



SCHOLARS
STRATEGY NETWORK

ANNUAL REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR 2023-2024

“The SSN National Convening in DC brought me into conversation with the most passionate and diverse set of scholars that I have been around in a long time.”

- KELSI HOBBS, SSN MEMBER



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A Letter from the Directors



PAOLA MAYNARD-MOLL



THEDA SKOCPOL

The highlight of the Scholars Strategy Network’s calendar this academic year was its culminating event – the first SSN National Convening since 2019! Over 150 members, chapter leaders, policy actors, and foundation supporters joined us in Washington, D.C., for two days of tailored programming. Attendees joined panels on topics ranging from state child tax credit policy to academic freedom, networked with other scholars in their regions and issue areas, and heard from leading scholars on the state of democracy. 51 attendees stayed an extra day and conducted 87 visits with legislators and policymakers. For Confluence SSN chapter co-leader Rebecca Clendenen, the convening provided a valuable opportunity for “so many good people to pool their energy into a nationwide brain bank to solve contemporary challenges to American democracy.”

All of this exciting programming built on the momentum of the past year’s chapter and cohort activities. Our chapters brought together local scholars for trainings, meetings with policymakers and journalists, and tried out some innovative new ideas, such as Connecticut’s Moving Beyond Implications conference that allowed researchers to share their findings and policy perspectives with state legislators and their staff in a new format.

SSN launched the Education Scholars Training Program, a new cohort that fosters impactful relationships between education scholars who identify as members of one or more minoritized groups in the academy, policymakers, and practitioners. The 2024 cohort, which includes 16 researchers from universities across the United States, met in January for a two-day Education Research Accelerator, and since then cohort members have been busy preparing for and meeting with policy actors who align with their specific research interests. This year also saw the launch of second-year cohorts of our Election Protection and Enhancement Program and Health Equity Scholars Program. Our longstanding Reproductive Health and Justice cohort remains strong now in its seventh year. These cohort programs are building powerful ecosystems of publicly engaged scholars in their disciplines, furthering SSN’s mission to create a nationwide culture where research informs policy at every level.

The steady support of SSN’s funders and Board of Directors makes all of this activity possible. We are grateful for the years of service that outgoing member Hahrie Han has given to the organization and are excited to welcome Deondra Rose and E.J. Dionne, Jr. to the board.

“Our chapters brought together local scholars for trainings, meetings with policymakers & journalists, and tried out some innovative new ideas.”

We look forward to the next academic year. Despite uncertainty about the nation’s political future, SSN remains steadfast in our dedication to empowering scholars to leverage their research and expertise to inform policy and thereby strengthen our democracy.

Sincerely,

PAOLA MAYNARD-MOLL, Executive Director

THEDA SKOCPOL, Director and Victor S. Thomas Professor of Government and Sociology, Harvard University

