

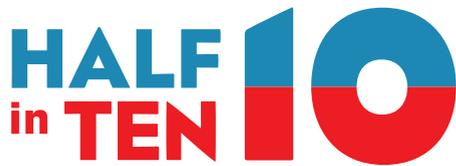
**HALF**  
in **TEN** **10**



# Cutting Poverty in Half in 10 Years: Tools for Action

November 2011

[WWW.HALFINTEN.ORG](http://WWW.HALFINTEN.ORG)



# Cutting Poverty in Half in 10 Years: Tools for Action

November 2011

This toolkit was developed to provide local advocates with the tools and tips to take action to cut poverty in our nation. The Half in Ten campaign hopes that you will use these basic strategies to develop innovative and unique partnerships to plan and execute effective advocacy campaigns. Our partner organizations the Center for American Progress Action Fund, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and the Coalition on Human Needs have also developed a wealth of resources to assist with your advocacy efforts.

# Contents

## **1 Background information**

- 1 Background of Half in Ten campaign
- 2 A framework to cut poverty in our nation
- 11 Half in Ten policy priorities for 2012

## **19 Starting an advocacy campaign**

- 19 Identifying your issue
- 20 Developing your outreach plan
- 20 Asking the right questions
- 21 Assessing your capabilities
- 22 Developing inventory of internal resources
- 22 Building and sustaining local coalitions
- 23 Staying connected with Half in Ten

## **24 Organizing your community**

- 24 Tips to engage different groups
- 24 Participating in community events
- 25 Virtual events
- 26 Participating in events with elected officials
- 26 Sample questions for political events

## **28 Conducting media outreach**

- 28 Developing a communications plan
- 28 Power of stories
- 29 Engaging the media
- 31 Utilizing social media

# Contents

## **33 Building relationships with elected officials**

- 33 Working with congressional staff
- 35 Writing your member of Congress
- 36 Drafting action alerts

## **38 Resources**

- 38 Legislative process 101
- 39 Glossary of terms
- 42 Key antipoverty and safety net programs
- 44 Key dates in the annual federal budget cycle

## **45 Endnotes**

# Background information

---

## Background of Half in Ten campaign

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Center for American Progress convened a diverse taskforce of national experts to examine the causes and consequences of poverty in America and to devise a plan to reduce poverty and promote greater opportunity for all. The result was a landmark report, released in April 2007, “From Poverty to Prosperity: A National Strategy to Cut Poverty in Half.” The report laid out a series of policy recommendations, which if implemented would lead to dramatic reductions in the U.S. poverty rate.

The Half in Ten campaign was launched as a partnership of the Center for American Progress Action Fund, the Coalition on Human Needs, and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights with the philosophy that we have the policy tools to dramatically reduce poverty and grow the middle class; what was lacking was the political will. The campaign was launched in 2008 with the purpose of mobilizing support for the report’s policy agenda and holding our elected officials and ourselves accountable to an ambitious, but achievable, target.

## Background on Half in Ten indicators project and report

The Half in Ten campaign’s goal of cutting the U.S. poverty rate in half over the next decade goes beyond a simple examination of the number of people who fall below the official poverty level. The campaign recognizes that well-being is multidimensional and that moving above the official poverty line does not necessarily signal an end to deprivation. As a result the campaign developed its first annual report that includes multiple indicators to track progress toward achieving economic security and opportunity for all people in the United States.

The first benchmark report, “Restoring Shared Prosperity: Strategies to Cut Poverty and Expand Economic Growth,” was published in October 2011. Each subsequent year we will track progress in moving families towards self-sufficiency

and highlight the policies and trends that moved us closer or further from the Half in Ten goal of cutting poverty and creating economic opportunity. The indicators in the report are organized in three categories: creating good jobs, strengthening families, and promoting economic security. The report also provides a detailed overview of the challenges facing low-income families in the United States.

During the development of these indicators, the Half in Ten Campaign coordinated a series of meetings with key stakeholders on Capitol Hill, within the administration, and across the antipoverty community to gather information on important policies and poverty-reduction strategies to include as part of the indicators project. The Half in Ten campaign also sponsored a number of roundtable discussions with key researchers and policy experts to review sample indicators and discuss strategies to engage a wider audience in a conversation about policy solutions to move more individuals and families toward economic security.

This toolkit provides additional resources and strategies to help advocates across the United States better utilize the findings of the report. It is intended to provide quick and easy references to the larger report, but also to provide ideas to develop partnerships to build momentum around the indicators presented in the document. The Half in Ten campaign believes that only through stronger partnerships at the state and local levels will we be able to drive the policy changes necessary to cut poverty in half in 10 years.

---

## A framework to cut poverty in our nation

In the new report, “Restoring Shared Prosperity: Strategies to Cut Poverty and Expand Economic Growth,” the Half in Ten campaign established benchmarks to assist advocates and policymakers to take immediate action to ensure that as a nation we move forward with the appropriate policies to expand economic opportunities for all Americans. The campaign outlines a set of priorities that it will work with its partners to urge policymakers to advance during the next 10 years. These priorities focus on the following broad categories:



Policy recommendations made in these areas would increase opportunities for families to lift themselves out of poverty and reduce the threat of falling out of the middle class.

## Creating good jobs

A good job is the best ticket out of poverty. But with elevated levels of unemployment and underemployment, the American Dream is out of reach for too many families. Unemployment not only has scarring effects on individual families and neighborhoods; it's actually a driving force behind our national deficit. Higher unemployment means fewer people paying taxes and more people requiring social services. Targeted investments to tackle the job deficit is a critical component of a strategy to get our nation's deficit under control.

For those who do have jobs, there has been a steady decline in job quality over the past four decades, with fewer jobs offering family-supporting wages, health and retirement benefits, and the flexibility needed to balance work and family demands. Too often hard-working individuals find themselves facing economic hardship even though they have full-time employment.

Wages play an important role in an individual's employment decisions, but other factors, such as access to training, opportunities for advancement, employment benefits, and workplace flexibilities, are all components of a good job. Over the next decade the Half in Ten campaign will track the following indicators relating to creating more good jobs:

- **Median weekly real earnings of workers in service occupations were \$479 in 2010.** Our goal is to increase the weekly earnings of workers in service occupations. This is an important strategy to lower the number of working people living in poverty. Service workers comprise a significant chunk of the “working poor.”
- **Only 74.7 percent of students graduated high school in 2008.** Our goal is to increase the number of students who graduate high school so that there will be better-prepared workers to compete in the labor force who have sufficient earnings to stay out of poverty.
- **Sixty-seven percent of workers had access to paid sick leave in 2010.** Our goal is to increase the number of workers whose jobs offer paid sick leave. This will

mean more working families will not have to risk losing their job or needed wages when they or a family member becomes ill.

- **Sixty-nine percent of all workers had access to retirement benefits in 2010, but less than half of workers (43 percent) in the bottom quartile did.** Our goal is to increase the number of workers with access to retirement benefits to create greater economic security for more working families.
- **Women earned 78 cents on the dollar compared to men doing the same job in 2010.** Our goal is to reduce the disparity in wages between men and women. This is a critical component to poverty reduction, as more women are entering the workforce and are now primary or co-breadwinners of their households.

### Strengthening families and communities

While we know that raising children is primarily the responsibility of parents, public policies can create environments conducive to good parenting by increasing opportunities in communities so more families can provide the necessary emotional and economic support to their children. To that end, strengthening families means providing children with the best possible life chances regardless of where they start off in life. This means ensuring that children have access to stable and safe housing, adequate nutrition, health care, and educational opportunities they'll need to thrive. These factors, coupled with other changes in social norms, will require policymakers to address the needs of working parents in a more comprehensive manner.

Over the next decade the Half in Ten campaign will track the following indicators relating to strengthening families:

- **16.3 percent of Americans lacked health-insurance coverage in 2010.** Our goal is to increase the number of people with health-insurance coverage, which will reduce both economic and health risks for low-income families—factors that contribute to keeping families poor.
- **408,425 children were in foster care in 2010.** Our goal is to increase the number of youth who transition from foster care to safe, permanent-living arrangements. This will help cut economic risks for youth.

- **Only 4 percent of households with more than one earner are in poverty (income less than \$22,000 a year for a family of four) as compared to 24 percent with a single earner.** For single-mother households, poverty drops from 40.7 percent on average to only 14 percent when the mom has full-time, year-round employment. Our goal is to increase the number of dual-income households and number of single mothers with good jobs and necessary work supports to reduce the number of children living in poverty.
- **The teen birth rate in 2009 was 39.1 births per 1,000 teens.** Our goal is to reduce the number of teen pregnancies so more young people are likely to finish high school and stay out of poverty.

