In the United States, our survey-based infrastructure for counting the number of people in poverty is very sophisticated, whereas our capacity to monitor the everyday conditions of poverty is less well-developed.

The National Poverty Study (NPS), which is currently being planned in preparation for a 2019 launch, addresses this problem with an innovative approach to monitoring the everyday conditions of poverty in rural, suburban, and urban sites.

The objective of the NPS is to provide a systematic understanding of the everyday lives of the poor and near poor in the United States. The NPS is founded on three premises:

1. that existing quantitative protocols for measuring poverty, although immensely useful, tell us relatively little about the day-to-day experience of poverty;

2. that existing qualitative studies, although also immensely useful, do not allow for systematic comparison across different types and levels of poverty; and

3. that a new hybrid form that blends the best of qualitative and quantitative approaches is therefore needed. We refer to this new hybrid form as a "qualitative census."
A qualitative census will allow us to better understand the conditions, causes, and effects of poverty and thereby strengthen the country’s basic science on poverty. A qualitative census will support the development of authentic evidence-based policy on poverty. Because a qualitative census of this kind is not currently available, the country has tended to default to one-size-fits-all policy without, in most cases, strong evidence in support of this approach.

The NPS is a joint research initiative of the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, Johns Hopkins University, and the American Institutes for Research. The NPS planning committee is currently involved in fundraising for the NPS rollout and developing the protocol, sampling design, and possible forms of collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau. For additional information, please see our June 2017 article in The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science [3].