
SCHOLARS STRATEGY NETWORK

Annual Report 2020



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTORS

In 2020, COVID-19 laid bare many of the country's deep-seated problems — from economic inequality to racial disparities to a lack of social safety-net support. The pandemic affected everyone in the SSN community: policymakers responding to multiple crises, civic leaders finding new ways to care for their communities, and journalists covering one breaking development after another. And scholars, who are at the heart of our work and make up our network of volunteers, had to pivot to remote teaching, often while caring for loved ones at home.

Despite a year like no other, SSN chapters and members rose to meet the challenges that surfaced. SSN helped chapters take advantage of new digital formats to connect with policymakers and community leaders working on COVID-19 relief. As journalists and voters looked to understand election-related issues in what was also a high-profile election year, SSN helped scholars channel their expertise through opinion pieces in national and local outlets. And with campuses closing their physical doors, SSN helped faculty anchor their students to their university communities while providing critical information about the voting process.

The network added chapters in Central Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Nebraska, and South Carolina for a total of 38 regional chapters and welcomed new Board members Darrick Hamilton, Hedwig Lee, and Ellen Nissenbaum, who will lead the organization to new heights.

Throughout 2020, SSN scholars remained committed to civic engagement and democracy, and we thank them for their time and energy during an unprecedented year. As we look towards the future, we are excited to build on these collective efforts in 2021 and beyond.

Theda Skocpol, Director and Victor S. Thomas Professor of Government and Sociology, Harvard University

Paola Maynard-Moll, Executive Director

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Eager to help mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, SSN chapter leaders came together seeking community among public-spirited scholars during a challenging and isolating time. Throughout the year, SSN chapters used the shift to a virtual world to

connect with policymakers and community leaders who they may not have been able to connect with in-person, expand digital organizing efforts, and develop public engagement skills through remote trainings. Together, SSN chapters:



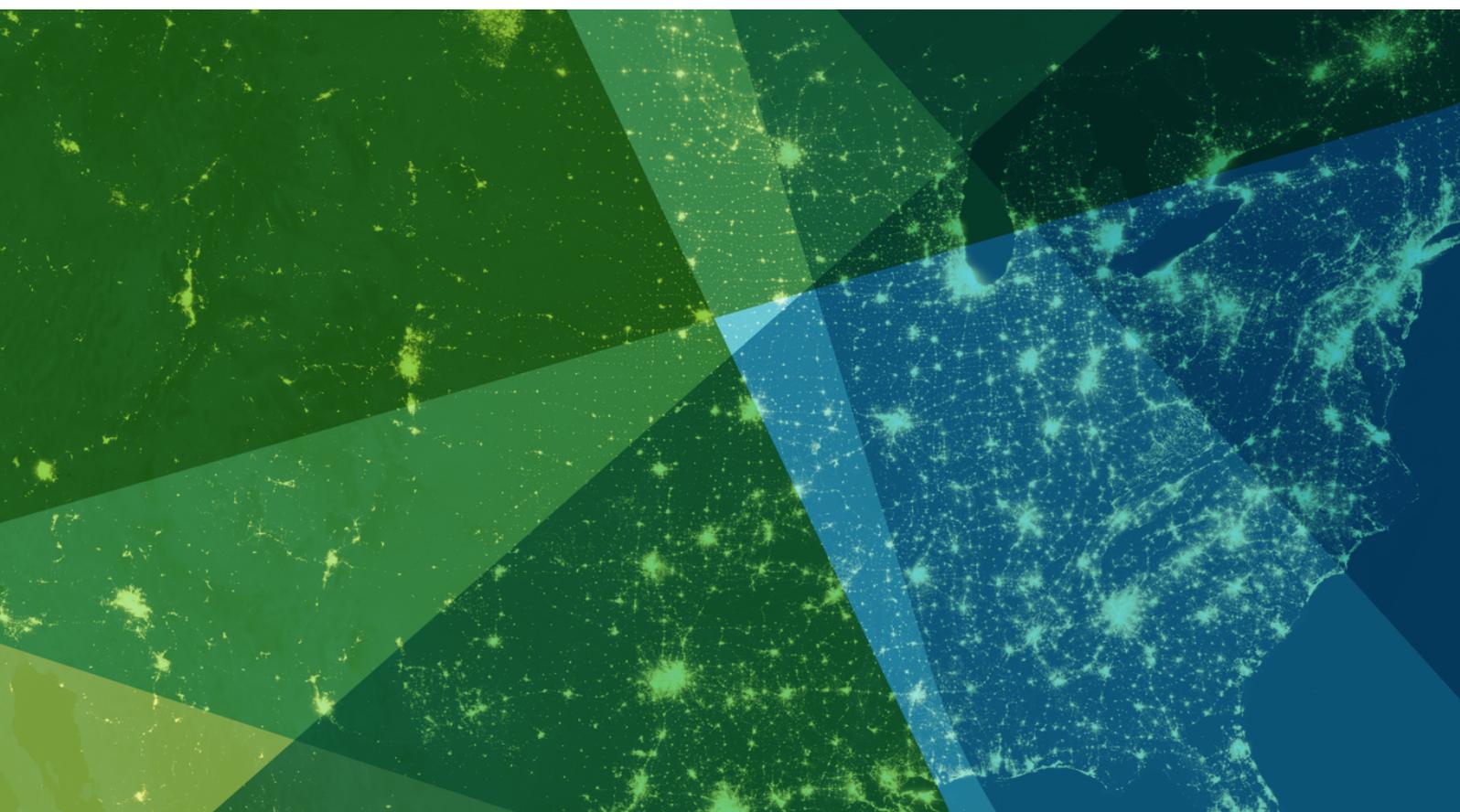
**ORGANIZED 46
EVENTS WITH LOCAL
AND NATIONAL
JOURNALISTS,
ORGANIZERS, AND
FELLOW SCHOLARS**



