



**SCHOLARS**  
STRATEGY NETWORK

*Researchers champion truth  
amid threats to knowledge  
and democracy. **We are  
showing up, not  
shutting down.***





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# Letter from the Directors

The November 2024 election and the beginning of President Trump's second administration defined the past academic year, and we are proud of how SSN's members and chapters confronted rising challenges to democracy and higher education. Their resilience and preparedness to rapidly respond to policy debates at all levels of government reflect the impact of over a decade of investment in training scholars and building relationships with journalists, civic organizations, and policymakers.

This spring, as Congress debated the 2025 federal budget reconciliation bill, SSN supported both members and partner organizations attempting to make clear how the bill's myriad proposed cuts would impact social safety net programs. Nineteen SSN members came together to coordinate efforts to inform policymakers and the public about the consequences of cuts to Medicaid, while other members stepped in on short notice to speak at press conferences hosted by SSN partners and respond to requests for op-eds in local press.

Meanwhile, SSN's intrepid policy team worked with scholars to broker legislative meetings, introducing valuable research evidence to elected officials

of both parties. They also helped scholars inform the regulatory process, including ten researchers who testified in a Department of Education hearing on student loan forgiveness policies. And SSN's communications team helped a growing number of editors and journalists connect to researchers with expertise relevant to their reporting, resulting in a surge of op-eds and interviews with members.

Much of this was possible because, since 2011, SSN has helped its members build communities of resilience in the form of chapters, cohorts, and our broader network. SSN chapters drew on experience and executed new iterations of successful programs, including the Maine Policy Fellowship, Connecticut's Moving Beyond Implications conference, New Jersey-Philadelphia's Policy Shark Tank, and visits to state legislatures. With nearly 100 alumni of SSN's Reproductive Health and Rights cohort, SSN has organized scholars of a highly politicized topic to provide mutual support and collaborate on research. SSN also held its first cross-cohort convening, bringing together education and health equity scholars who share a commitment to community-based and culturally relevant research practices, despite differing in their topics of study. SSN's monthly Q&A sessions, open to all members, brought scholars from across the network together to learn from and encourage each other.

Finally, SSN had its own change of administration as Founding Academic Director Theda Skocpol stepped down. We are so grateful to Theda for shepherding the organization through its first decade and a half. SSN continues to grow and evolve, and has more members than ever. The result is a dynamic and responsive network that continues to lift up member voices and connect academic expertise to real-world challenges.

**SINCERELY,**

**Paola Maynard-Moll**, Executive Director & **Suzanne Mettler**, Academic Director, Scholars Strategy Network and John L. Senior Professor of American Institutions, Cornell University

*"Doing more public engagement with my research through SSN, & helping others do the same, is vital for our country & democracy."*