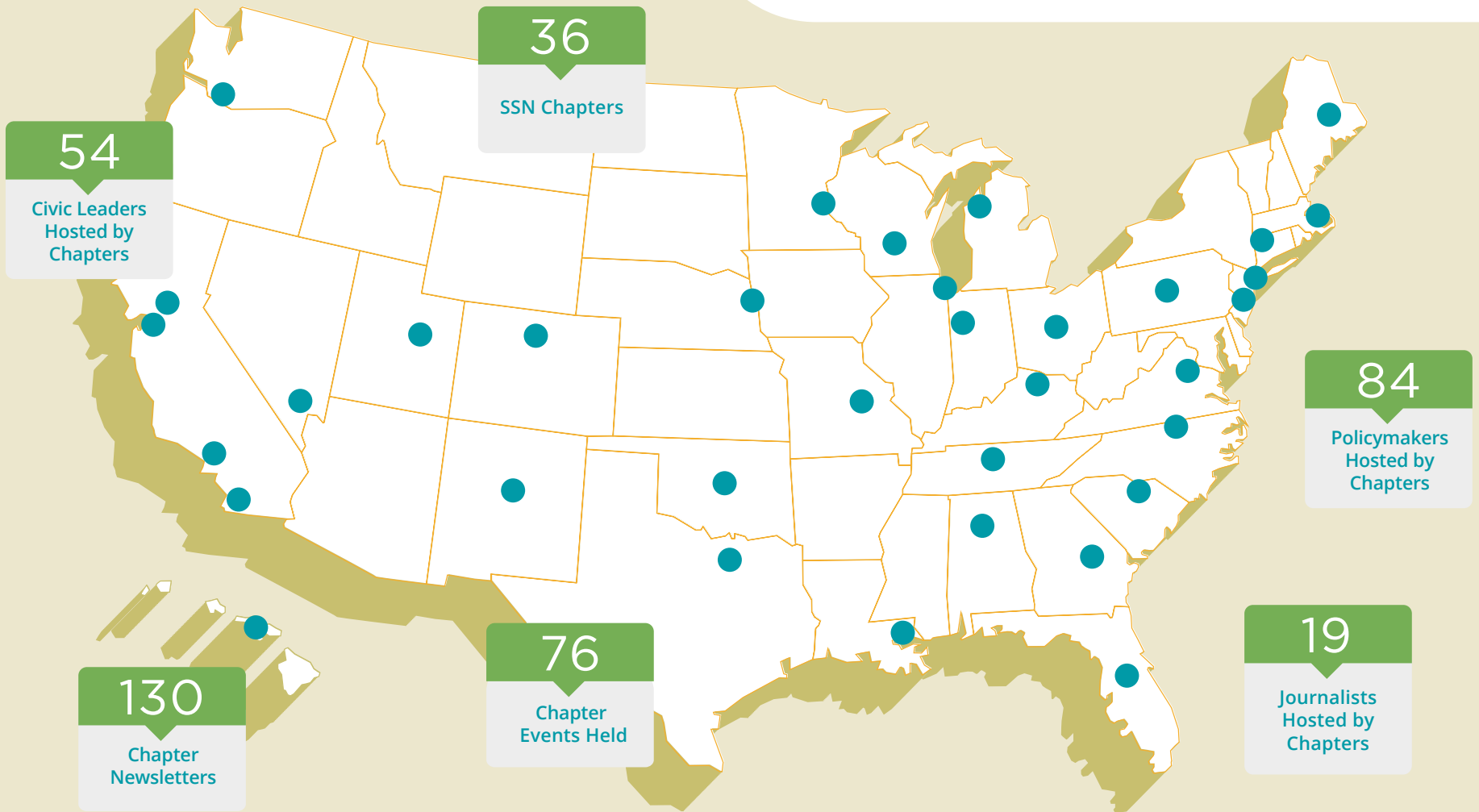
Year in Review

By the Numbers

1,900+
Total 2024 SSN
Members

100+
New SSN Members
since August 2023

85
Attendees at
SSN Orientations



87

IN-PERSON MEETINGS
BROKERED BETWEEN SSN
MEMBERS AND FEDERAL
LEGISLATIVE OFFICES

11

PUBLISHED PUBLIC
COMMENTS ON
FEDERAL AGENCY
RULE CHANGES

70

PUBLISHED POLICY
BRIEFS AND MEMOS

16

POLICY BRIEFS &
MEMOS PUBLISHED
AT THE REQUEST OF
A POLICY ACTOR

128

SSN TRAININGS
OFFERED

2,485

ATTENDEES FOR
SSN TRAININGS

85

OP-EDS
PUBLISHED

130

REQUESTS FOR
OP-ED SUPPORT

60,000

UNIQUE DOWNLOADS OF
THE NO JARGON PODCAST

6,600

NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBERS

225,000

VISITORS TO SCHOLARS.ORG

Full Network Highlights



SSN INAUGURATES CHAPTER LEADER AWARDS

In September, SSN announced the winners of its inaugural Chapter Leader Awards, established to recognize SSN's extraordinary chapter leaders who lead SSN's collaborative work to inform policy and strengthen democracy in state and local chapters across the United States.

Luisa Deprez received the David Brian Robertson Excellence in Leadership Award, honoring her exceptional

contributions to the development of SSN through her years of leadership of Maine SSN. Alabama SSN received the 2023 Outstanding Chapter Award in recognition of its "Policy-Palooza 2.0," its second annual event to introduce researchers to data needs of local civic and advocacy groups, while Dallas-Fort Worth SSN took home the Emerging Chapter Award for its efforts to forge relationships with the *Dallas Morning News*, city and regional officials, and nonprofit organizations that will serve the chapter as it grows in years to come.



INTERACTIVE Q&A SERIES FOR MEMBERS BEGINS

In 2024, SSN began offering monthly virtual Q&As for members to hear from and ask questions of policy-makers, civic leaders, journalists, and engaged SSN members. The first program featured Leah Nelson, Director of Research for Alabama Appleseed, and Alabama chapter leader Peter Jones, who shared lessons learned from their multi-year collaboration. In March, *Newsweek* political reporter Nick Mordawenec led a conversation about what reporters look for in interviews with researchers, followed by April's Q&A with Emmy-nominated freelance journalist Melissa Chan

and media-savvy SSN member Jules Boykoff, who focused on researcher-reporter relationships. SSN is collecting insights from these interactive events [on our website](#) so they can serve as an enduring resource for members.

MEDIA FELLOWSHIP LAUNCHES

Designed to empower SSN members who are new to media work, the SSN Media Fellowship launched in September. It paired four selected SSN members with mentors from the network, while also providing additional support from national staff.

SSN WELCOMES FIRST COHORT OF EDUCATION SCHOLARS TRAINING PROGRAM

With generous support from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and Bezos Family Foundation, SSN launched the first of three annual cohorts for education scholars who identify as members of a minoritized group in academia.

