



Bringing SSN's Mission to Life

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Last week, we had the privilege of hosting the [SSN National Leadership Convening](#), an event that truly brought SSN's mission to life. With over 150 attendees—including scholars, policymakers, journalists, and civic leaders from across the country—the convening showcased the collective power of our network to inform public policy by connecting research with those in positions to act on it.



The key goals of the convening were to make connections across our network, share best practices for informing policy with research, and seize opportunities to build trusting relationships with policy actors. Attendees were inspired and energized by the programming, which began with a powerful plenary on the state of American democracy, emphasizing the importance of becoming civically engaged as the 2024 election season ramps up. This session demonstrated the crucial role scholars can play in informing public discourse and policy. In a second plenary, academics who had served in federal, state, and local government roles shared how they leveraged their expertise in their positions and how these experiences transformed their approach to research. The final plenary provided practical advice from journalists on collaborating with the media, equipping attendees with tools to effectively communicate their work to broader audiences.



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Kimberlyn Leary, Executive Vice President at the Urban Institute, noted:

“It’s great to hear the panelists speaking through their academic identity but outwardly, towards policy actors and communities more broadly.”

This sentiment was echoed throughout the event, reinforcing the value of our work.

Breakout sessions meanwhile offered attendees the opportunity to learn from fellow attendees and collectively engage with them on important topics, from the benefits and challenges of community-engaged research to strategies for protecting academic freedom to preparing for upcoming elections. These sessions provided a more intimate and interactive setting, fostering meaningful connections and the exchange of ideas.



Breakout Session: Concrete Strategies for Protecting and Advancing Academic Freedom

The convening culminated with the most concrete manifestation of SSN's mission: site visits to Capitol Hill that transformed the motivation and learnings from the convening into actionable steps for over fifty scholars. Altogether, participants held 87 meetings with federal legislators, staffers, and civic organizations targeted to their specific areas of expertise. This policy outreach allowed attendees to immediately apply the skills and strategies discussed during the convening, leaving them energized and empowered.



SSN members Ernesto Castañeda and Harry Holzer with Congressman Jamie Raskin



Tiffany Joseph, Associate Professor of Sociology at Northeastern University

As Tiffany Joseph, Associate Professor of Sociology at Northeastern University, expressed:

“Attending the SSN Convening and congressional meetings on the same day Senate Republicans voted against contraception access confirmed that doing more public engagement with my research and helping others do the same through SSN is vital for our country and democracy at this time.”

While it's too soon to capture all the outcomes, many attendees have already reported fruitful connections and significant follow-ups from the convening and Capitol Hill meetings. These interactions are paving the way for the trusting relationships essential for research to inform policy effectively.

Thank you to all our attendees, partners, funders, and staff for your dedication to the Scholars Strategy Network. Together, we are making a difference, and together, we will continue to grow and succeed. Let's carry this momentum forward into the coming academic year. With an election around the corner, SSN chapters and cohorts stand ready to connect research to policy, making our collective efforts even more impactful.