- TIFFANY JOSEPH, SSN MEMBER



**PAOLA  
MAYNARD-MOLL**



**SUZANNE  
METTLER**

# Year in Review

2000+

Total SSN  
Members

114

New Members  
Since Aug. 2024

107

Attendees at  
Orientations

304

Attendees  
at Q&As

37

SSN Chapters

158

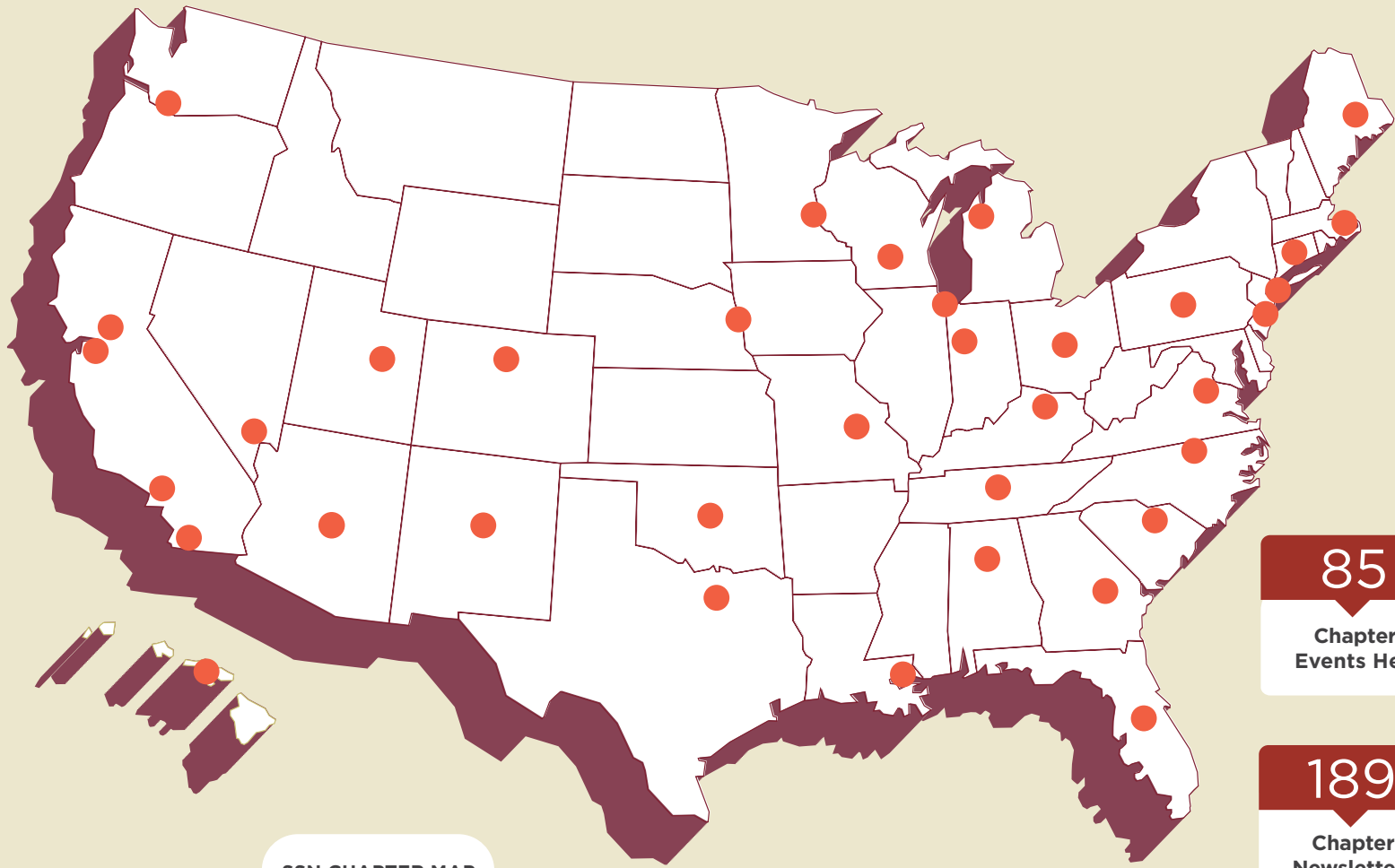
Chapter-hosted  
Civic Leaders

15

Chapter-hosted  
Journalists

159

Chapter-hosted  
Policymakers



SSN CHAPTER MAP

85

Chapter  
Events Held

189

Chapter  
Newsletters



SCHOLARS STRATEGY NETWORK'S

## Year in Review

SSN trainings, policy and media coaching, newsletters and podcast, and chapter activities yielded impressive results over the past twelve months.