**LAUNCHED 6 NEW
CHAPTER TWITTER
ACCOUNTS**



**HOSTED 22 POLICY
ENGAGEMENT AND
MEDIA TRAININGS
FOR CHAPTER
MEMBERS**



ADVANCING EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY ACROSS THE STATES

Across the country, SSN chapters and members worked with state and local policymakers, civic leaders, and journalists to bring relief to communities in their state.



MISSOURI: KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER

More than 5 million U.S. children have had a parent in jail or prison at some point in their lives. In Missouri, Hedwig Lee worked to get courts to recognize the harms that parental incarceration inflicts on children and communities. In collaboration with local non-profit **Missouri Appleseed**, Lee penned a powerful op-ed in the [*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*](#), arguing that Missouri judges should be allowed to sentence parents convicted of nonviolent crimes to community-based sentences, rather than prison.

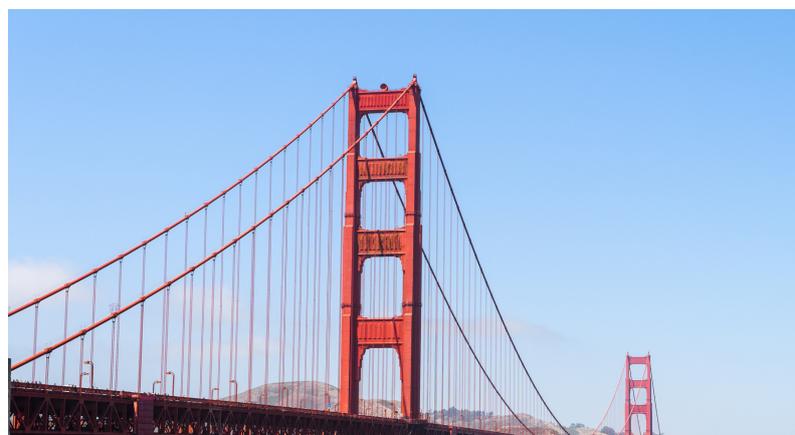
A bill introduced in the State House in Jefferson City would do just that. Lee drafted written testimony to the House Judiciary Committee, outlining bipartisan support for keeping families together, and secured 12 other researchers around the country to co-sign the letter. The bill advanced favorably out of committee and, while it did not come up for a vote in the 2020 legislative session, is in a strong position to advance through the legislature in 2021.

NEW MEXICO: RECOVERING TAX CREDITS FOR FAMILIES

Every year, the Earned Income Tax Credit helps low- and moderate-income families keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets, at times receiving over \$6,500 depending on eligibility. In New Mexico, Janet Page-Reeves and Elise Trott Jaramillo started a program to train community healthcare workers in tax-preparation to help eligible residents receive the Earned Income Tax Credit. In 2020, these community healthcare workers helped about 50 low-income families recover over \$90,000 in tax credits. Because of the impact of this pilot initiative, the chapter submitted a grant proposal to the Department of Human and Health Services, which is now funding a three-year implementation and research project to help more families in the state recover the tax credits they have earned.