SSN National Leadership Convening

From June 3-5, over 150 SSN scholars, policymakers, journalists, and civic leaders from across the country gathered in Washington, D.C., to share research on current policy issues, foster collaboration through SSN's 30+ regional chapters and issue working groups, feature insights from media and policy experts, and, most importantly, create strategies to increase the impact of research in public debates.



Convening programming was anchored around **three plenary sessions**: The State of American Democracy, a panel of experts who study American politics and economics; Bridging Academia and Public Service, featuring scholars who have served in government roles; and The Role of Researchers in the Media, a conversation with three editors from national and local news outlets.

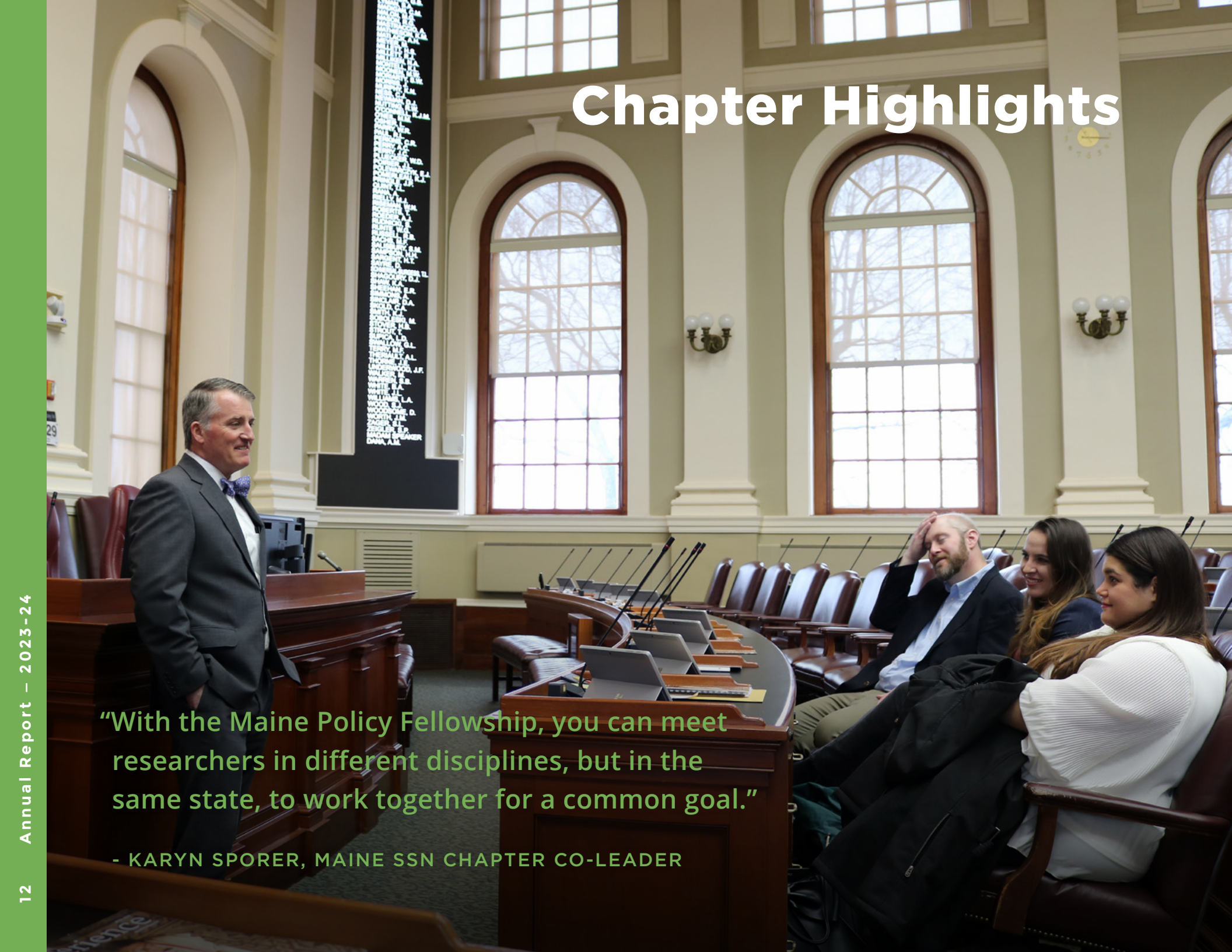
There were **nine different breakout sessions** throughout the convening, on topics ranging from academic freedom to federal education policy, that demonstrated the range of approaches that researchers can use to apply their academic expertise to policy change and improve the lives of policy-affected communities.



To take advantage of the convening's location in Washington, D.C., SSN coordinated a day on Capitol Hill for 51 attendees, who each had between one and five meetings with federal legislators and their staff.

Researchers made new connections and reunited with existing ones over the convening's many meals and at the vibrant networking cocktail hour.

Chapter Highlights



"With the Maine Policy Fellowship, you can meet researchers in different disciplines, but in the same state, to work together for a common goal."