105

SSN TRAININGS  
OFFERED

2,483

ATTENDEES AT  
SSN TRAININGS

209

REQUESTS FOR  
OP-ED WRITING &  
PITCHING SUPPORT

6,718

NEWSLETTER  
SUBSCRIBERS

258,865

VISITORS TO  
SCHOLARS.ORG

64,113

UNIQUE DOWNLOADS OF  
THE NO JARGON PODCAST

128

OP-EDS  
PUBLISHED

54

PUBLISHED POLICY  
BRIEFS AND MEMOS

20

PUBLISHED PUBLIC  
COMMENTS ON FEDERAL  
AGENCY RULE CHANGES

*Amid threats to:*

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*Elections*

*Democracy*

*The Federal Budget*

*Taxation*

*The Economy*

*Medicaid*

*Public Health*

*Medicine*

*Education*

*Immigration*

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*SSN chapters and members  
have engaged at the **State**  
and **Local** levels.*

The following sections feature the bold efforts of our scholars, both individually and working together as chapters, over the past year to **champion truth** amid threats to knowledge and democracy. Each section also includes related episodes of SSN's No Jargon podcast, and other short highlights from around the network.

# Elections & Democracy







## Safeguarding Democracy: A Bipartisan Summit on Election Protection



Georgia SSN, led by [Michael Evans](#) and [Bernard Tamas](#), co-hosted Safeguarding Our Democracy, an October forum on election integrity that brought together 18 speakers across the political spectrum. Conversations focused on the work these policymakers, election officials, and civic leaders are doing to support voting and safeguard the rule of law. Held at Georgia State University and co-sponsored with Community Change, BridgeGSU, and the Georgia State University Political Science Department, the event drew over 400 attendees and was featured on [WABE Radio](#) and covered by the [Georgia Recorder](#). Georgia SSN also produced [Safe Vote Georgia](#), a resource for Georgia voters, voting professionals, and academics.



## Campus Initiative Promotes Civic Engagement Around 2024 Election

SSN MEMBER AMEL AHMED

In September, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst introduced [Democracy in Troubled Times](#), directed by [Amel Ahmed](#). Ahmed and her colleagues designed this innovative campus initiative to promote civic engagement, resilience, and open dialogue leading up to and following the 2024 presidential election. Through a speaker series, structured discussions, and civic engagement activities, the initiative sought to establish a framework for meaningful discourse on campus, and [succeeded in drawing a high level of participation](#) from the campus's ideologically, socially, racially, and ethnically diverse student body.



## Defining Democracy: Navigating Election Integrity








Nevada SSN, led by [Barb Brents](#) and [Leila Pazargadi](#), held a fall pre-election event designed to boost engagement with the election. Co-hosted with Community Change, Nevada ACLU, and Make the Road Nevada, the event featured three scholars in political sociology and political science who shared their expertise on the political system and safeguarding democracy, and a team-based simulation game in which some 60 participants created mock organizations to encourage democratic engagement in the face of disinformation.

## Mobilizing Experts to Protect the Integrity of the Civil Service

**Democracy Forward**, a national legal organization that pursues litigation that advances democracy and social progress, reached out to SSN looking for experts on the administrative state to inform an amicus brief opposing the proposed Office of Personnel Management (OPM) “Schedule P/C” rule, a rebranding of Trump’s earlier “Schedule F” executive order that would politicize many federal civil service roles. SSN introduced Democracy Forward to eight scholars whose research is relevant to the case. In parallel, SSN also worked with six scholars to submit public comments to the OPM rule, ensuring that evidence-based concerns are reflected in both legal and administrative advocacy efforts.

## No Jargon Podcast

-  [Episode 273: Suzanne Mettler on The Four Threats to Democracy](#)
-  [Episode 271: Ryan LaRochelle on Trump, Nixon, and the Dismantling of Federal Agencies](#)
-  [Episode 267: Don Moynihan on The Risks of Trump’s Plans to Overhaul the Government](#)
-  [Episode 265: Christina Greer on Dissecting the 2024 Presidential Election](#)
-  [Episode 264: Paul Gronke on Threats, Opportunities, and the Future of U.S. Elections](#)

## Member Q&As Help Scholars Navigate the Political Moment

SSN hosts regular, virtual Q&A events open to all members, featuring new experts and topics each month. Prior to the election, the September member Q&A session with [Thessalia Merivaki](#) and Donald Palmer (U.S. Election Administration Commission) discussed how research can improve election practice. In December, New York City SSN chapter leader [Heath A. Brown](#) and activist, author, and policy analyst Dara