CALIFORNIA: SECURING HOUSING FOR THE HOMELESS

The impact of the pandemic on people experiencing homelessness highlighted the connection between housing and public health. Working with a coalition of local scholars, healthcare providers, and public health professionals, members of the Bay Area SSN chapter mobilized to inform the San Francisco city government about ways to use empty hotels to reduce homelessness during the pandemic. Dilara Yarbrough, who also works with the [San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness](#), wrote a public letter to local officials that received 50 signatures from faculty, while Neil Gong and Christopher Herring published an op-ed on the topic in the [San Francisco Examiner](#). Their efforts contributed to an emergency ordinance passed by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to greatly expand the number of hotel rooms available for people experiencing homelessness. Since then, [Project Roomkey](#) has been launched across the state.



NEW JERSEY: RAISING REVENUE FOR COVID-19 RELIEF



As states manage the economic impact of COVID-19, many looked to compensate for revenue shortfalls by cutting spending on housing, public transportation, and health care. These cuts would erode the health and social infrastructure needed to continue combatting COVID-19, exacerbate the economic downturn, and increase inequality.

In coordination with **New Jersey Policy Perspective** (NJPP), SSN helped create an **open letter** to push back against these measures in the state.

Together, the lead authors, NJPP, and the local SSN chapter used their network to share the letter with experts from across the state. More than 90 New Jersey-based economic policy experts added their names to the letter in support of an evidenced-based approach to economic recovery.

The letter was covered in a number of New Jersey regional outlets including ***The Star Ledger***, ***Patch***, ***WNYC***, and ***Bloomberg***.

Louis Di Paolo, Communications Director at NJPP, highlighted the role the letter played in their work with state policymakers:

"[The letter] was something we pointed to in meetings with lawmakers. We heard from a few lawmakers that we met that they received the message loud and clear about [NJ] not being able to dig ourselves out of this hole with austerity and spending cuts."

In September, New Jersey Gov. Philip Murphy announced the inclusion of a millionaires tax in the state budget, one of the recommendations outlined in the letter. In his budget address, the Governor referenced the open letter, saying:

"A group of one hundred leading economists echoed this point in an open letter to me and to Legislative leadership. They note, correctly, that years of poor fiscal decision-making have left too many New Jerseyans vulnerable to the global recession that this pandemic has created.

And, they note, also correctly, that an overreliance on cuts would be counterproductive not just to our efforts to contain the economic impacts of COVID-19, but to the ability of millions of families to get ahead — notably low-income households, single mothers, and people of color.

We've heard these warnings before – the last time in 2009, just as the last recession began gutting our state. And, we were one of the last states in the entire nation to get back on our feet. Maybe it's about time we start heeding them."

HELPING STUDENTS VOTE

When the pandemic threatened the safety and accessibility of our elections, faculty played a critical role in ensuring that students

knew how to register and when to vote. Working with groups within the **Students Learn Students Vote Coalition**, SSN:

01

HOSTED SUMMITS

Hosted 3 student voting summits in LA, MS, and GA, bringing together 171 students, faculty, and university administrators from 31 campuses

02

ORGANIZED ONLINE

Participated in 34 virtual events on issues including overcoming barriers to student voting, online voter registration, and voting deadlines

03

DEVELOPED FACNET

Activated 300 scholars through **FacNet**, a vehicle for faculty to advance student voting efforts on their campuses and develop student voting champions across disciplines

04

SECURED CAMPUS COMMITMENTS

Secured 9 campuses to commit to 100% student voter registration

COMMUNICATING THE IMPACTS OF POLICY SHIFTS

From local newspapers to national media, SSN helped hundreds of scholars translate research into clear, powerful points and insert facts and evidence into the biggest policy debates of 2020.