### Promoting family economic security

Economic security means that Americans don't fall into poverty when they cannot work or work is unavailable, unstable, or pays so little that they cannot make ends meet. It means that when workers lose their jobs, they have time to look for a better one or upgrade their education and skills without risking eviction or foreclosure. It also means that individuals with disabilities are encouraged and supported in their efforts to participate in the workforce to the maximum extent possible, without fearing that these efforts risk leaving them with no source of support.

Over the next decade the Half in Ten campaign will track the following indicators relating to family economic security:

- **7.7 percent of Americans were “unbanked,” or without savings or checking accounts, in 2009.** Our goal is to increase access to affordable banking. This will help families save and build assets to weather a crisis or invest in their future.
- **Sixty-six percent of unemployed workers received unemployment benefits in 2010.** Our goal is to increase the number of unemployed workers who gain access to unemployment insurance benefits. This will lift more families out of poverty and create jobs for other Americans through maintaining demand in the economy.
- **There were 62 affordable and available units per 100 very low-income tenants (those earning 0 percent to 50 percent of the state median family income in 2009).** Our goal is to increase the availability of safe and affordable housing,

which will reduce economic hardship among low-income families and provide more stability for struggling families.

- **SNAP/food stamps is an important tool in responding to increased need from the Great Recession.** The number of unemployed people grew 110 percent from 2007 to 2010. SNAP responded with a 53 percent increase in participation (from 26.3 million to 40.3 million) over the same period, and food banks have increased the number of clients served by 46 percent from 2006 to 2010

Top 10 findings from Half in Ten's inaugural report  
tracking our progress reducing poverty

### *Creating good jobs*

1. **Since 1970 real wages have not kept pace with employee productivity.** Since 1973 worker productivity has nearly doubled, and Americans 25 and older have achieved higher levels of high school and college educational attainment. Unfortunately, increases in these areas have not translated into increased wages for workers across the board. Only workers with already-high wages experienced big wage gains.
2. **In 2010 people with disabilities had an employment rate of 18.6 percent, which was just one-third that of people with no disabilities (63.5 percent).** People with disabilities account for a larger share of working-age adults living below the poverty line than any other major demographic group with a heightened risk of poverty. Poverty among people with disabilities is driven by a combination of labor-market exclusion and inadequate social insurance.
3. **Between 1979 and 2007 overall direct expenditures by the federal government on education, training, and employment services fell by half, from 8.8 percent of GDP to 4.3 percent.** Increasing high school and college graduation rates and investing in job training for middle-skill workers must be a part of a comprehensive poverty-reduction strategy that also includes major economic reforms and incorporates wages, nonwage benefits, and other components of job quality.
4. **The transportation sector provides new opportunities for equitable job growth.** The report shows that investments in the transportation sector provide the dual impact of improving access to employment and creating jobs

at the same time. More than 14 million jobs—about 11 percent of civilian jobs in our nation—are estimated to be transportation related. This presents new opportunities for Americans living in poverty to obtain good jobs without displacing current workers.

### *Strengthening families*

5. **Poverty rates for households headed by a single mother drop from 40.7 percent to 14 percent when the mother has full-time, year-round employment.** This underscores the importance of job creation and flexible workplaces, as well as work supports such as child care, in enabling single mothers to move their families out of poverty.
6. **Only 4 percent of households with more than one earner are in poverty as compared to 24 percent of households with a single earner.** In modern American society, marriage is an important route, but not the only one, for low-income families to achieve financial stability. Recognizing and encouraging multiple incomes in whatever form they exist has a significant impact on families' poverty status.
7. **Among those facing employment challenges, more than one-third (35 percent) had home or family reasons for not working all or part of the year, such as a sick child or parents, and disruptions in child care.** The report shows that 80 percent of low-wage workers have no paid sick leave, and there are waiting lists for child care assistance across the country. In order to connect low-income families to employment opportunities, it is critical to address these barriers to work.

### *Promoting economic security*

8. **African Americans and Latinos are more than five times more likely than whites to be “unbanked.”** One in five African American (21.7 percent) and Latino (19.3 percent) households were “unbanked,” or without checking and savings accounts, in 2009. This is more than five times the rate experienced by whites (3.3 percent). Assets help families weather periods of unemployment or economic hardship, climb the economic ladder, and solidify their spot in the middle class.
9. **High poverty rates among families with children cannot simply be explained by low work effort.** Low-income parents work more hours than those in many other developed countries, but a parent working full time (40 hours a week,

50 weeks a year) earning \$10 an hour would only bring home only \$20,000 annually—less than the official federal poverty level for a family of four and not nearly enough to pay for decent housing, food, child care, transportation, and health care. That’s why “work support” benefits such as earned income tax credits, child care assistance, and public health insurance coverage are a critical component of policy efforts to reduce poverty.

10. **In 2009 the earned income tax credit lifted 6 million people—half of them children—out of poverty.** The child poverty rate would have been nearly a third higher without it. The credit is also a powerful work incentive for single parents as research shows that 60 percent of increased labor force participation among single mothers from 1984 to 1996 can be attributed to an expansion of the EITC.

Perhaps the most important finding from the report is that we have both the experience and the policy tools necessary to cut poverty in half.

Between 1964 and 1973, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, the U.S. poverty rate fell by nearly half (43 percent) as a strong economy and effective public-policy initiatives expanded the middle class. Similarly, between 1993 and 2000 shared economic growth combined with policy interventions such as an enhanced EITC and minimum-wage increase worked together to cut child poverty from 23 percent to 16 percent.

It is possible to restore shared prosperity. Let’s start today.

## A call to action

*“There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we have the resources to get rid of it.” — Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.*

What would it mean to cut poverty in half across the United States? In concrete terms, it would mean 23 million fewer Americans living in poverty. It would mean more consumers for American goods and services to help us rebuild our economy from the bottom up. It would mean a more educated workforce to create the jobs and industries in the future and spur greater economic growth. It would mean a healthier population, less crime, and a major decline in the racial inequities and disparities that plague our nation. And it would mean a more competitive America with greater opportunity for all its citizens.

During these challenging economic times, it is easy to believe that poverty is a permanent and unalterable feature of our society—that elevated levels of unemployment and diminishing opportunity are the “new normal.” In fact, a May 2011 Gallup poll suggests for the first time, a majority of Americans believe their children will not be better off or have the same opportunities as their own generation. And it’s undeniable that the American Dream is at risk for the more than one in three Americans struggling to make ends meet on low incomes alongside the 46.2 million Americans in poverty.

It doesn’t have to be this way.

In fact, throughout our history there have been periods when we significantly reduced poverty, periods when a strong economy at near full employment combined with government and private initiatives to enable millions of Americans to find paths of opportunity into the middle class. Our past experiences teach us a great deal, and we now boast more effective strategies for poverty reduction. We know that it is possible to reduce poverty and expand the middle class. What we need more than anything is the will to do so.

We are today, as we were in Dr. King’s time, at a crossroads—a pivotal moment that will test our collective ability to spur our great nation to reach its highest ideals. The overall picture of the American economy is gloomy, with the lingering effects of the mortgage crisis, persistent unemployment, and falling median income all undermining Americans’ economic security.

Since the beginning of the Great Recession, the number of poor people in America has grown by 9 million.<sup>1</sup> And that number is likely to continue to grow if nothing is done. We cannot expect prosperity to trickle down without intentional steps to increase and share the economic growth so that all Americans move forward together.

Ending poverty is in the national interest. Our nation cannot continue to lead the world while ignoring widespread poverty and economic insecurity that paralyzes families, destabilizes communities, and closes doors of opportunity to our children. To compete in the 21st century, we must be a nation that nurtures and deploys the talents of all of our citizens.

And while poverty affects every race and nationality in our nation, we must also be brutally honest about the racial disparities that continue to separate blacks and

Hispanics from whites. While the 2010 poverty rate among whites was 13 percent, 27.4 percent of blacks and 26.6 percent of Latinos lived in poverty.

Demography is not destiny, yet our growing population and growing diversity as a nation is a source of strength in the international economic arena. But we need to provide economic opportunities to all Americans to capitalize on these important demographic trends—not least because these future taxpayers will be providing the fiscal resources for our own aging population in the coming decades.

Rising inequality among these emerging groups is unhealthy for our democracy, too, both in terms of economic growth and social conflicts. Escalating rates of poverty robs the United States of one of its fundamental values—the belief that one can achieve success through hard work.