Baldwin focused on the transition to a new presidential administration and how researchers can continue to do meaningful work with adversarial policy actors. The first Q&A of the new year was a virtual town hall on the challenges and opportunities of a new presidential administration, hosted by SSN’s new Academic Director [Suzanne Mettler](#), in conversation with professors [Larry Jacobs](#), [Don Moynihan](#), and [Deondra Rose](#). With academic freedom increasingly threatened by political and ideological pressures that

seek to silence scholars and restrict the free exchange of ideas, SSN then invited PEN America to give a digital safety workshop teaching strategies for navigating online abuse. And in April, SSN members [Jules Boykoff](#), [Miranda Yaver](#), and [Ciara C. Torres-Spelliscy](#) shared their successful experiences with email list-building, Substack blogging, and social media use in a time of rapid political change, helping fellow members ensure that critical research findings and expert opinions reach their intended audiences.





## Election Protection and Enhancement Program

SSN concluded the second year of the Election Protection and Enhancement Program (EPEP) in December 2024. SSN supported **six projects**, all of which tested innovative approaches to election enhancement that bridge evidence-based research with grassroots action. In St. Louis, two complementary projects strengthened resident participation in elections: the first used community partnerships to bolster student voting, and the second used issues specific to St. Louis County to strengthen trust and participation in local elections. Connecticut's project strengthened voter engagement through human service organizations, while Maine's initiative built on previous work to enhance poll worker recruitment and support. In New York, efforts centered on increasing trust in post-election transitions through federal job training, and Virginia's BC Votes project expanded on the Valley Votes Project to develop future civic leaders and encourage state election participation. The program concluded with EPEP participants presenting at panels during the 2025 Southern Political Science Association Annual Meeting, showcasing their work as part of SSN's program.

## Other Highlights

Connecticut SSN hosted a September "Ballots and Beverages" event in Hartford with Connecticut House Majority Leader Jason Rojas, Connecticut Deputy Secretary of State Jaqueline Kozin, and scholars Dang Do and **Tanya Rhodes Smith** on how to engage students and higher ed institutions in get-out-the-vote efforts.

Minneapolis-St. Paul SSN's **Dialogue across Difference series** featured conversations between elected officials, academic thinkers, and public leaders.

Working in collaboration, members of Los Angeles SSN, San Diego SSN, Bay Area SSN, and Sacramento SSN produced the **California ballot initiative policy brief round-up** to educate voters about the impact of various state ballot measures.

For the 2024 election, SSN sent over 650 national and state reporters **a list of 30 SSN members in key swing states** available to share their expertise and **a list of 11 experts available for timely analysis on 2024 election administration.**



# The Federal Budget, Economy & Taxation

*“In an increasingly low-trust information environment, people trust academics and local news the most. To publicly fight back against massive, harmful policies coming out of Congress this year, we wanted to elevate professors as ideal messengers. While many groups have been struggling to get any press at all, SSN delivered **eight op-eds** in seven target districts in just over two weeks. That’s a testament to SSN as much as its scholars.”*



