels. The closest Metro stop is Capitol South on the blue, orange, and silver lines.

Each office building has multiple entrances, some of which may be closed or only accessible to Members of Congress and their staff. Signs outside the building will direct visitors to open entrances.

Cannon House Office Building
27 Independence Ave, SE

- Bounded by Independence Ave, SE (north), First St, SE (east), C St, SE (south), and New Jersey Ave, SE (west).

Longworth House Office Building
9 Independence Ave, SE

- Bounded by Independence Ave, SE (north), New Jersey Ave, SE (east), C St, SE (south), and South Capitol St, SE (west).

Rayburn House Office Building
45 Independence Ave, SW

- Bounded by Independence Ave, SE (north), South Capitol St, SE (east), C St, SE (south), and First St, SW (west).

Senate Office Buildings

Senators' offices are located in three buildings on the northeast side of the Capitol. The Russell and Dirksen Buildings are connected by a tunnel on the basement level. Dirksen and Hart are connected by stairways on each level. Food and coffee shops are located in the basement of Russell and Dirksen and on the ground floor connecting corridor between Dirksen and Hart. The closest Metro stop is Union Station on the red line.

Each office building has multiple entrances, some of which may be closed or only accessible to Members of Congress and their staff. Signs outside the building will direct visitors to open entrances.

Russell Senate Office Building
2 Constitution Ave, NE

- Bounded by C St, NE (north), First St, NE (east), Constitution Ave, NE (south), and Delaware Ave, NE (west).

Dirksen Senate Office Building
100 Constitution Ave, NE

- Adjoins the Hart building on the east side. Bounded by C St, NE (north), Constitution Ave, NE (south), and First St, NE (west).

Hart Senate Office Building
120 Constitution Ave, NE

- Adjoins the Dirksen building on the west side. Bounded by C St, NE (north), 2nd St, NE (east), and Constitution Ave, NE (south).

Capitol Hill Security

All visitors to Congressional office buildings must pass through security. Plan ahead and leave extra time as there can be a wait—particularly during the morning rush (8:30-10:00 a.m.) and lunchtime (11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.).

You will be asked to pass any items you have brought with you through an X-ray machine and walk through a metal detector. You will not have to take off your shoes, but you should take off your coat and empty your pockets.

The following items are prohibited:

- Aerosol containers
- Non-aerosol spray (prescriptions for medical needs are permitted)
- Any pointed object, e.g., knitting needles and letter openers (pens and pencils are permitted)
- Any bag larger than 18" wide x 14" high x 8.5" deep
- Electric stun guns, martial arts weapons or devices
- Guns, replica guns, ammunition, and fireworks
- Knives of any size
- Mace and pepper spray
- Razors and box cutters
- Gift-wrapped items

On the Web

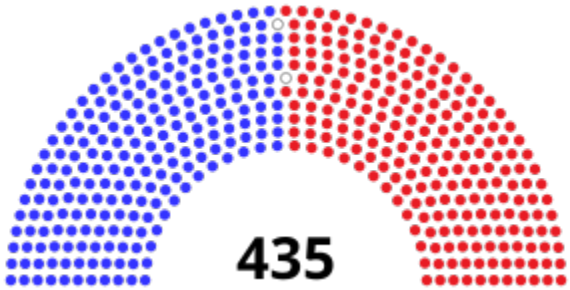
The White House ..... http://www.whitehouse.gov
Office of Management and Budget..... http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb
Office of Science and Technology Policy..... http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ostp
The White House office that advises the president on the effects of science and technology on domestic and international affairs.
USA.gov..... http://www.usa.gov
The official web portal of the federal government.