Thankfully, it's not too late for us to act. This report lays out concrete steps our nation can and should take today to turn the tide on this crisis. By providing access to good jobs that honor the dignity of work, policies that strengthen families, and opportunities to promote economic security, we can chart a new course for America's future—one based on the hard-won recognition that stable economic growth requires shared prosperity.

America has never shied away from big challenges. Whether it was rebuilding Europe after World War II or venturing into the heavens to put an American on the moon, our nation has succeeded by committing itself to grand goals with the focus and determination to achieve what many thought was impossible. Our organizations—the Center for American Progress Action Fund, the Coalition on Human Needs, and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights—believe that the same focus, fearlessness, and determination that brought stability to postwar Europe and put a man on the moon in less than 10 years can be marshaled to slice poverty in half in the next decade and expand opportunity for all.

This is a vision of society worth fighting for. At critical points in our history, Americans from different backgrounds and political beliefs came together to solve our nation's most pressing problems. Today we enjoy the fruits of those victories that were once thought to be out of reach. Whether we consider the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or the recent expansion of health coverage to 30 million Americans, these hard-fought victories all came because of a unified effort to build a better country.

It is time once again for all of us to join together to reignite America's can-do spirit and tackle the great challenge of this generation—cutting poverty and economic inequality in our country. Our political leaders will not take the necessary steps to build this vision of shared prosperity unless we the people work together to demand it. It is time that we recognize our collective strength and come together to fight for that brighter, more prosperous America.

---

## Half in Ten policy priorities for 2012

The protracted congressional debate this year over how to raise the federal debt ceiling was a tough blow for struggling Americans. In the end, the deal is likely to force cuts to programs that will affect those hit hardest by the Great Recession and the slow, uneven recovery. The federal debt ceiling debate further distracted policymakers from addressing critical needs of our nation: 25 million Americans in need of a full-time job, a shrinking middle class, and the lack of economic mobility in too many communities.

The Half in Ten campaign strongly believes it is possible to rebuild a nation of shared and stable prosperity. We can do it by investing in programs to grow the middle class and reduce economic hardship. Without such investments our efforts to reduce the deficit will fail, because the stalled economy will not produce enough revenue and the needs of a struggling population will be costly. A plan to create jobs, raise revenues from those who have gained the most from our economy, and make savings without harming the vulnerable will reduce the deficit and set us on a path of shared growth.

In this report we examine the current economic challenges facing the middle class and low-income families across the United States. The section below calls on policymakers to take immediate action to ensure that, as a nation, we move forward with the appropriate policies to expand economic opportunities for all Americans.

To that end, the Half in Ten campaign will work with its partners to urge policymakers to advance the following sets of progressive policy priorities in 2012 for a better America:

- Create more good jobs.
- Strengthen families and communities.
- Promote family economic security.

## Create more good jobs

### *A comprehensive jobs plan*

Record unemployment and underemployment has caused millions of Americans to fall behind. Unemployment damages individual families and neighborhoods and is a driving force behind our national deficit and rising poverty rates. Higher unemployment means fewer people paying taxes and more people requiring social services. Targeted investments to tackle the jobs deficit are a critical component of a strategy to get our nation's budget deficits under control. The Half in Ten campaign supports the essential components of President Obama's American Jobs Act, which takes important steps to target job creation strategies to reach low-income people and communities.

The Half in Ten campaign supports policies to promote equitable job growth among all sectors of the U.S. economy. We urge policymakers to approve a comprehensive jobs strategy that includes investing in jobs for low-skilled and long-term unemployed workers in distressed communities and in infrastructure projects to rebuild America's aging bridges, roads, and schools, while also creating jobs for skilled construction workers. The Half in Ten campaign also supports federal aid to states and localities to prevent layoffs and allow for the hiring of teachers, public safety, and human services workers in low-income communities.

### *Increase the minimum wage*

Too many American families continue to live in poverty even though they work full-time jobs. The minimum wage must be updated to allow more workers to earn a family-sustaining wage.

The Half in Ten campaign supports increasing the minimum wage and indexing it annually to keep pace with the increasing expenses that families face.

### *Reform our nation's workforce development system*

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act made significant investments to the nation's workforce development system, adding new funds for job training to the Workforce Investment Act and providing resources for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund that were in part used to subsidize 260,000 temporary jobs. These programs provided targeted training and employment services for low-income youth and adults. The Half in Ten campaign supports building on the successful experience of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families jobs program by providing additional federal funds to create more

subsidized jobs, taking care not to displace existing positions and ensuring the temporary workers are fully protected by labor laws.

In addition, the Half in Ten campaign supports summer and year-round programs aimed at connecting disadvantaged youth to education and work experience as part of a comprehensive jobs initiative to put Americans back to work. Expanded investment in supported work can help people with significant barriers to employment make a successful entry into the labor force.

Finally, reforms are needed to our nation's employment and training system to ensure more dislocated workers and youth are prepared to enter the workforce once the economy starts to grow. Specific investments must be made to connect workers to growth sectors such as transportation, health care, and energy.

#### *Support for paid sick leave*

Workers should not have to make a choice between taking care of their health and keeping a job. Yet according to the U.S. Department of Labor, nearly 40 million private-sector workers are not offered a single paid sick day to recover from an illness.

The Half in Ten campaign supports efforts to expand paid sick leave to more low-income workers. These workers should be allowed to earn job-protected, paid sick days each year to address their own illness or the health care needs of a family member. These policies should include a simple formula to calculate sick days to protect both workers and employers from abuse.

#### *Strengthen families and communities*

##### *Protect our nation's family and community supports*

Protecting funding for critical support programs must be a critical component of our nation's efforts to grow the economy and expand the middle class. Programs such as home energy assistance; the Women, Infants, and Children food-and-health assistance program; housing subsidies; and child care all play a key role in helping low-income families make ends meet. At a time when most states are facing budget shortfalls, with many cutting back on their own funding for child care and other family supports, the federal government should help states continue to serve vulnerable families; it should not make things worse.

The Half in Ten campaign urges policymakers to protect these vital supports in annual spending bills. These programs help families get a foothold in the middle class. The shrinking of the discretionary spending pot already approved as part of deficit reduction plans will further squeeze the funding sources for programs that support families during crisis and help them get on a path to economic stability. Congress and the president should spare programs that provide vital assistance for low-income and vulnerable people, and should reject proposals to cut domestic appropriations even more deeply.

### *Reform Temporary Assistance for Needy Families*

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Over the past decade and a half, this program has failed during the toughest economic times to provide the poorest families with support. Its predecessor program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, aided 75 families with children for every 100 such families in poverty; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families provided help to only 28 out of 100 poor families in 2009, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

During the strong economy of the 1990s, many parents found work and left this program, and some were helped by its increased funding for child care and other work supports. But during the Great Recession, when the number of the unemployed doubled, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families caseload rose only modestly—13 percent—compared to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for food stamps, which rose by 45 percent in response to the spike in need.

Most of the gains in employment among single mothers since the beginning of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program have been wiped out by the bad economy. The reauthorization of the program provides an opportunity to reform it to make it more responsive to the needs of low-income families, to better respond to economic downturns so families can gain support during periods when they are most in need, and to help more low-income parents gain access to training and better-paying jobs.

The Half in Ten campaign urges policymakers to reform Temporary Assistance for Needy Families to focus on real outcome measures such as improved access to education and training, job placement, and wage advancement. Specifically, we call for the creation of a national poverty reduction goal that would include regular measurements of progress as part of the program's core goals.

### *Build stronger communities*

Far too many children are growing up in high-poverty communities, defined by extreme levels of racial and economic segregation. These neighborhoods often lack resources such as high-performing schools, adequate public transportation, banks, parks, and other safe places for children to play. These community factors put families at a higher risk of remaining in poverty or slipping back into poverty.

The Half in Ten campaign supports efforts to address these challenges through targeted investments in struggling communities to spur economic growth, rebuild crumbling infrastructure, and create jobs. We also call for better cross-system collaboration by government agencies to break down the fragmentation in service delivery to vulnerable families.

### Promote family economic security

#### *Support tax credits for low-income workers*

The earned income tax credit is one of the nation's most effective work promotion and poverty reduction programs. In fact, this tax credit kept more than 3 million children out of poverty in 2010. Congress recognized the power of the earned income tax credit and the child tax credit and improved both through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

These reforms increased earned income tax credit benefits to families with three or more children and reduced the marriage penalty by allowing married couples to receive larger earned income tax credit refunds. The child tax credit was substantially improved, allowing a parent of two children working full-time at the minimum wage to receive nearly \$1,500 more than under the original law.