ANNA AURILIO, FEDERAL CAMPAIGN DIRECTOR,  
ECONOMIC SECURITY PROJECT



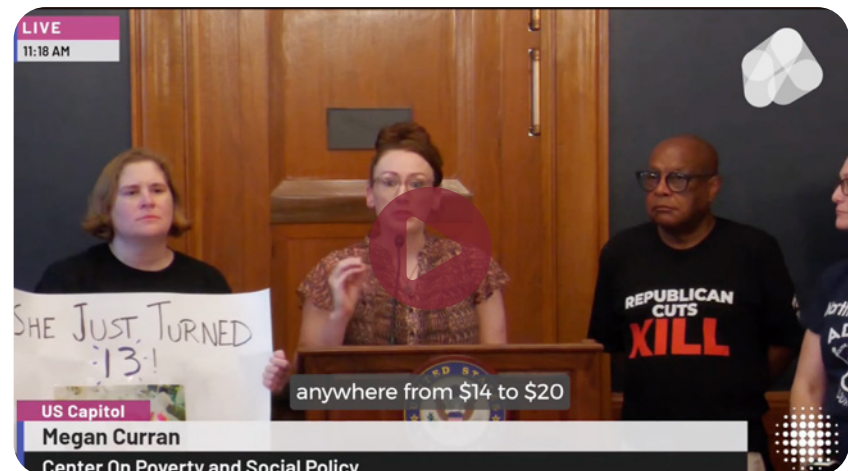


## Speaking Out Against Tax Cuts at Capitol Hill Press Event

SSN MEMBER HARRY HOLZER

In May, longtime collaborator [Community Change](#) asked SSN to secure an economist for a Capitol Hill press conference on planned cuts to major social safety net programs like Medicaid and SNAP. SSN reached out to Maryland-DC SSN, and [Harry Holzer](#) stepped forward. Holzer, a professor of public policy, delivered a compelling, [3-minute speech](#) that marshaled research and economic expertise to explain in plain language how tax cuts for the rich, funding cuts to vital programs and services, and increased administrative burdens were bad economic policy for all. The press conference resulted in stories by [NexStar](#) and [News from the States](#), which were picked up by local affiliates nationwide, as well as mentions in [The Daily Signal](#) and [Washington Examiner](#).

[Watch the Video](#)



## Championing the Child Tax Credit at the U.S. Senate

SSN MEMBER MEGAN CURRAN

After co-authoring [a June 20 op-ed in the Washington Post](#) on research into the Child Tax Credit, [Popular Democracy](#) invited [Megan Curran](#) to speak at a June 25 press conference at the U.S. Senate about child poverty and the implications of the budget reconciliation bill. The event included organizers, advocates, constituents, and U.S. Senators. Curran gave an 8-minute speech discussing the bill's negative impacts on vulnerable populations and shared both her expertise and frustration as a researcher. By participating in the event, Curran was able to directly reach a very engaged audience inside the U.S. Senate at a critical point in policymaking. While in D.C., Curran also met with civic organizations like Popular Democracy, the Economic Security Project, and Community Change. As a result of combined advocacy efforts, the final version of the bill increased the Child Tax Credit to \$2,200 a year and restored eligibility to immigrant families as long as one parent has a Social Security number.

[Watch the Video](#)





## Briefing Scholars on the Budget Bill in Collaboration with CBPP

SSN partnered with the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#) this February to host an exclusive briefing on the Trump administration's promised sweeping reductions in federal spending, threatening programs like Medicaid and food assistance. The event prepared the scholars in attendance to engage in the resulting federal and state policy debates.

### Other Highlights

SSN compiled lists of experts available to speak with reporters and provide timely analysis on [the impact of Social Security Administration workforce cuts](#) and the [dismantling of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau](#).

## Collaborating with the Economic Security Project on Tax Fairness

The Economic Security Project (ESP) reached out to SSN for help connecting with a scholar who could speak on the negative impacts that tax cuts for the rich will have on California at a Tax Fairness Champions Event during the California Democratic Convention in May. SSN connected them with [Wes Yin](#), who [spoke](#) at the event. At the urging of ESP, SSN also recruited members to write op-eds in opposition to the Republicans' proposed changes to the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in the federal budget reconciliation bill. In eight op-eds published in local and national outlets, scholars explained how the proposals for these tax credits would limit CTC eligibility for millions of kids and add hurdles for families to access the EITC. [Jennifer Greenfield](#), whose [op-ed](#) was published in both the Sunday print edition of the *Denver Post* and online, received a grateful message from [Colorado State Treasurer Dave Young](#) and an invitation to speak at a town hall organized by a local grassroots political group.