Congress .....http://www.congress.gov
Research legislation and public laws.
House of Representatives ..... http://www.house.gov
Access individual Member and Committee webpages.
Senate ..... http://www.senate.gov
Access individual Senator and Committee webpages.
Congressional Budget Office.....http://www.cbo.gov
Library of Congress ..... http://www.loc.gov
Government Accountability Office..... http://www.gao.gov
Annual Appropriations Process..... https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47106

COSSA .....https://www.cossa.org
Action Alert ..... https://www.cossa.org/action-center
Resources.....https://www.cossa.org/social-science
COSSA Washington Update ..... https://www.cossa.org/washington-update
COSSA Headlines ..... https://www.cossa.org/events
Why Social Science?.....https://www.whysocialscience.com

VI. The 119th Congress (2025-2026)

U.S. House of Representatives

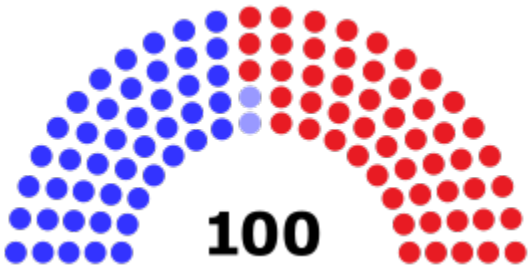


Republicans: 218
Democrats: 213
Vacant: 4

House of Representatives Leadership

Speaker of the House	Mike Johnson (R-LA)
Majority Leader	Steve Scalise (R-LA)
Majority Whip	Tom Emmer (R-MN)
Minority Leader	Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY)
Minority Whip	Katherine Clark (D-MA)

U.S. Senate



Republicans: 53
Democrats: 45
Independant: 2 (caucus with Democrats)

Senate Leadership

President of the Senate	J.D. Vance
President Pro Tempore	Chuck Grassley (R-IA)
Majority Leader	John Thune (R-SD)
Majority Whip	John Barrasso (R-WY)
Minority Leader	Charles “Chuck” Schumer (D-NY)
Minority Whip	Richard Durbin (D-IL)

As of January 2026

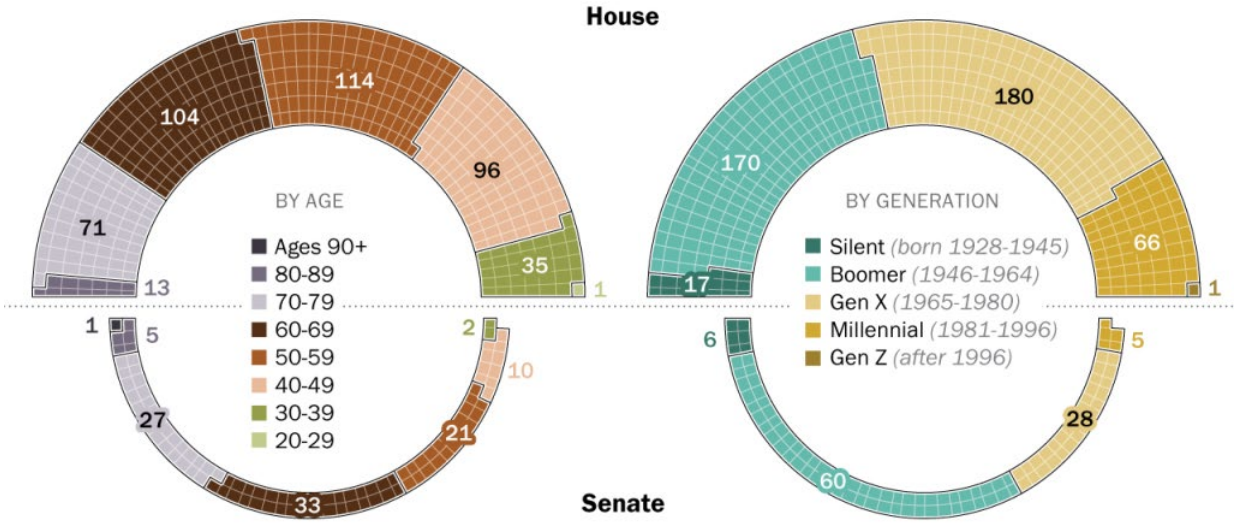
Member Profiles

House of Representatives

- 57 freshmen
- 125 women (out of 435)
- Median age = 58.6
- 133 non-White
  - 61 Black
  - 46 Hispanic
  - 18 Asian American
  - 5 Multiracial
  - 3 Native American
- 301 White

Senate

- 9 freshmen
- 26 women (out of 100)
- Median age = 63.6
- 16 non-White
  - 5 Black
  - 7 Hispanic
  - 3 Asian American
  - 1 Native American
- 83 White



Source: Pew

As of February 2025

House Committees

House Committee on Appropriations

Chair: Tom Cole (R-OK)
Ranking Member: Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)
Website: http://appropriations.house.gov
Minority Website: https://democrats-appropriations.house.gov/

The House Appropriations Committee is responsible for crafting the legislation each year that funds the federal government. This legislation is divided into twelve individual funding bills, each of which is assigned to a designated subcommittee. These subcommittees review the President's annual budget request, hear testimony from federal agency officials and outside witnesses, and draft legislation that will fund their respective agencies for the coming fiscal year.