The Half in Ten campaign urges policymakers at least to continue these improvements to the earned income tax credit and child tax credit, which will otherwise expire at the end of 2012. Half in Ten also supports increasing the earned income tax credit for childless adults and young workers. We also urge policymakers to make the child tax credit fully refundable so more vulnerable working families can benefit.

### *Protect nutrition assistance programs*

In 2011 more than 45 million low-income individuals utilized Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps) benefits. The program helped 3.9 million more low-income families buy nutritious food in 2010 than in 2009, responding to the growing need after the onset of the recession. In 2012 Congress will update the program as part of the larger Farm Bill reauthorization.

The Half in Ten campaign urges policymakers to maintain the integrity and responsiveness of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in the 2012 Farm Bill reauthorization and in any deficit reduction plans. Unlike block-grant programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program was able to quickly respond to the nutritional needs of families hard hit by the recession and slow economic recovery. Congress should continue to strengthen the nation's nutrition safety net by restoring the \$2.2 billion removed from the program in 2010 to pay for the Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. The Hunger-Free Kids Act improved nutritional standards in school meals and expanded access to school lunch and other nutrition programs for low-income children, important steps that should not have been funded by reducing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits starting in 2013.

### *Extend unemployment insurance coverage*

Unemployment across our country is hovering around 9 percent, with low-income communities, youth, less-educated workers, and communities of color facing disproportionately higher rates of joblessness. Recognizing the ongoing hardship faced by unemployed workers, Congress and the Obama administration have provided additional support to dislocated workers in the form of Emergency Unemployment Compensation and Extended Benefits, both federally funded programs that provide benefits to individuals who have exhausted their regular, state benefits (usually six months).

Emergency Unemployment Compensation, or EUC, is a fully federally funded program that Congress has implemented on an ad hoc basis. The most recent extension of EUC occurred in December 2010, which extended benefits through 2011. The Extended Benefits, or EB program, is a permanent program that provides up to an additional 20 weeks of benefits that trigger on when unemployment rises and is generally funded 50-50 by the states and the federal government. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and subsequent extensions of the EUC program provided full federal funding of the EB program to state that implemented triggers that turned on faster.

The Half in Ten campaign urges policymakers to continue to extend both the EUC and the EB programs to vulnerable jobless workers as they continue to search for employment in this slow economic recovery. Since the introduction of unemployment benefits in 1938, Congress has never failed to act on extending benefits for the long-term unemployed while the national unemployment rate remains above 7.2 percent. Unemployment insurance is an effective safety net and economic engine— the program kept some 3.5 million Americans out of poverty in 2009<sup>2</sup> – and provides the additional benefits of driving demand among small business, which according to the Department of Labor averted an estimated 1.8 million job losses during the recession and kept the unemployment rate approximately 1.2 percentage points lower than it would have been.<sup>3</sup> These programs should be extended until the employment rate falls to pre-recession levels.

#### *Expand needed child care assistance*

Safe and affordable child care is an essential component of expanding employment among low-income parents. Without child care, parents face great obstacles to preparing for employment, finding a job, and staying employed. Without adequate and safe child care, too many parents must make the difficult choice between employment and taking care of their children. These decisions often force many parents out of the workforce, pushing them and their children further into poverty.

The Half in Ten campaign urges policymakers to protect and expand critically needed child care funding in fiscal year 2012. Congress recognized the critical need for additional child care and invested \$2 billion as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to create additional child care opportunities. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, states have spent these funds to provide care for an estimated 314,000 children.<sup>4</sup> States have used these funds to reduce parents' copays, as well as shorten, eliminate, or avoid waiting lists. These investments not only support employment among low-income parents but they also promote healthy child development.

#### *Expand efforts to protect and build assets*

Our government's current asset-promotion policies favor middle- and especially high-income households by subsidizing asset building, largely through the tax code. By lowering the family tax bill, these policies provide strong incentives for upper-income people to buy a home or save for retirement. One of the biggest barriers that low-income families face to improving their economic situation is a lack of money to invest in these assets. Savings and other assets provide critical protection for families during short-term crises, such as job loss, extended illness, or family breakup.

The Half in Ten campaign supports policies to increase assets and savings among low-income Americans. Policies to help low-income families build assets must recognize the daily financial challenges these families face. Policies should not discourage savings by stripping access to safety net programs if a family accumulates limited savings or owns a car. Additionally, policies and regulations are needed to protect low-income families and communities from predatory financial practices that rob them of their limited resources.

The Half in Ten campaign strongly believes it is possible to rebuild a nation of shared and stable prosperity. We can do it by investing in programs to grow the middle class and reduce economic hardship. Without such investments our efforts to reduce the deficit will fail, because the stalled economy will not produce enough revenue and the needs of a struggling population will be costly. A plan to create jobs, raise revenues from those who have gained the most from our economy, and make savings without harming the vulnerable will reduce the deficit and set us on a path of shared growth. In this report we examine the current economic challenges facing the middle class and low-income families across the United States. The section below calls on policymakers to take immediate action to ensure that, as a nation, we move forward with the appropriate policies to expand economic opportunities for all Americans.

# Starting an advocacy campaign

Creating the type of political change needed to reduce the level of poverty and economic hardship facing Americans will require leadership and active engagement by citizens in every state of our nation. Half in Ten aims to provide tools and educational materials to local advocates so they can build the types of ongoing campaigns that are necessary to create this change. While most issue advocacy campaigns involve several key components such as media outreach, policy development and public education, Half in Ten hopes that these simple tips will help local advocates develop effective and efficient advocacy efforts to move policymakers in the right direction.

---

## Identifying your issue

Developing a deep understanding of the issue or problem you plan to work on is the first step in building a strong advocacy campaign. Half in Ten and its partner organizations can provide you with detailed summaries of most federal programs and policies impacting low-income families. The Half in Ten policy agenda provides a useful benchmark for a number of policy issues that impact low-income families. Once you have completed your basic research, it's important to try to find answers to these key questions:

- Are there other groups already working on these issues?
- Are there policymakers in your community who are critical to this issue who will be helpful cheerleaders for your advocacy efforts?
- Will a legislative fix be most appropriate or is this something that can be addressed through regulatory changes?
- Are there short- and long-term objectives that you can use to address the problem?
- What potential solution will have the most impact?
- Which government agency is responsible for addressing the problem at the state and federal levels?
- Which organizations would make the best potential partners?

Once you have done some research to answer these questions, the Half in Ten campaign can support your efforts with additional data, tips, and strategies to help advance your advocacy efforts.

---

## Developing your outreach plan

The strategies you identify for your campaign will determine which types of campaign tactics you use and how you deploy them. Some campaigns may depend on generating intense media attention or mobilizing a specific constituency. Other campaigns may depend more on working behind the scenes to influence key decision makers. There's no single campaign template. But there are a set of questions to ask that will help you prepare and implement a strategic plan.

It's a good idea to make strategic planning a small team project. Effective strategic planning is hard to do in a large group setting. Gather a few people who are committed to your goals, understand the climate you'll be working in, and know some of the important decision makers.

---

## Asking the right questions

Developing a strategic campaign plan is a process of asking and answering a set of essential questions. As you ask and honestly answer these questions, you may find yourself needing to revise or clarify your goals as well as the important intermediate objectives.

*Who are the decision makers?* Look at your goal(s) and identify the people and/or institutions that have the power to make the change you are seeking. If you're trying to win passage of a law at the state or federal level, identify the people who will determine whether or not you will succeed:

- Who is in the best position to introduce the measure?
- Which committee or committees will have to approve your bill or can include your provision in broader legislation?
- Who leads those committees?
- Who are the other influential committee members?
- Who has the credibility and influence to be an effective sponsor or public spokesperson for the measure?
- Which respected legislators can help you get a majority to support your bill?

*What do they think about your issue?* Once you've identified the key decision makers, pull together what you know about their record and positions:

- What is their voting record?
- What is their record on issues similar to your campaign?
- What kind of public statements have they made?
- Have you or any of your colleagues had a private conversation with them?

If you're a seasoned activist who has worked on an issue for a long time, you may already have this information in hand. If not, you may be able to find much of it with electronic searches of news articles or an agency's public records. If you don't feel confident working with electronic databases, ask a librarian for suggestions.