92

OPEDS PLACED IN LOCAL AND NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS

05

PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL NEWSPAPERS IN FL, LA, ME (2), AND WI

44

REQUESTS FOR EXPERTS FROM JOURNALISTS

2M

DOWNLOADS OF SSN'S NO JARGON PODCAST

40

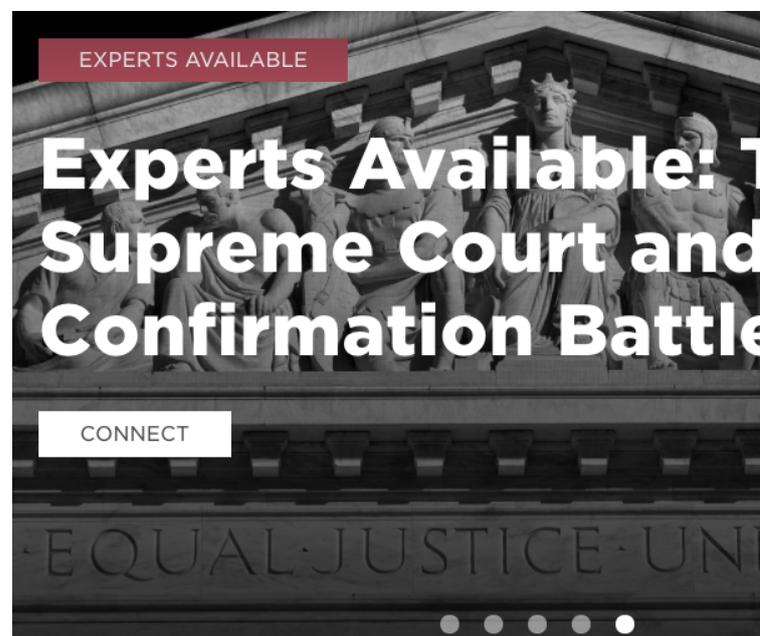
LISTS OF EXPERTS AVAILABLE TO COMMENT SHARED WITH JOURNALISTS

117

ATTENDEES AT SSN'S OPED WRITING PITCHING AND SOCIAL MEDIA WORKSHOPS

CONNECTING RESEARCHERS WITH JOURNALISTS

As the impact of COVID-19 is felt in every area of American life, it is more important than ever to provide rigorous research to inform reporting on the pandemic. To meet this growing need, SSN compiled lists of scholars who were available to be contacted for comments and analysis on issues including [school closures](#), [racial disparities in healthcare](#), [job creation](#), [voting and the census](#), and [incarcerated populations](#). The lists were shared with hundreds of local and national journalists from across the country, leading to dozens of stories citing scholars and their research.