Some of the key appropriations subcommittees for social and behavioral science are:

- Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
- Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS)
- Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-H)

House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Chair: Brett Guthrie (R-KY)
Ranking Member: Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ)
Website: http://energycommerce.house.gov
Minority Website: https://democrats-energycommerce.house.gov/

The House Energy and Commerce Committee has broad jurisdiction, including over biomedical research and development, consumer affairs and consumer protection, health and health facilities, energy policy, and interstate and foreign commerce. It is an authorizing committee that oversees the Departments of Energy, Health and Human Services, Commerce, and Transportation, as well as the Food and Drug Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Communications Commission, and other agencies.

Energy and Commerce's six subcommittees are:

- Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade
- Communications and Technology
- Energy and Power
- Environment and the Economy
- Health
- Oversight and Investigations

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Chair: Brian Babin (R-TX)
Ranking Member: Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)
Website: http://science.house.gov
Minority Website: https://democrats-science.house.gov/

The House Science Committee has jurisdiction over the National Science Foundation, NASA, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology, as well as issues including energy research, environmental research, and other scientific research and development areas. This Committee is responsible for passing the legislation that authorizes the National Science Foundation.

The Committee has five subcommittees:

- Energy
- Environment
- Oversight
- Research and Technology
- Space

House Committee on Education and Workforce

Chair: Tim Walberg (R-MI)
Ranking Member: Robert "Bobby" Scott (D-VA)
Website: https://edworkforce.house.gov/
Minority Website: https://democrats-edworkforce.house.gov/

The House Committee on Education and the Workforce has jurisdiction over education programs (including early childhood, primary, secondary, and adult education) and programs affecting the labor market, such as pensions, job training, employee benefits, and worker health and safety. It oversees the Departments of Education and Labor.

The Committee has four subcommittees:

- Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
- Workforce Protections
- Higher Education and Workforce Training
- Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions

Senate Committees

Senate Committee on Appropriations

Chair: Susan Collins (R-ME)
Vice Chair: Patty Murray (D-WA)
Website: http://appropriations.senate.gov

As in the House, the Senate Appropriations Committee is responsible for crafting the legislation that funds the federal government each year. This legislation is divided into twelve individual funding bills, each of which is assigned to a designated subcommittee. These subcommittees review the President's annual budget request, hear testimony from federal agency officials and outside witnesses, and draft legislation that will fund their respective agencies for the coming fiscal year.

Some of the key appropriations subcommittees for social and behavioral science are:

- Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
- Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS)
- Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-H)

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Chair: Bill Cassidy (R-LA)
Ranking Member: Bernie Sanders (I-VT)
Website: http://www.help.senate.gov

The HELP Committee legislates on issues affecting the agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services (including the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the Food and Drug Administration), the Department of Education (including the Institute of Education Sciences), and the Department of Labor (including the Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Its three subcommittees are:

- Children and Families
- Employment and Workplace Security
- Primary Health and Aging

Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Chair: Ted Cruz (R-TX)
Ranking Member: Maria Cantwell (D-WA)
Website: http://www.commerce.senate.gov

The Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee has jurisdiction over science, engineering, technology, and research and development policy; communications; interstate commerce; highway safety and other transportation issues; oceans, weather, and atmospheric activities; and standards and measurement. This committee drafts the authorizing legislation for the National Science Foundation (NSF), which makes it particularly important to the social and behavioral science community.

The Committee has seven subcommittees:

- Aviation and Space
- Communications, Technology, and the Internet
- Manufacturing, Trade, and Consumer Protection
- Science, Oceans, Fisheries, and Weather
- Transportation and Safety
- Security

cossa.org
whysocialscience.com