*How do you capture the attention of decision makers?* In addition to knowing where your decision makers stand on your specific issue, you need to try to understand what is important to them, and how they make decisions. That will help you decide how best to influence their decision-making process. Among the important questions to ask:

- *How do they usually approach an issue?* Are they people who generally focus on the financial implications of a proposal, or are they more likely to explain their positions in moral language? Do they tend to focus on the big picture (the welfare of the state) or on the details (the impact of a decision on a neighborhood or individual people)?
- *What is their political situation or professional interest?* Is an election coming up? Do they face a competitive election? Are they hoping to move into a higher position of authority? Can you make the case that leadership or effective resolution of your issue will help them reach their own goals?

---

## Assessing your capabilities

Once you have identified key decision makers and ways you can influence them, consider the tools you have to work those levers of influence.

## Existing relationships

- Evaluate the existing relationships that you or members of your coalition can use to influence the decision makers:

- Who among your team or coalition is particularly well-respected in the community?
- Who understands the political dynamics of their district and how they view their election or re-election needs?
- Which organizations have political influence or the ability to apply political pressure?
- Who has personal or professional relationships with the key decision makers or members of their “inner circle” of friends and advisors? Who volunteered or worked on their campaign? Who went to school with them? Served with them on the boards of community organizations?

---

## Developing inventory of internal resources

Identify resources you will need to carry out your plan. If you want to generate 250 phone calls to a key decision maker, does your organization or coalition have the ability to organize that? If you decide that a public rally or town hall will be important to staking out your position publicly, do you have the staff or volunteer time to organize it, and the financial resources to rent a space and take care of other expenses? If you believe that media outreach will play an important role in the campaign, do you have people who know how to work with media? Do you have funds, or a fundraising strategy, to pay for organizing materials or advertising?

If you determine that you are missing needed resources, you may need to review your goals and revise your strategic thinking. Do you need to broaden your team or your coalition? Is there a way to start small and expand as you gain visibility and access to additional funds?

---

## Building and sustaining local coalitions

Once you have identified your internal resources, developing a working relationship with external partners is an effective approach to help advance the advocacy goals. Identifying the correct coalition partners is an essential skill for bringing about change that would be impossible for a single organization to achieve on its own.

When you are ready to build or expand an existing coalition, keep two things in mind: On one hand, you want your coalition to be as broad and diverse as possible, so that it reflects and can draw interest and resources from as many different

segments of the community as possible. At the same time, you want to develop partnerships with groups that are supportive of your goals and mission. While not every human needs or antipoverty group will be suitable for your coalition, you must resist the urge to only partner with people and groups you're comfortable with or have worked with in the past.

*These tips on coalition building were developed by The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.*

---

## Staying connected with Half in Ten

The Half in Ten campaign has developed a range of resources to empower advocates to hold their policymakers accountable for reducing poverty and expanding opportunity for all. These resources include an [interactive map of poverty data by congressional districts](#), online [informational quizzes to bust myths about poverty](#), and frequent national webinars to educate the grassroots at critical moments in the legislative process.

The campaign utilizes the power of stories, by allowing everyday Americans to share their stories to policymakers through the “[Road to Shared Prosperity](#)” story-mapping project. This project shows the effectiveness of federal programs through personal stories and compelling data to reinforce those stories.

**Tell us your story:** Do you have a story to tell, or know someone who does? Look through [our story submission tips](#) to making stories, and [share your story](#) today.

# Organizing your community

---

## Tips to engage different groups

Tailoring your outreach to different types of groups is a useful technique to build and expand diversity in your coalition. A critical component of your success will be developing messaging and talking points that resonate with the particular audience you are attempting to recruit or influence. Your outreach should be personal, culturally appropriate, and build on common and shared interests. Here are several tips to help:

- Attend community meetings and ask permission to make announcements about your program or event.
- Get coalition partners to publicize your event in their newsletters, websites, social media networks, and other communications with their members or constituents.
- Submit listings to newspapers and radio stations with community calendars.
- Ask coalition groups and allies to make specific commitments to segments of the community that you might not have strong relationships with.

---

## Participating in community events

Take advantage of public events that will give you visibility and access to groups of people you want to engage in your campaign. If you are trying to reach residents of a particular neighborhood or constituency, plan to attend block parties and other events. Neighborhood, religious, and cultural festivals may give you good opportunities to set up information tables or have volunteers working the crowd and distributing information. Some may even let you speak—you just have to figure out who to ask. You may be able to encourage other organizations to help produce a major public event by creating an event that combines programs. Here is a short checklist for working public events:

- Make sure you understand the ground rules for setting up a table or distributing materials (for example, you may need to rent a table or get a permit to set up in a public space).
- Create engaging visuals: banners, signs, recognizable t-shirts for your volunteers.

- Try to get everyone who shows interest to give you their contact information on a sign-up sheet.
- Give people an easy way to take action, like signing a postcard or petition.
- Consider offering stickers or other small giveaways that will draw people to your table.
- Determine what kind(s) of materials you want to distribute and how much you'll need: fact sheets, flyers, palm cards, or postcards that people can send to public officials, etc.
- If at all possible, try to get on the schedule as a guest speaker.

Additional resources: [http://halfintention.org/get\\_involved/program\\_guides/](http://halfintention.org/get_involved/program_guides/)

---

## Virtual events

Sometimes it is difficult to host a meeting with all of your key partners. Other times you may want to expand your reach to a larger audience or help build your list of supporters. In both of these instances, conference calls and webinars are useful tools.

**Conference calls** can be a great way to reach a large number of people in order to hear a motivational speech from the campaign public official; to update activists (and media) on new developments or campaign milestones; or to allow activists to share success stories with each other. Readily available conference call technology can allow you to have several speakers in different locations who can also talk with each other before speaking to the wider group of participants. You can “moderate” the call in order to control audience participation, create an orderly Q&A process, and more. For a simple conference call, you may be able to use in-house technology for your organization or a coalition partner. Check out available services like <http://www.freeconferencecall.com>.

**Webinars** are conference calls with the added component of people looking at visual information on their computers. Participants phone into a shared conference call number and use the Internet to join. Webinars can be highly interactive, allowing participants to raise questions by phone or email, or to edit materials live while other participants watch. Participating in webinars generally requires people to have a decent computer and good Internet connection, and to be willing to download some software. If your organization does not have its own webinar-organizing capabilities, you can arrange with companies like <http://www.gotowebinar.com>.

---

## Participating in events with elected officials

Policymakers and decision makers frequently hold events to communicate with the public. These types of events are more common during election seasons but also occur at community events and civic association gatherings throughout the year. Policymakers schedule these events or agree to join groups for two reasons: they want to communicate with constituents directly to deliver their message; they also want to get input from members of the public. These events provide a great opportunity for local advocates to interact with policymakers but also to convey their agenda to a broader politically active audience.

---

### Sample questions for political events

These are sample questions you can ask your elected officials to get them on the record about key policies that will help cut poverty in half in 10 years. You can look up the data for your state at <http://www.halfinten.org/indicators> or preface your question with a personal story that shows how these problems and policy solutions affect your family or community.

- More than X people in Y state live in poverty. Nationally, child poverty alone costs our economy upward of \$500 billion. In the past a strong economy combined with public and private initiatives to lift up all Americans have enabled us to cut poverty by half. (If (re)elected) would you support a goal to cut poverty in half in 10 years?
- More than X workers in Y state don't have access to a single paid sick day. This places workers in impossible situations, forcing them to risk their job or to come in sick/send their children to school sick putting others at risk and costing all of us. (If (re)elected) would you support legislation to ensure workers can earn paid sick leave?
- The earned income tax credit and child tax credit help make work pay for struggling families and cover extra child-related costs. But key provisions are set to expire at the end of next year, which would force a full-time minimum wage worker with two children to lose \$1,500 in their child tax credit, and penalize married couples and larger families, pushing millions into poverty. Do you support extending these key provisions and making the tax code work better for low-income working families?

- Record unemployment and underemployment has caused millions of Americans to fall behind. Unemployment damages individual families and neighborhoods and is a driving force behind our national deficit and rising poverty rates. Unemployment in X state is at Y percent. What is your plan to create more jobs? Would you support a tax on millionaires to pay for your proposal?
- In order for the United States to be a competitive country, we must invest in higher education and ensure our workers have the skills to compete. What is your strategy to increase America's high school graduation rate and enable more students to affordably attend college?
- Do you support the principle that the most vulnerable should be protected in deficit reduction? If so, what programs and policies will you stand up for in order to prevent an increase in poverty and hardship?