- KARYN SPORER, MAINE SSN CHAPTER CO-LEADER



California

JOINING EFFORTS TO INFORM POLICY IN CALIFORNIA

Housing and homelessness, immigration, criminal justice, reproductive rights, and voting and elections are among the issues on which SSN's four California chapters—Bay Area, Los Angeles Unified, Sacramento, and San Diego—and their 300+ members bring considerable research-based insight and evidence. To unify these efforts, SSN organized a California legislative workshop to demystify the legislative process, while SSN's policy team assembled twice-monthly California legislative update newsletters with action steps for members working in these issue areas.

At the chapter level, San Diego SSN took the lead in cultivating cross-chapter engagement via its community of practice on homelessness and a potential collaborative project on statewide ballot propositions. Sacramento launched a statewide virtual series of policy conversations via CRB Nexus that likewise brought together California researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Los Angeles SSN organized in-person op-ed writing and pitching workshops at UCSB, USC, and UCLA to bring new voices to public issues, while the Bay Area chapter hosted a policy training and conversation with SSN member Diana Greene Foster (pictured here with San Francisco State University's Amanda Roberti) on her current work on the health, legal, and economic consequences of the end of *Roe v. Wade*.



Chapter Leaders Power Our Network

SSN's chapters exist because of the invaluable contributions of their leaders, who develop local communities of publicly engaged scholars, build relationships with policy actors and journalists, and organize programming for members to use research to inform policy and strengthen democracy.

WORKPLACE MISSOURI
RECOVERYFRIENDLYMO.COM
 Presenter, Dr. Douglas Swanson
 7,000,000 workers are out of the workforce due to addiction.
(Dr. Alan Krueger, where those are the highest level) October 4, 2018.
 OUD and overdose deaths cost the state \$34.5 million a day;
\$1.4 million an hour. That's 4.2% of the nearly \$300 State GDP.
MSR Healthbeat January 2018.

MOTIVATION	PROJECTS	FUTURE
<p>MSO created a first strategy that was adopted by management and employees to address issues surrounding recovery including becoming Recovery Ready.</p> <p>MSO fosters a workplace culture that values employee safety, health, and benefits by including right and wrong use policies, related to workplace accommodations and recovery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness • Employee Assistance • Health Care and Support • Employee Training • Employee Support • Employee Communication • Employee Incentives 	<p>MSO continues to work on increasing awareness through the state planning and training sessions in the state of Missouri Recovery Month.</p> <p>Training on and technical assistance including state and disaster relief impact on the workplace continue to be provided and related to the state.</p> <p>The chapter plans to continue to work on and include a being seen with a new grant, the First Step National Recovery Region of MO, MI, IL, IN, OH, PA, VA, WV, KY, TN, MS, AL, GA, SC, NC, and DE.</p>

to me to put my foot forward and get myself some help and to keep my job." - Torry, employee in Recovery.

RFW-MW Partners
 University of Missouri Extension
 Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry
 Missouri Hospital Association
 Missouri Rural Health Association
 State of Missouri Department of Mental Health

Does Your Employer Provide or Offer Any Educational Materials / Programs for Substance Use and/or Addiction Recovery?
 Yes 65%
 No 35%



Confluence

SEEKING COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS TO ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN ST. LOUIS

To carry on the legacy of political scientist David Robertson, one of Confluence SSN's founding leaders and a specialist on Missouri's environmental policy, the chapter convened environmental advocates, community organizers, scholars, and public agencies for a two-day conference on environmental challenges facing St. Louis and Missouri. The event featured conversations with the political director of the Sierra Club's Missouri Chapter and the EPA's Region 7 Water Director (Midwest), as well as sessions on Social Vulnerability in Disaster Response, Equitable Distributions of Park and Greenspace Services, and Bringing DEI into Community Conservation.



Dallas-Fort Worth

PROMOTING EQUITABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Public and nonprofit leaders are game-changers in promoting equitable economic development and community cohesion in private-capital-focused growth-oriented local contexts. Dallas-Fort Worth SSN worked with UT Dallas to bring together city managers and nonprofit leaders of the five largest cities of North Texas to promote cross-sector collaboration, community, and equity in local economic development.

Above: Chapter co-leader Doug Swanson presenting research on Recovery Friendly Workplace Missouri. Right: Chapter leader Eugenia Gorina poses with speaker Andrea Headley before an event on police-worn body cameras.





Connecticut

CONVENING LAWMAKERS AND ACADEMIC EXPERTS

Researchers, legislators, and policymakers each bring distinct types of expertise to policymaking but rarely have the opportunity for the collective exchange of ideas and evidence. In December of 2023, Connecticut State Representative Jaime Foster (pictured with State Senator Saud Anwar and University of Connecticut’s Alexander Hagan) reached out to Kerri Raissian, co-leader of Connecticut SSN, with the idea of organizing a conference that would bring researchers into community with members of the state assembly’s various policy committees to present the latest, policy-oriented research being conducted in the state. The result was the Moving Beyond Implications conference.

