

Working With Your Government Relations Office

APSA members play a key role in informing policymakers and the public about the importance of political science research and in advocating for the discipline. Whether you are writing a letter to your member of Congress, attending a lobby day organized by an outside organization, or are reaching out to a government agency related to your research, working with your institution's government relations officer helps ensure your activities are effective, meaningful, and fit within the guidelines determined by your institution.

Contacting your government relations office is a good first step before meeting with government officials. Not sure what or when to ask? APSA spoke with a government relations officer to provide you with three questions to consider and the answers you need for effective engagement:

1. I'm writing to my member of Congress about pending legislation. How should I state my institutional affiliation?

When writing to government officials, be sure to pay close attention to how you identify your affiliation with your institution and contact your university's government relations office if you have any questions. Your college or university may not allow use of institutional letterhead or material resources for certain types of activities. Some institutions may ask that you note explicitly that you are not speaking on behalf of the university, but as a private citizen. For example, you may state: "I am writing to you today as a private citizen and scholar, and not on behalf of my employer."

2. I'm traveling to Washington, DC, or to a district office to participate in an advocacy day or lobby on a particular issue. Should I contact my college or university in advance?

Getting aligned with your government relations office before participating in these events is key. In particular, government relations offices can help you navigate the requirements and definitions for any activities that constitute formal lobbying and thus carry reporting requirements for time spent and expenses incurred. Lobbying, broadly defined, involves activities that seek to influence specific legislation or the legislative process. Advocacy activities are more general. For example, you can advocate for robust funding for political science research and lobby a member of Congress to support specific legislation appropriating funds for research. Differentiating between these two activities can be challenging, so it's helpful to check in with your government relations office first. For additional information, see Yale University's [primer on lobbying and disclosure](#), which illustrates several common scenarios for faculty members engaging in lobbying and non-lobbying contact with government officials.

In addition, before advocacy days and meetings with congressional staff, ask your government relations office about any materials you can bring with you. Often, government relations officers will have one-pagers and other documents that will clearly outline the institution's asks—all the way down to the thousands, millions, or billions of dollars a program needs to continue its work. Offices also collect examples of the importance of federal funding to the university.

**3. I conducted research that should be helpful to members of Congress or a government agency.
Can I reach out on my own to share my research?**

Sharing your research with government officials is a great way to communicate the value of political science research to policymakers and help inform their understanding of specific issues. You can share your research without engaging in advocacy or lobbying activities, but government relations staff can still play a helpful role in advising you on where, when, and how to share your work for maximum impact. For example, your government relations officer may be able to inform you if your research may have greater impact in the hands of your representative's committee staffer, instead of a legislative aid in the representative's personal office. As a practical matter, it is also useful to loop in government relations officers in your correspondence with staffers. Government relations officers may facilitate scheduling meetings with staff. In addition, if a staff member reaches out to you after your meeting with a request for data, testimony, or previous research, the government relations staff may help you handle the request.

For more tips on engaging with policymakers, see the resources in APSA's advocacy program member action [page](#).