# Conducting media outreach

---

## Developing a communications plan

Effectively communicating with policymakers, media, and partner groups is an essential component in advancing your policy agenda. Advocates who are able to develop effective messaging that quickly captures their objectives and mission are able to more effectively advance their policy goals. When developing your communication plan, you should consider the following:

- Audience(s): Who are you trying to reach?
- What kinds of media do your audiences pay attention to? What other ways can you reach them?
- Messages: What messages will move people to take the action you want? How can you package and deliver those messages effectively through the media?
- Spokespeople: Who will be credible and effective at getting your message heard by the people you're trying to reach?
- Information and events: What kinds of information do you have, or events can you create, that will interest the public and media and enable you to place stories or get your spokespeople in print or on the air?
- What are the campaign milestones that will make good stories?

Once you have developed the key points and message you want to communicate to the broader audience, it is important to develop effective *talking points* that will allow you to reinforce your core message. You may need to shape these talking points to fit the different audiences that you will interact with.

---

## Power of stories

You do not have to be an expert in the data. Instead, tell a story about why this topic matters. You are an expert in your own story and that will make a stronger case to other readers. The Half in Ten story map project provides tips for matching powerful personal stories with data to effectively drive your policy agenda.

---

## Engaging the media

Identifying opportunities to expand your message through the media is an effective way to educate the public, build support among partners, recruit new supporters, and inform decision makers. Below are some strategies for working with different types of media outlets:

**Tips for developing and placing an op-ed:** Placing an op-ed is an effective way to communicate your policy agenda to the larger audience to help build support among opinion shapers. In many cases policymakers and their staff will scan local and national papers to see the types of issues that are of concern to their constituents and advocates. An op-ed also provides a cost-effective opportunity to expand your coalition and build support among regular citizens. These simple tips can help you shape and successfully place an op-ed:

- Refer to recent events in the news cycle that can help draw interest to your policy objective or long-term goals.
- Focus your points on one key message and use data to support your key points.
- Be concise and clear in your writing.
- Try to avoid overly technical terms that only experts in your field will understand.
- Check with the publication guidelines before submitting an op-ed. Filing a piece with the appropriate length will increase your chances for publication.

**Developing letters to the editor:** Many people, elected officials included, read the opinion section of their local newspaper. They are an excellent way to get media coverage, easy to write, and have a good chance of being printed. Tips for writing a letter to the editor:

- First, read the newspaper you want to submit it to. Look for other articles, letters, ads, or opinion pieces that you might be able to respond to in your letter.
- The best letters are written in your own voice, because you can add references to local experience and take advantage of coverage you see every day.
- Make the letter to the editor your own whether you're using a template or not.
- Be brief and choose your message. Your letter shouldn't be more than 200-250 words so try to focus on one or two specific points.
- Make sure you are responding to something previously printed. Cite that piece at the beginning without summarizing it and go on to make your points.

- Be specific. Use local and national census data to convey your message. If you want a specific person like a local legislator to hear your message, name them in your letter. This will make it much more likely that they will read your letter.
- Tell a story about why this topic matters. You are an expert in your own story and that will make a stronger case to other readers.

### Sample letter to the editor

*The rise in poverty reported in [your newspaper's story and date] tells us that the recession isn't over for more than 46 million poor Americans, the largest number in the 52 years the Census Bureau has been collecting poverty statistics.*

*The [number] more poor people in [your state], part of an increase of 2.6 million nationwide, underscore the urgent need for jobs. President Obama is right to press for a job-creation package to help the jobless escape poverty and climb into the middle class. Getting people back to work will help rebuild the economy and contribute the taxes that reduce long-term deficits. Congress should get its priorities straight: Slashing Medicaid, education, and other needed services will make things worse.*

**Other ways to get your opinion out:** If you don't have time to write a letter to the editor, most newspapers provide space for online comments. It's quick and easy to get your point of view out and to supply new information. If an opinion piece is written that you agree with, pay attention to the comments opponents are writing. Make sure you get your comments in so that it doesn't look like the majority of your community rejects views you share. If you don't agree with a piece, or know it is factually inaccurate, it's a good opportunity to set the record straight.

*These tips incorporated materials developed by the Coalition on Human Needs.*

**Tips for radio:** Getting an interview on a local radio program can significantly and quickly expand the number of people who are aware of your program or policy agenda. While it might be difficult to arrange an interview with a popular radio program, many stations have call-in shows. A well-planned call to one of these shows can be just as effective as a lengthy interview. Here are some tips to consider before contacting a radio program:

- Know the show you are planning to join. Try to listen to the show to know how long the segments are, what types of questions to anticipate, general flow, etc.
- Know the topic you plan to discuss. Prepare twice as much as you think you should.
- Develop a game plan. Think of your first answer, a “dodge” answer for a question you would rather not answer, and a sound bite or joke that you can use if needed.
- Be yourself. It is important that you appear comfortable and relaxed. Pretend you are talking to a group of friends.
- Call the host by name.
- Use lists, such as five reasons why your policy proposal will improve the program.
- Use simple language. Avoid acronyms or language that only experts will know.
- Define everything. Remember that there are no graphs, so use back stories and examples to illustrate your points.
- Stay on your key message. Try to restate some of your key points in different ways.
- Plug your products. If you were invited to represent a certain perspective or discuss a report, make sure the audience knows the name of your group or the report you are pushing out.

*Incorporated from the Center for American Progress’s top 10 radio tips.*

---

## Utilizing social media

Social media has emerged as a powerful antipoverty advocacy platform. Follow Half in Ten on [Twitter \(@halfinten\)](#) and “like” Half in Ten on [Facebook](#). Join the online conversation to reduce poverty and expand opportunity today—check out Half in Ten’s [social media directory](#) and email [info@halfinten.org](mailto:info@halfinten.org) to add your organization’s Twitter handle and Facebook page to the directory. If you’re new to Twitter, learn more about how you can get started with our [Twitter 101 guide](#). For more experienced users, check out our [Twitter 201](#) to find out how you can take your advocacy to the next level. Here are some sample tweets and posts you can use to spread the word about “Restoring Shared Prosperity” and incorporate the data for your state into your advocacy efforts. Use the #sharedprosperity hashtag in your tweets about the report and the data it contains.

### Sample Facebook posts:

- My state has lots of work left to do to create good jobs, strengthen families, promote economic security, and ultimately cut poverty. Check out Half in Ten's new state-by-state fact sheets to see where your state stands! <http://bit.ly/t2459Y>
- Ever wondered what policies would reduce poverty in America? Check out Half in Ten's new report, "Restoring Shared Prosperity," to find out! <http://bit.ly/vF6vZC>
- Join me and use data from Half in Ten's new state-by-state fact sheets for anti-poverty advocacy today! <http://bit.ly/t2459Y>

### Sample tweets:

- Only about 35% of low-wage workers have paid sick leave. Good jobs build #sharedprosperity for all <http://bit.ly/sFGiPf>
- 41% of single-mother families were in #poverty in 2010. Strengthening families creates #sharedprosperity <http://bit.ly/vUOVRw>
- The EITC kept 3 million kids from #poverty in 2010. Tax credits promote #sharedprosperity <http://bit.ly/v1fYlQ>
- Nearly XX in XX ppl in (insert your state abbreviation and data for your state) are w/out health insurance. Find out how to create #sharedprosperity 4 all <http://bit.ly/vF6vZC>
- In (insert state abbreviation and data for your state), XX% of all residents r living in #poverty. Explore @halfinten's plan to create #sharedprosperity <http://bit.ly/vF6vZC>
- Food stamps kept millions out of poverty in 2010. Find out how the safety net promotes #sharedprosperity here <http://bit.ly/v1fYlQ>
- Support #sharedprosperity—incorporate data for your state into an op-ed <http://bit.ly/t2459Y>
- Have you seen food stamps or other progs build #sharedprosperity? Share your story with Half in Ten's storybank today <http://bit.ly/jacEOC>

# Building relationships with elected officials

To build the political will to reduce poverty in America, Half in Ten and its partner organizations work to develop champions in Congress who can encourage their colleagues to support policies that lift families out of poverty. Local antipoverty advocates looking to create and develop relationships with members of Congress can use these simple strategies to build relationships with policymakers and their staff. Two rules to remember when working with elected officials: First, developing strong relationships will take time—you must be persistent. Second, congressional staff play a critical role in policy development; it is important for these staff to see you as a resource. Here are some useful tips and resources for working with Congress.

It is important to develop a relationship with congressional aides who handle the issues or programs that you are attempting to change. These aides often meet daily with their representatives and senators to offer advice and to interpret the thousands of bills that are introduced in Congress each year. Developing relationships with these aides so that they become your allies is a key component in building the necessary political will to cut poverty in the United States. Use this guide to put together an action plan for the aides in your own congressional offices.