Just a month later, in January, Connecticut SSN convened over 150 scholars, state legislators, and agency staff in a first-of-its-kind research-to-policy conference at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford. The audiences in attendance at the day’s 15 research presentations included members of eight standing committees of the Connecticut General Assembly, the Lieutenant Governor, the Governor’s Chief of Staff, and local journalists. Following their presentations, participating researchers got face-to-face time with legislators and agency staff who had expressed interest in potentially drafting new legislation incorporating participants’ ideas and recommendations. After the event, Rep. Foster and Raissian published an **op-ed in the CT Mirror** arguing that similar research-to-policy conferences need to happen more frequently.



Oklahoma

ASSESSING POTENTIAL PRIMARY CHANGE IN OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma currently has closed primaries for Republicans, while Democrats allow Independents to vote in their primary. Some Oklahomans are advocating to make all primaries open in the state to increase voter participation and ensure a fair and inclusive electoral process. Oklahoma SSN has partnered with Let's Fix This, a local civic organization, to explore potential options and the pros and cons of each.

Photo: Oklahoma SSN co-hosts a workshop on state primary changes with local organization Let's Fix This.



Hawaii

INFORMING A RANGE OF POLICY ISSUES IN HAWAII

To build relationships among researchers and lawmakers on a range of issues critical to the state, Hawaii SSN organized a meet-and-greet for freshman legislators, a briefing on criminal justice for committee chairs in both legislative chambers, and four public forums on the topics of child welfare, food system resilience, state proposals to require paid family leave, and Indigenous approaches to environmental conservation in the Pacific. Lieutenant Governor Sylvia Luke (center) joined Hawaii SSN chapter leader Robert Perkinson (right) at one of the forums, which featured sociologist Dorothy E. Roberts.



Maryland-District of Columbia

BUILDING A NEW COMMUNITY OF PUBLICLY ENGAGED SCHOLARS

Maryland and the District of Columbia, jurisdictions known for policy innovation and experimentation, are home to a new Scholars Strategy Network chapter. In its first year, Maryland-DC SSN brought together existing members of the national network and local academics new to SSN for in-person workshops on building relationships with policy-makers and on city/state legislative processes, featuring local advocacy groups and experts like Jews United for Justice and the DC Policy Center (whose Chelsea Coffin and Hannah Mason are pictured here).



Maine

EXPANDING PATHWAYS TO POLICY IMPACT

For its second year, Maine SSN doubled the size of its Maine Policy Fellows program, recruiting ten new researchers from across the state and providing them with one-on-one support, tailored trainings, and facilitated connections to lawmakers, academic mentors, media, and civic organizations. As a result of this effort, Maine SSN was able to recruit more scholars from educational institutions traditionally under-represented within the network.

One of the highlights of this year's fellows program was a day spent at the Maine State House demystifying the state policy process, and learning about ways that research can impact policy. Participants met with partisan and nonpartisan legislative staff, as well as professional policy advocates. Chapter leaders and fellows were even able to sit down for a one-on-one conversation with Maine Governor Janet Mills (pictured above, center).



Nebraska

SUPPORTING PRODUCTIVE CIVIC PARTICIPATION & EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY DEBATE ON IMMIGRATION

Over the past decade, Nebraska’s political landscape has shifted from nonpartisan to polarized. In the 2023-2024 legislative session, Nebraska SSN presented a **policy memo** on Evidence-Based Practices for Supporting Productive Civic Engagement in Nebraska for a legislative interim study on rules governing public participation in the legislative process. The memo and a scholar op-ed in the *Nebraska Examiner* emphasized the urgent need for bipartisan leadership to unite Nebraskans on policy matters.

Nebraska SSN also formed a migration policy working group to inform local immigration policy. Nebraska faces persistent labor shortages, and scholars aim to bring research to illuminate how a welcoming environment for immigrants and refugees can foster economic benefits. One working group member, for example, published an op-ed in the *Nebraska Examiner* explaining how migrants can help solve the state’s shortage of healthcare workers.



Florida

MONITORING ASSAULTS ON HIGHER EDUCATION & ACADEMIC FREEDOM

As the Florida legislature passes bills attacking higher education, Florida SSN has been active in informing university communities about the status of proposed bills and their potential impacts, and organizing programs that advise faculty and graduate students on how to navigate these laws. Florida SSN members have published several op-eds that have opposed such measures, as well as connected with representatives from the American Civil Liberties Union, PEN America, and United Faculty of Florida.

Chapters Make Introductions

SSN chapters create informal opportunities for members to engage with journalists, policymakers, and community leaders in small group lunches, in-person workshops, and other casual gatherings. Here are some of the individuals SSN members met through their chapters this year.