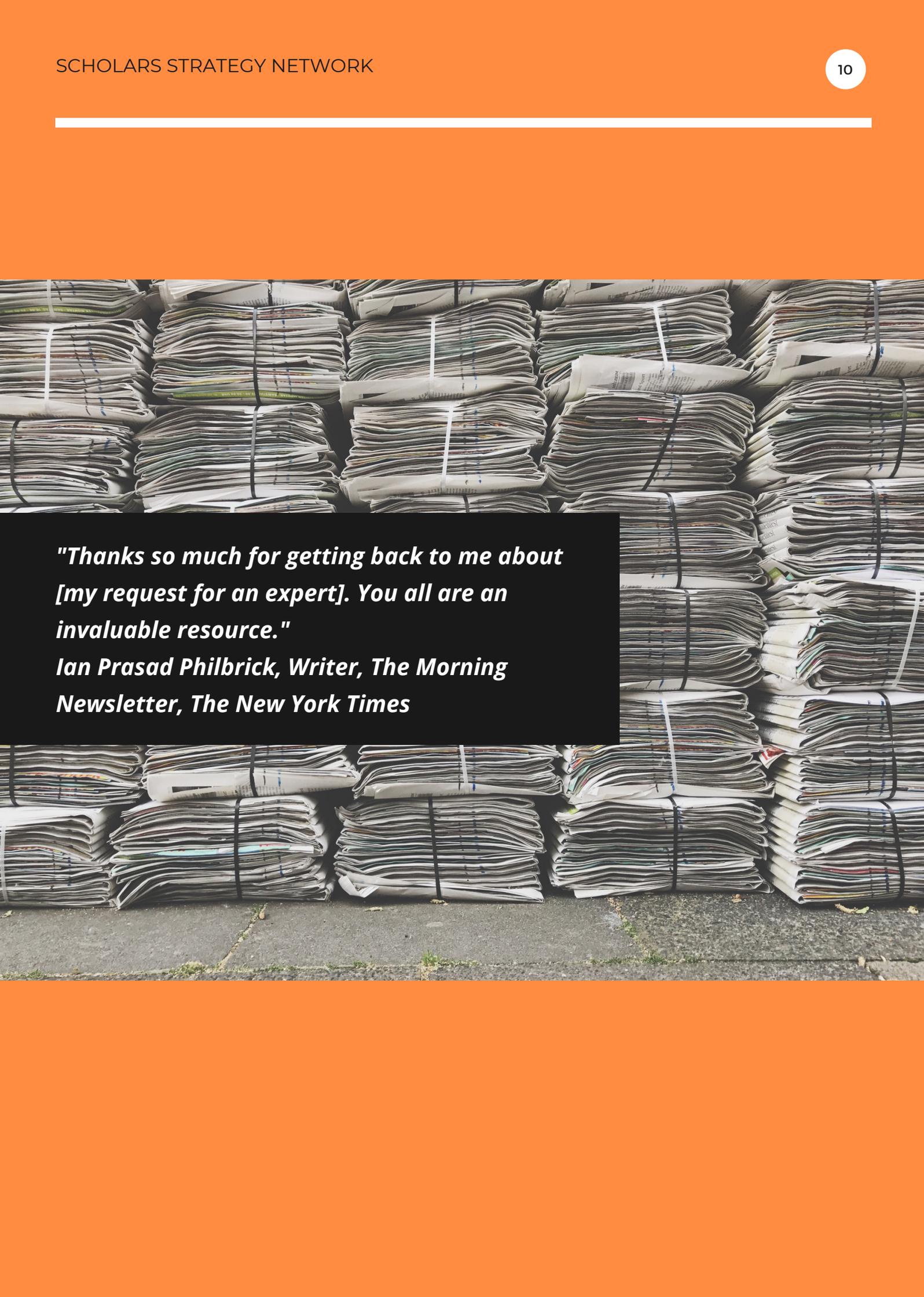
CASE REPORT: A WEEKLY DIGEST

At the outbreak of COVID-19, SSN created *Case Report* — a weekly digest of SSN's best research, analysis, and policy recommendations related to the pandemic. The newsletter provided a way to get the most important information about the pandemic from the network into the hands of grassroots organizations, journalists, community advocates, and policymakers.

"Thanks for the Case Report — I think these are extremely helpful for all the advocacy work that is happening right now."

Ashley Marshall, Deputy Director of Forward Justice, North Carolina





"Thanks so much for getting back to me about [my request for an expert]. You all are an invaluable resource."

Ian Prasad Philbrick, Writer, The Morning Newsletter, The New York Times

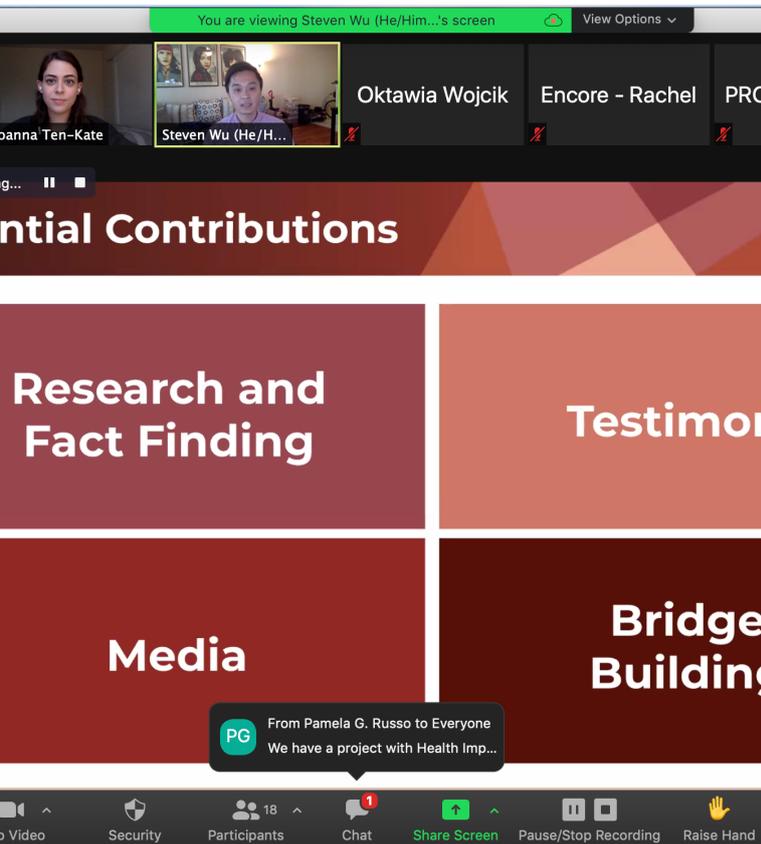
STRENGTHENING TIES BETWEEN RESEARCHERS AND LOCAL MEDIA

As a continuation of their partnership with the *Kennebec Journal*, the Maine SSN chapter took over the opinion section with a series titled "[Scholars Strategy Network: What's at Stake in the November Election](#)." The series included op-eds written by local scholars on environmental sustainability, social stability, and economic security.