---

## Working with congressional staff

Step one: Learn more about your representatives and senators.

Get background information about your members of Congress and their positions on the issues. Here are some sources for this information:

- The website for your member of Congress at <http://www.house.gov/> or <http://www.senate.gov/>
- The newsletter your representatives and senators put out to interested constituents
- Newspaper articles

Step two: Identify the aides in Washington who handle your issues.

Once you get to the photo and bio of the specific member of Congress, click on the “Staff” button above his/her photo. If you cannot find the specific aide on our website, call your Congress member’s Washington, D.C., office and ask for the person who handles your specific issue.

Step three: Begin to build a relationship with the key aides.

1. Introduce yourself in person or over the phone.
2. Ask if the aide has a few minutes to speak to you.
3. Tell the aide that you are a constituent—and any affiliation you have—who is concerned about hunger and poverty issues.
4. Thank the aide for the work he or she is doing and specifically acknowledge something your member of Congress has done.
5. Ask if you can send him or her any additional information via email or fax.
6. Make a plan to follow up with the aide by asking when you might call back or, if he or she prefers, when the aide might be able to get back to you.
7. Use these same tips when interacting with both local and national office staff.

Step four: Work with your group to establish an effective system of communicating information and requests to the aide, including following up.

1. Who will be the contact person in your group?
2. Ask the aide what the best way is to communicate initial requests. Phone? Email? Fax?
3. Ask him or her: What is the best way to follow up on requests? Phone? Email? Fax?
4. Continue to stay in regular contact with the aide via their preferred communication method. Send the aide key media or other information related to the issue you are working on to keep him or her informed.

After some initial contact with the aide, consider asking him or her to have a conference call with the group and/or local coalition partners so he or she can get to know other people who care about the issues, and/or a local in-person meeting while the member of Congress is in their district.

*These tips were incorporated from materials developed by Half in Ten partner RESULTS.*

---

## Writing your member of Congress

Sending a letter to your elected official serves many purposes. It informs the elected official that his constituents care about the specific issues that you bring to his/her attention. It also allows you to start building your relationship with the office and to start establishing yourself as a potential resource for staff. Some simple tips:

- Utilize local and personal stories if possible.
- Offer solutions when appropriate.
- Use local and national data to reinforce your positions.

### Sample letter to Congress:

*Dear senator:*

*As your constituent, I urge you to act before the end of the year to continue unemployment benefits through 2012. [insert your story here]*

*These benefits kept 3.2 million American families from falling into poverty in 2010 alone, and failing to continue such a critical benefit would be a blow to unemployed workers and their families, as well as our economy. It would lessen families' ability to provide for their basic needs such as rent and food, and this reduced spending would force businesses to lay off additional workers. Failing to continue benefits could mean that nearly a million U.S. workers could lose their jobs and the economy could lose \$70 billion to \$80 billion in 2012.*

*In [insert your state name], unemployment tops [insert unemployment rate]—that's nearly 1 out of every XX [insert state name] residents. Unemployment across the country still hovers above 9 percent, with low-income communities, youth, single-mother households, and communities of color facing disproportionate rates of joblessness.*

*Please act swiftly to continue unemployment benefits. Millions of jobless workers and our nation's economic well-being are counting on you.*

*Sincerely,*

---

## Drafting action alerts

Many human needs programs like child care, Head Start, and WIC are at great risk for reduction in funding. Other safety net programs such as SNAP/food stamps, Medicaid, and unemployment insurance are in danger of either expiration or structural changes that would hinder the ability of these effective programs to meet the still-high need for services facing struggling families and state economies across the country.

Each month, Half in Ten develops an action alert on the most pressing poverty-related policy issue that requires urgent action from grassroots advocates. The first part of the alert provides a background on the issue, underscores the need to act, and outlines the consequences of inaction. The second part of the alert is a draft letter local advocates can send to their members of Congress. Advocates are encouraged to edit and update this sample letter to include their personal story, facts from their state or district, etc. To see Half in Ten's current action alert and to view an archive of past alerts, [click here](#).

Personal stories can be a great addition to action alerts and sample letters as they can personalize and humanize the policy debates. Add your own story in your letter to your member of Congress or incorporate stories from the Half in Ten/Coalition on Human Needs storybank, "[The Road to Shared Prosperity](#)."

The "[Restoring Shared Prosperity](#)" report contains a wealth of data that can be used to advocate for these programs and the families they support. Here is an example of how you can use the data in the report for advocacy around extending unemployment benefits through 2012 (since they expire at the end of 2011) and how you can protect food/nutrition programs.

### Sample action alert

#### ***Urge Congress to continue unemployment benefits!***

*The time to urge members of Congress to protect jobless benefits is now. Cutting off unemployment insurance hurts our economic recovery and can have dire effects on families.*

*Jobless workers across the country are doing all they can to keep their families afloat. In 2010 alone, the unemployment benefits these struggling families*

*receive kept 3.2 million Americans from falling into poverty. Unemployment insurance not only assists jobless workers and their families but also boosts demand in the economy and creates jobs, aiding economic recovery.*

*Despite these benefits, federal unemployment insurance is set to expire at the end of this year, putting millions of vulnerable workers and families at risk. If Congress does not act to continue these benefits, nearly a million U.S. workers could lose their jobs, and the economy could lose \$70 billion to \$80 billion in 2012.*

### Other useful tips for engaging your members of Congress

*Half in Ten partner RESULTS has developed some other useful tips for working with your member of Congress:*

- Meet Face-to-Face with Your Member of Congress
- Arrange a Site Visit for Your Member of Congress to Communities Affected by Poverty
- Get Your Member of Congress to Take Leadership on One of Our Issues

# Resources

Below are resources to help speed the development of your advocacy efforts. These resources along with the data available at <http://www.halfinten.org/indicators> should provide the necessary tools to help you develop or expand your outreach and advocacy efforts in your state.

---

## Legislative process 101

The legislative process can seem daunting when you first start your advocacy effort. This short overview of the federal legislative process is intended to demystify the process.

There are two chambers in Congress: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Each U.S. citizen has two senators and one representative. Throughout the year, you may contact your members of Congress more than once on the same pieces of legislation. For example, early in the year you might ask your representatives to contact committee leaders during the writing of a bill and urge for greater funding levels for key programs.

Then, when bills you support are formally introduced into Congress, you may ask your members of Congress to co-sponsor the legislation, which publicly shows their support for the bill. With thousands of bills being introduced each year, bills with many co-sponsors are more likely to make it to the next phase of the process.

The next phase of the process after the bill is introduced is for the bill to be sent to the congressional committee, which can consider the bill and even propose important changes. If one of your members of Congress sits on a committee that is considering a piece of legislation that you support, they can play an important role in shaping policy or funding decisions. Asking your member to weigh in when a bill is being revised in committee—known as “marking up”—is an important step in the legislative process. But even if your member of Congress doesn’t sit on the committee in question, they can still influence the process by contacting members of that committee.

Once the committee considers and passes a bill, it is sent to the full House or Senate for debate and a vote. During debate before the full House or full Senate, you can build support for certain amendments or urge passage or defeat of others. This process happens in both the House and the Senate.

Then, once the bill has passed both the House and Senate, any differences between the House version and the Senate version are worked out in what is called a conference committee. Here again you can weigh in with members of the conference committee to make sure provisions you support are included in the final bill. Once a compromise is reached in the conference committee, the final compromise bill is voted on by both the full House and Senate with no amendments. If passed, the bill is then sent to the president to be signed into law or vetoed.

*This section was incorporated from materials developed by Half in Ten partner RESULTS.*

---

## Glossary of terms

The legislative process uses its own language. Becoming familiar with these terms will help you better understand the legislative process and improve your communication with staff and legislators. Below are some common terms that will help you keep track of your policy issues and better understand the legislative process.

**Authorization and authorizing committees:** Authorization refers to the process by which governmental programs are created, changed, or continued under specific terms. As its name implies, authorizing legislation gives the appropriation committees permission to appropriate funds for a program, usually setting a limit on the amount of money that can be appropriated. Any program or agency requires authorization before it can receive money from the appropriations committee. Once the terms of a program are set, the program will continue to be funded until the government wishes to change the terms. These types of programs fall under the category of government spending called “mandatory spending.” The committees that debate mandatory spending levels for these programs are called authorizing committees. They do *not* actually appropriate the money themselves; they determine *how* money is to be spent and give approval to the appropriations committee to fund a program under their recommended terms.