RUTH SERVEN SMITH
AL.com
Alabama



PRISKA NEELY
Gulf States Newsroom
Alabama



GIANNA BAKER
Chicago Fair Housing Alliance
Chicagoland



ESTHER YOON-JI KANG
WBEZ Chicago
Chicagoland



CHRIS JONES
Chicago Tribune
Chicagoland



SOLEDAD ADRIANZÉN MCGRATH
Corners: the Center for Neighborhood
Engaged Research & Science
Chicagoland



URIEL GARCIA
Texas Tribune
Dallas-Fort Worth



DAN SWEENEY
South Florida Sun Sentinel
Florida



GOV. JOSHUA GREEN
Governor of Hawaii
Hawaii



LT. GOV. SYLVIA LUKE
Lieutenant Governor of Hawaii
Hawaii



SABRINA MCKENNA
Associate Justice, Supreme
Court of Hawaii
Hawaii



AI-JEN POO
National Domestic
Workers Alliance
Hawaii



ELENA GOORAY
Los Angeles Times
Los Angeles Unified



NAFEESA SYEED
Los Angeles Times
Los Angeles Unified



GOV. JANET MILLS
Governor of Maine
Maine



ANNA GREENBERG
GQR
Minneapolis-St. Paul



SEN. ROB PORTMAN
U.S. Senate 2011-2023 (R-OH)
Minneapolis-St. Paul



CATE FOLSOM
Nebraska Examiner
Nebraska



HALI BERNSTEIN SAYLOR
Nevada Independent
Nevada



BRIGID BERGIN
WNYC and Gothamist
New York City



ELIZABETH KIM
WNYC and Gothamist
New York City



JEFFERY C. MAYS
New York Times
New York City



EMILY NGO
Politico
New York City



WALTER SHAPIRO
The New Republic
New York City



HARRY SIEGEL
The City
New York City



ANDREW BOWEN
KPBS
San Diego



No Jargon.

The No Jargon podcast presents monthly interviews with America's top researchers on the politics, policy problems, and social issues facing the nation. This year, SSN produced nine original episodes and re-aired two from the archives.

EPISODE 251

Erica Frankenberg on Segregation in Our Schools



EPISODE 252

Dara Purvis on Ignoring Women's Pain



EPISODE 253

Alex Vosick Barnard on The Long History of Conservatorships



EPISODE 254

Jim Samuel on the Rise and Risks of AI



EPISODE 255

Nathan Wilmers on The Year of Strikes



EPISODE 256

Hajar Yazdiha on MLK's Contested Legacy



EPISODE 259

Ray Block on Countering the Spread of Misinformation



EPISODE 260

Neil Gong on Exposing America's Mental Health Care Inequities



EPISODE 261

Elizabeth Fussell on Disaster Management in the Era of Climate Change



Member Highlights

Addressing the Need for Home Repairs in St. Louis

After a grassroots coalition focused on understanding and addressing the root causes of vacancy issues in St. Louis reached out to Todd Swanstrom, he embarked on a new research project on local housing deterioration. Swanstrom and his colleagues at the University of Missouri-St. Louis Community Innovation and Action Center sent a survey asking a sample of 2,500 St. Louis homeowners over the age of 60 to report on repair problems in their homes, like unsafe electrical outlets, leaking roofs, or a lack of accessibility modifications like shower grab bars. This then allowed them to estimate the total cost to address repairs for older adult homeowners in St. Louis: over \$302 million. This new research galvanized St. Louis's Home Repair Network—a coalition of nonprofit agencies that coordinate or provide home improvement services—to reconvene after a few years' pause and put together a new policy agenda. Outside of St. Louis, Swanstrom has worked with SSN to publish opinion pieces in *Governing*, *Shelterforce*, and *The Progressive* that he hopes will reach policymakers and advocates beyond St. Louis to increase the visibility of housing repair as a major policy issue.



TODD SWANSTROM
Professor of Community
Collaboration & Public
Policy Administration,
University of Missouri-
St. Louis
Confluence SSN



DANI CARILLO
Former Project Director,
Interdisciplinary Migration
Institute, University of
California-Berkeley
Bay Area SSN

Providing California Lawmakers with Evidence to Support Expanding SNAP to Undocumented Immigrants

In June 2023, SSN member Dani Carrillo opened an email from SSN and found that the week's California Legislative Log—a round-up of new and pending legislation in the state—included AB 311, a bill that would make California's Food Assistance Program accessible to undocumented immigrants. Carrillo, an expert in how immigrants access social welfare programs, was excited to be involved. She wrote a brief for policymakers that built an evidence-based case for the bill, and then did outreach to members of California's Congressional delegation and the California legislature, sending them the brief and a note on her forthcoming book. From her outreach, Carrillo scheduled meetings with legislative staff for Senator Alex Padilla, Senator Laphonza Butler, CA Senator Melissa Hurtado, and CA Assembly Member Miguel Santiago.