Similar to Maine SSN's ongoing collaboration with *Kennebec Journal* and *The Bangor Daily News*, the Wisconsin SSN chapter developed a new collaboration with *The Cap Times*, where local scholars [regularly contribute op-eds](#) on local issues. So far, members have written multiple op-eds on topics including [equity in pandemic schooling](#), [Title IX](#), and [bridging the political divide with deep canvassing](#). The chapter was able to use this new platform to publish a [letter](#) from 12 University of Wisconsin professors condemning the shooting of Jacob Blake and outlining ways to save more Black lives.



TRAINING RESEARCHERS TO INFORM POLICY



SSN's [*Training Researchers to Inform Policy*](#) is a full-day, in-person workshop that gives scholars a hands-on introduction to effective strategies for policy engagement. In light of the pandemic, SSN broke down the training into 90-minute virtual sessions focused on evidence-based steps researchers can take to ensure that research perspectives inform policy. Throughout the year, SSN offered these online modules on an ongoing basis to members as well as to researcher cohorts from national foundations.

- Op-ed Writing & Pitching
- Policy Mapping: Navigating Your Network
- Engaging in the Legislative Session
- Connecting & Building Relationships
- Orientation to Civic Intermediaries
- Share & Solve

SUPPORTING SCHOLARS ONE-ON-ONE

Through one-on-one coaching, SSN helped Daphne Hernandez broadcast her research and recommendations on what the pandemic means for families who suffer from food insecurity. In March, SSN staff helped Hernandez publish an op-ed in [*The Hill*](#) discussing the issue. The [**National Institute for Health Care Management Foundation**](#) saw the piece and invited Hernandez to be a panelist in a series on timely health topics featuring key policy, public health, and research perspectives.

SSN staff helped prepare Hernandez for the webinar — reviewing slides and talking points. Hernandez's presentation was a success, prompting stakeholders to reach out to her looking for further expertise. Hernandez also [**discussed her research**](#) on SSN's *No Jargon* podcast and published a COVID-19 [**policy recommendation**](#) on housing and food insecurity through SSN's COVID-19 Project.

TRAINING RESEARCHERS TO ENGAGE WITH THE JUDICIARY

As our longest-standing issue-specific program, SSN's work with reproductive health and rights scholars continues to be a model for how the network can best support scholars in deeper ways. In 2020, SSN developed and piloted a training on how scholars can engage with reproductive health policy through the judicial system.

Facilitated by SSN, the presenters included litigators and reproductive rights leaders from prominent organizations, such as **If/When/How**, **Center for Reproductive Rights**, **The Lawyering Project**, and **Lift Louisiana**, as well as senior researchers who have engaged with the judicial system on these issues. The training seeks to make meaningful connections between the scholars and organizations present, strengthening the ties between researchers and efforts to advance evidence-informed reproductive health policy.

"Litigation challenging abortion restrictions depends on expert testimony to show judges how the laws harm people in wide-ranging ways. But the process of serving as an expert can be daunting and confusing. The SSN training helped demystify the expert's role, and it was wonderful to hear and talk through the scholars' questions."

Amy Myrick, Senior Staff Attorney, Center for Reproductive Rights

Courts in the United States

Susan M. Sterett



Research Findings Come to the
Attention of the Court

testimony
the Briefs



WELCOMING NEW LEADERSHIP

In 2020, three distinguished academic and civic leaders joined SSN's Board of Directors. The Board of Directors sets SSN's strategic direction, advancing our mission to ensure that research is used wherever policy decisions are made. SSN also welcomed Pao Maynard-Moll as Executive Director.

DARRICK HAMILTON

Hamilton is the Henry Cohen Professor of Economics and Urban Policy at The New School. Hamilton has been involved in crafting policy proposals, like Baby Bonds and a Federal Jobs Guarantee, which have garnered a great deal of attention and served as inspirations for legislative proposals at the federal, state, and local levels. He has served as a member of the economic committee of the Biden-Sanders Unity Task Force; testified before several Senate and House committees; was a surrogate and advisor for the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign; and advised numerous leading Members of Congress, as well as various 2020 presidential candidates.