**Authorizing legislation:** Authorizing legislation has several functions: (1) to create, continue, or alter an agency or program for a time; (2) to lay out the responsibilities, the organizational structure, and the function of an agency or program; (3) to authorize a specific amount of money that may be appropriated to an agency or program. The authorizing legislation, however, *does not give out money* (this is the job of the appropriations bills) but rather can set a spending limit for a program or agency. Authorizing legislation is introduced by any member of Congress before it undergoes the complex process of being passed into law. Consideration of this type of legislation is therefore separate from the federal budget process.

**Budget authority:** Budget authority, or BA, refers to the authority of the government to set specific levels of federal funds that its agencies may spend. Congress may set these spending levels through its appropriations bills, and it can specify how this money must be spent through authorizing legislation. Congress also can make these funds available for one year or for several years to come. One can think of budget authority as placing a certain amount of money into a checking account—this money is then spent through budget outlays.

**Budget Committees:** The Senate and House Budget Committees define their tasks as “drafting Congress’ annual budget plan and monitoring action on the budget for the Federal Government.” The Budget Committees prepare a budget resolution for each fiscal year. The Congressional Action section of the Federal Budget Process explains how the budget is created by the president and Congress each year.

- Senate Budget Committee Website: <http://budget.senate.gov/democratic/aboutsbc.html>
- House Budget Committee Website: <http://budget.house.gov/>

**Budget resolution:** A budget resolution serves as the general framework within which Congress will make its decisions about the congressional budget by setting specific spending and taxing levels. Budget resolutions are “concurrent” congressional resolutions—that is to say, they do not have the force of law and they do not require the president’s signature. Thus, they also do not directly provide funding to any organization or program but they establish the structure of the budget. In doing so, a budget resolution sets targets for governmental spending in 20 different budget functions while considering total revenue, the deficit, and the allotted money that will be used for two types of spending: discretionary and mandatory. Congress begins to create the budget resolution in February, after receiving the president’s budget request. Specifically, the House and the Senate Budget Committees hold the

responsibility of creating a budget resolution, which will be debated in each chamber before being reconciled into one document in a conference committee.

**Chairman:** A chairman (chair, for short) is the legislator who presides over a committee or a subcommittee. In the Senate, chairs are selected on the basis of seniority of committee tenure (though a senator may not chair more than one standing committee).

**Cloture:** The only procedure by which the U.S. Senate can vote to place a time limit on consideration of a bill or other matter, and thereby overcome a filibuster. The Senate may limit consideration of a pending matter to 30 additional hours, but only by vote of three-fifths of the full Senate, normally 60 votes.

**Continuing resolution:** A continuing resolution, or CR, allows for government departments, agencies, and programs to continue to be funded when Congress and the president are unable to pass all of the annual appropriations bills by October 1, the start of the government's fiscal year budget calendar. A continuing resolution (which must be passed by both houses of Congress and signed by the president) funds agencies for a certain period of time at the same funding level as the previous year.

**Discretionary spending:** Discretionary spending is one of the two types of governmental spending, along with mandatory spending. Specifically, discretionary spending refers to the funding levels determined each year in the annual appropriations bills that are set by Congress for the use or purpose that it chooses. The discretionary budget accounts for about one-third of the federal government's total spending. Money in this category of spending is generally used for such programs as housing, education, and foreign aid. The president and Congress must act each year to ensure that spending toward these programs continues.

**Entitlement programs:** Entitlement programs are created by the federal government to provide payments to certain individuals or units of government under specific criteria. Funds for these types of programs are set under mandatory spending by the number of people eligible for the coming fiscal year. The government is bound by law to provide these funds to qualified individuals, unless Congress alters the eligibility criteria. Entitlement programs consume the largest amount of the government's budget, and examples of these programs include Medicare/Medicaid and Social Security.

**Mandatory spending:** Mandatory spending is one of the two types of governmental spending, along with discretionary spending. It is enacted by law and does not depend on any annual appropriations bill. This type of spending makes up two-thirds of the total federal budget per year. It mostly includes entitlement programs that are consistently funded each year based upon the rules set forth by them. When Congress creates a program, such as Medicaid, it lays out who will be eligible to receive financial benefits under the program, often determined by such criteria as age or income. Congress then estimates the number of people each year that will be eligible for the program, using this number to formulate its spending for the program. The president and Congress can change the level of mandatory spending for a program by altering the criteria for eligibility or the formula for payment. The government does not need to take action annually, however, to ensure that the program continues to be funded.

**“Markup” sessions:** “Markup” sessions occur when a committee or subcommittee reviews the text of the bill after public hearings, in order to debate, amend, and rewrite the proposed legislation. The views of both sides are studied in detail before a vote is taken to determine whether the committee will report the bill to the full committee favorably, with or without amendments, or unfavorably. The committee may also suggest that the full committee “table” it (postpone action) indefinitely. Both chambers require a minimum quorum of one-third of a committee’s members to hold a markup session.

**Offset:** An offset is a cut in funding elsewhere to cover the expense of an added spending item. It is generally employed when members of Congress wish to increase spending to a program, since they in turn look to cut funding somewhere else in order not to increase the government’s overall spending.

*This section was incorporated from materials developed by Half in Ten partner RESULTS.*

---

## Key antipoverty and safety net programs

The federal government provides a wide range of programs to support vulnerable people in every state. Many of these programs face annual funding decisions and are frequently at risk of funding reductions. It is important to know which department within the federal government administers the program you care about, the proper name of the program, and what the primary goals of the program are. These simple facts will help you better target your advocacy efforts with your federal policymakers.

## U.S. Department of Agriculture

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/Food Stamps:** This is the largest nutrition assistance program for low-income people. The program provides monthly benefits to eligible low-income families so they can purchase food.
- **National School Lunch Program:** The National School Lunch Program, or NSLP, is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides low-cost or free lunches to low-income children.
- **The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, or WIC:** This program provides nutritious foods, nutrition education (including breastfeeding promotion and support), and referrals to health and other social services to participants at no charge. WIC serves low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, and infants and children up to age 5 who are at nutrition risk.

## U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

- **Child Care Development Block Grant, or CCDBG:** Provides funds to states to develop safe and affordable child care options for low-income working parents.
- **Low Income Heating Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP:** Provides heating and cooling assistance to low-income families.
- **Community Services Block Grant, or CSBG:** Provides grants to states for a range of services and activities to assist the needs of low-income individuals including the homeless and the elderly.
- **Head Start:** Provides grants to local agencies to operate comprehensive child development services for low-income children and families, with a special focus on early reading and math.
- **Teen Pregnancy Prevention Community Grants:** Provides funding to develop programs to reduce teen pregnancy.

## U.S. Department of Labor

- **Workforce Investment Act:** Provides employment and training services to dislocated workers, adults seeking new employment, and low-income youth.
- **YouthBuild:** A community development program that addresses core issues facing low-income communities such as housing, education, employment, and crime prevention.
- **Job Corps:** Job Corps is an education and training program that helps low-income youth learn a career, earn a high school diploma or GED, and find and keep a job.

---

## Key dates in the annual federal budget cycle

Deadlines	Action to be completed	
First Monday in February	President submits budget to Congress; this package outlines the president's spending priorities and policy proposals.	This provides a great opportunity to work with your partners to review the budget of various federal agencies that administer your programs.
February 15	Congressional Budget Office submits report on economic and budget outlook to Budget Committees.	Time to weigh in with your member of Congress to ensure the programs you care about are protected in the annual budget.
April 15	Congress completes action on budget resolution.	While the budget resolution is a nonbinding legislation, it establishes the broad spending parameters for appropriators.
June 30	House completes action on regular appropriations bills and any required reconciliation legislation.	In a typical year, Congress will pass 13 appropriations (spending) bills that set the spending levels for various federal agencies.
October 1	Federal fiscal year begins.	If the process works as scheduled, the president will receive and sign all 13 spending bills before the start of the new fiscal year. If the typical appropriations process fails, Congress must pass a short-term spending measure to enable the government to continue operation.

---

## Endnotes

- 1 Bureau of the Census, *Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010* (Department of Commerce, 2011), Table B-1, available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p60-239.pdf>.

---

The Half in Ten campaign is a project of the Center for American Progress Action Fund, the Coalition on Human Needs, and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. It is dedicated to building the political and public will to cut the U.S. poverty rate in half in 10 years. The campaign builds on the work of the Center for American Progress's 2007 Task Force on Poverty, combining evidence-based policy recommendations with strategic building of networks, spokespeople, and opinion leaders in communities to amplify the call to reduce poverty in America. Our approach is grounded in four fundamental principles: creating good jobs, promoting economic security, strengthening families, and cutting poverty in half in 10 years.

---