Op-ed Opens Doors to Media & Policy Collaboration

In January, John Skrentny worked with SSN to place an op-ed about STEM education and STEM work, based on his recently published book, in the *Los Angeles Times*. Within a week of publication, the piece racked up more than 70,000 views and was a top-read article across the entire *LA Times* website, not just the opinion section. In addition to wide readership, Skrentny received interview requests from journalists, publications, and podcasters—including San Diego NPR affiliate station *KPBS* and *Times Higher Education*—to speak further on the topic of STEM majors and their post-graduate job prospects in the field. Fellow researchers, based both in the U.S. and abroad, also reached out to Skrentny to discuss his findings. The op-ed also opened up doors for potential policy engagement; labor unions and organizations engaged in STEM education policy have expressed interest in collaboration.



JOHN SKRENTNY

Professor of Sociology,
University of California-
San Diego
San Diego SSN

“I would not have known who to contact had it not been for SSN.”

TANISHA FAZAL

Professor of Political Science,
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
Minneapolis-St. Paul SSN

Briefing Congressional Staff on Military Medicine Aid in Ukraine

In May of 2023, political scientist Tanisha Fazal attended an SSN policy brief writing training, which got her started on a brief explaining to policymakers why more of the aid money the United States is providing to Ukraine should be dedicated to military medicine. When the brief was complete, SSN’s policy team helped Fazal create a list of members of Congress and their staff who specialize in and have influence over foreign policy issues. Ultimately her outreach led to her meeting with Congressional staffers from the offices of Senator Amy Klobuchar and Representative Betty McCollum, with whom she had fruitful conversations. Fazal continues to do outreach around this policy issue and is working with SSN to identify more potential interlocutors on Capitol Hill, at various government agencies, and at the Defense Department.

Policy Engagement Helps Health Equity Scholars Win NSF Research Funding

Zelma Oyarvide Tuthill participated in SSN's first Health Equity Scholars Program (HESP) cohort in 2021-22, during which she learned how to write a policy brief and used it to conduct outreach to members of the Texas legislature. Conversations with these policymakers inspired core components of the research project she was working on with Houston sociology colleague Neema Langa, the project's Principal Investigator and a participant in the 2023-24 HESP cohort. The proposal that Langa and Tuthill submitted to the National Science Foundation, and which was successfully funded, investigates the social and policy determinants affecting disparate racial outcomes in obstetric care, maternal mortality, and morbidity in the United States.



ZELMA OYARVIDE TUTHILL

Assistant Professor of Sociology and Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies
University of Houston

Challenging New Jersey's Primary Ballot Design as an Expert Witness

In New Jersey politics, the state's unique county line primary ballot has long held significant influence. Julia Sass Rubin, a former New Jersey-Philadelphia SSN co-leader, has been researching the county line for years, revealing its deterministic influence on election outcomes. In March, Rubin served as an expert witness in an expedited review of the case *Conforti v. Hanlon*; the review was brought by Representative Andy Kim to challenge the county line's use in the 2024 primaries. The judge found in Kim's favor, ruling that the Democratic Party's 2024 primary ballots be replaced with office-block ballots (as is done in the rest of the U.S.). The underlying case remains ongoing, and so Rubin has continued to write opinion pieces for outlets like *The Hill* and *The New Jersey Star Ledger* advocating for the end of the county line to make New Jersey a real democracy.



JULIA SASS RUBIN

Assoc. Professor, Assoc. Dean of Academic Programs, Public Policy Program Director
Bloustein School of Planning & Public Policy, Rutgers University New Brunswick
New Jersey SSN

Media Mentorship Sparks New Op-eds & Book Proposal

When Asia Eaton saw SSN's call for applicants to its 2023-24 Media Fellowship, she jumped at the chance to work with a mentor to increase her confidence while speaking to the media. SSN paired Eaton with Juliet Williams, Professor of Gender Studies and Chair of the UCLA Social Science Interdepartmental Program, and the two immediately began a productive mentoring relationship. In their first meeting, Williams offered insights and advice on speaking to the media and encouraged Eaton to put together a trade book proposal. When Eaton did, Williams connected her with a literary agent to shop the proposal around to editors. Eaton also published multiple op-eds during the fellowship.



ASIA EATON

Professor of Psychology, Florida International University
Florida SSN



Cohorts and Working Groups

Health Equity Scholars Program

The Health Equity Scholars Program (HESP), established in 2021, is an initiative that supports scholars from across disciplines, geographies, and career stages to better understand and make use of opportunities to inform policy and public conversations and create successful funding proposals around social determinants of health. SSN brought the 2023-24 HESP cohort together for the first time in-person to build skills and confidence in areas such as best practices for cultural humility in research design, media work, and understanding how different policy actors work together and utilize research at the February Research Equity Accelerator. All cohort programming is tailored to the needs and wants of HESP scholars and their particular goals. For example, since the Accelerator, SSN staff assisted current and former cohort members with projects including finding researchers and policy actors working around pregnancy criminalization, putting together a local advisory board for a planned study on the roots of vaccine hesitancy, and interviewing litigators to determine the utility of future research on economic justice for incarcerated people.