"A legitimate critique of academic scholarship, much of which is funded via philanthropy, is its limited audience and lack of public engagement. SSN is different. Its focus is on helping researchers build relationships with non-academic organizations and leaders, like policymakers, journalists and grassroots groups to apply that research in a way that improves the human condition. It is an honor to join the Board to advance the cause of publicly engaged scholarship at all levels of government and throughout the country."



HEDWIG LEE

Lee is Professor of Sociology and Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity, & Equity at Washington University in St. Louis. Lee's research interests include the social determinants and consequences of population health and health disparities, with a focus on race, ethnicity, poverty, race-related stress, and the family.

"In 2012, I joined the Scholars Strategy Network so that I could apply my research to practice. Since then I have attended SSN trainings, co-led an SSN chapter, worked with the community groups advocating on the issues I study, published op-eds, and submitted written testimony to the state legislature. I have experienced first-hand the critical role that research can play in informing policy and ultimately improving people's lives. I am excited to join the Board of an organization that leverages the wealth of knowledge at America's universities to advance more just and equitable policy for everyone."



ELLEN NISSENBAUM

Since 1984, Nissenbaum has directed the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' work with federal policymakers and other national organizations to promote equitable and responsible fiscal policies. These efforts encompass a broad range of policy issues, such as federal budget and tax issues, refundable tax credits for low-income working families, Medicaid and health care, and nutrition programs. Her work with policymakers of both parties and their staffs has contributed to major policy improvements that reduce poverty and inequality and promote fiscal responsibility.

"I am so excited to join this dynamic and dedicated group that has successfully built important bridges between academic scholars and policymakers as well as the press. SSN's work has helped inform important national and state policy debates, and I look forward to contributing to that effort going forward."



PAO MAYNARD-MOLL

Maynard-Moll is SSN's new Executive Director. In this role, she manages the work of SSN staff, the financial direction of the organization, and the long-term strategy of the network. Maynard-Moll joined SSN in 2014 on the policy team and then led SSN's chapters program, working closely with the network's 30+ volunteer-led state and regional chapters. In 2019, she transitioned to the role of Managing Director, overseeing the organization's work with chapters, members, policymakers, civic leaders, and journalists.

"When I worked in a state legislature, I'd often think, 'someone must have thought about how to address this policy challenge.' I didn't have the time or know where to find the best research to answer the policy questions before us," recalled Maynard-Moll. "For the past five years, it has been my privilege to work with our members and chapters. I am honored and excited to expand my role in SSN's continued efforts to close the gap between research and policy."

FAREWELL TO 2018-2020 POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS

The Scholars Strategy Network congratulates the second cohort of SSN Postdoctoral Fellows on the completion of their fellowship. The network, the chapters that hosted them, and the communities that they joined benefitted greatly from the research they conducted and policy connections they made throughout their two-year fellowship. SSN wishes them the best in their next endeavors, and we look forward to working with them in the future.



AMANDA BERTANA

As the Maine SSN Postdoctoral Fellow, Bertana assisted local scholars with policy briefs, contributed to the chapter's biweekly op-ed column in the Bangor Daily News, and helped scholars draft legislative testimony. She also worked with Reversing Falls Sanctuary and Climate Action Net. Her research focuses on the political economy of climate change and local, national, and international efforts to adapt to a changing climate. She is now an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Southern Connecticut State University.



SARAH DIEFENDORF

As the Utah SSN Postdoctoral Fellow, Diefendorf fostered relationships between Utah scholars and policymakers, organized scholar visits to Capitol Hill, and facilitated connections between researchers and local organizations including Action Utah, Voices for Utah Children, and Alliance for a Better Utah. She studies how and why religious groups shift their beliefs on issues related to gender and sexuality.



JENNIFER NATIONS

As the San Diego SSN Postdoctoral Fellow, Nations brought SSN's media and policy engagement trainings to the chapter and cultivated relationships between community groups and academics in the San Diego area. She focused on forging partnerships between local organizations and university researchers with an emphasis on housing, immigration, and policing issues. Nations studies the government and institutional rules that contribute to social inequalities.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

The Scholars Strategy Network could not function without the financial support of individuals, organizations, and foundations.

SSN is deeply grateful to everyone who contributed in 2020. Thank you!



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