Reproductive Health & Rights Program

Since 2017, SSN's Reproductive Health and Rights program has supported over 170 scholars of abortion, contraception, maternal health, and related topics in public engagement and professional development, while creating a network within SSN where emergent and established researchers of these highly stigmatized topics can thrive. Since last summer, SSN reproductive health researchers have contributed to projects like submitting public comments on the Biden administration's proposed rule governing insurance coverage of over-the-counter contraception, educating California legislators about pregnancy criminalization, and ensuring Illinois legislators have the latest expert opinion on decreasing Black maternal mortality rates.

Now in its 7th year, the 2024 cohort consists of 14 researchers from states like Ohio, Indiana, and Nebraska who study topics like the history of reproductive health, maternal objectification, and Latinas' access to abortion. Cohort programming began with the Abortion Researcher Incubator Program, in partnership with the University of California, San Francisco's ANSIRH research center, during which scholarly mentors and practitioners shared their insights and strategies for conducting rigorous and relevant research on abortion in the U.S. In the fall, participants will come together for the cohort's Accelerator program, which will support the scholars' public engagement goals through workshops and opportunities for connecting with policy actors and civic leaders.





SSN Media Fellowship

Launched in 2023, the SSN Media Fellowship is a new initiative to equip a small cohort of scholars seeking to expand their media work with the skills and strategies necessary to effectively communicate their research findings to a diverse audience across various media platforms. In an era where effective communication and engagement are paramount, the ability to harness the power of media is crucial for advancing public understanding and shaping policy debates. Marshaling SSN's substantial network of publicly engaged scholars, SSN members with significant experience in the media and a relevant research agenda were paired as year-long mentors with SSN Media Fellows. Additional, hands-on media workshops and tailored support by SSN national staff provided fellows with the basic skills and background for engaging in media work. Four fellows were selected for this inaugural cohort and, over the course of the year, each deepened their skills and understanding of media work, leading to a first-time interview, new media

Election Protection and Enhancement Program

Coming off a successful pilot year, SSN launched the second year of the Election Protection and Enhancement Program. In this new phase, SSN welcomed six deserving member groups and chapters from across the country in order to embark on an 15-month journey, spanning September 2023 to November 2024, aimed at implementing best practices to improve, increase participation, and build public trust in U.S. elections.

The cohort projects, which are in full swing, include enhancing public trust and participation within universities by utilizing best practices in student voting and engaging surrounding communities to create future civic leaders. Other projects seek to understand the motivations behind becoming a poll worker, facilitate post-election transitions, and build capacity for human service organizations through research-based activities that support voter engagement.





Education Scholars Training Program

The Education Scholars Training Program (ESTP) is a year-long fellowship that bolsters the representation and influence of minoritized education scholars in public policy. The inaugural cohort of 16 ESTP scholars kicked off in January 2024 with two days of in-person trainings, meetings with policymakers, and social events. In the following months, the fellows attended monthly policy engagement workshops and developed individual policy engagement plans, which delineate their policy goals, how their research and expertise can inform desired policy changes, and specific decision makers who could help facilitate those changes.

With support from SSN staff, the fellows have identified more than 450 policy actors relevant to their unique policy goals. SSN is now initiating outreach to these targets and brokering meetings between them and the fellows. These meetings help fellows inform concrete policy changes while expanding their networks in the policy sphere. The relationships ESTP fosters this year promise to transform education policy as the scholars inform specific decisions today and in the future.

National Child Tax Credit Working Group

May of 2024 marked one year of SSN's National Child Tax Credit (CTC) Working Group. Members of the group continued to write briefs, publish op-eds, give testimony, and connect with policymakers. Notably, the CTC Working Group, in collaboration with the Boston SSN chapter, penned a jargon-free letter to the Massachusetts legislature. The letter cited research conducted by Working Group members and demonstrated the impacts an expanded CTC would have on Massachusetts families. After years of negotiating, the Massachusetts legislature finally passed an expanded CTC in September of 2023.

In addition to work on the state level, Working Group members were also engaged in the fight for an expanded CTC at the federal level this year. Ahead of the January House vote on a tax package that included an expanded CTC, SSN's communications team sent journalists a list of 'Experts Available' for interviews, which led to a number of media hits including a quote from Christopher Wimer in the *New York Times* and a *Wisconsin Public Radio* interview with Sarah Halpern-Meekin.

Also notably, two Working Group members, Christopher Wimer and Harry Holzer, were appointed to a congressionally mandated committee of experts to assess federal policies impacting child poverty. The impactful contributions of the Working Group were further recognized in the *2024 Economic Report of the President*, where Working Group member Natasha Pilkauskas' research is cited.

Finally, SSN devoted a breakout session at the National Leadership Convening to a panel discussion of the landscape of direct cash transfer programs in the states. CTC Working Group members Megan Curran and Elaine Maag (center) presented alongside Adam Ruben of the Economic Security Project (left) and DC Fiscal Policy Institutes's Erica Williams (right).



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