## No Jargon Podcast



[Episode 277: Terri Friedline on Consumer Protection Under Fire](#)



[Episode 274: Gopi Shah Goda on What's Happening With Social Security](#)



[Episode 269: Erica Owen on Tariffs, Trade Wars, and American Jobs](#)



# Rapidly Responding to Medicaid Challenges

## Medicaid Working Group

Given the urgency of ongoing debates over Medicaid funding, SSN relaunched its **Medicaid Working Group** as a rapid response effort to inform policymakers, advocates, and journalists with timely, evidence-based insights. Led by **Phil Rocco**, the 19-person group rallied together to address the consequences of proposed Medicaid funding cuts. Over the course of just a few short months, **members wrote and published 12 op-eds**, with editing and pitching support from SSN staff, and participated in two expert availabilities that continued to draw interest from reporters. Articles in **Politico**, **WIRED**, **The Virginian-Pilot**, and **two** in **Newsweek** included quotes from scholars.

Five members of the working group—Phil Rocco, Miranda Yaver, Nicole Huberfeld, Harold Pollack, and Michael Shepherd—led a July 1 **virtual briefing** to discuss how the Medicaid provisions of the federal budget reconciliation bill would impact states and constituents. SSN invited over 700 health journalists, civic organizations, federal and state offices with a deep interest in Medicaid policy, and other policy actors. The briefing was held directly after Senate passage of the bill, and for a very busy day in politics, the turnout was high. Attendees hailed from 16 states, and in addition to advocates, journalists, and staffers for state legislative bodies, staff or elected officials from 12 bipartisan state and federal legislative offices attended the briefing.

## Other Highlights

SSN shared lists of experts available to speak to reporters on **the Senate Finance Committee's Medicaid policy** and **proposed Medicaid changes**.

## No Jargon Podcast



**Episode 276: Nicole Huberfeld on The Fight Over Medicaid**



# Public Health & Medicine

## Highlights

Before the **Supreme Court's hearing in the case of *Medina vs. Planned Parenthood South Atlantic***, SSN alerted journalists of three experts available to provide timely analysis on the case.

## No Jargon



**Episode 278: Jean Junior on  
How Taxes Can Save Lives**





## Reproductive Health & Rights Program

In 2025, SSN shifted its long-running Reproductive Health and Rights program from an annual cohort model to a broader, more sustained effort to support the 173 scholars in the network doing this work, including 84 alumni from prior cohorts. Rather than launching a new cohort, this year's focus is on reconnecting with alumni, fostering collaboration, and identifying timely opportunities for public engagement. SSN interviewed over half of the cohort alumni to assess current research and policy goals, launched targeted outreach on priority topics like medication abortion and maternal health, and scheduled meetings for scholars with congressional offices on the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act. Alumni will gather in October for a convening to strengthen relationships and spark future collaborations.



## Helping Shape Federal Legislation on Opioid Treatment

SSN MEMBER ALEXANDRIA DRAKE

After struggling to find relevant scholars on their own for input on legislation improving rural access to methadone treatment, the office of US Rep. Shri Thanedar (D-MI) turned to SSN for help. SSN connected them with **Alexandria Drake**, who had recently authored an **SSN brief on medication-assisted opioid treatment**. In October, Alexandria met with congressional staff and shared insights on possible policy levers that could be incorporated into proposed legislation. As Alexandria **reflected**:

*“If my research can play even a small part in a bill being presented, deliberated, and passed, that’s incredible.”*

## Health Equity Scholars Program

Launched in 2021 with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the **Health Equity Scholars Program** is a year-long fellowship that unites a cohort of 15-20 early-career scholars researching social determinants of health. Now in **its third year**, the program offers a mix of in-person and virtual convenings, hands-on media and policy trainings, and individualized coaching to help scholars translate research into public impact.





## Connecting Cohorts for Joint Learning



In January, SSN hosted a convening in Albuquerque, NM, that brought together scholars from the Education and Health Equity cohort programs. Over two days, participants engaged in workshops on policy engagement, met with state education leaders and civic organizations focused on opioid use disorder, and began developing policy briefs and op-eds tied to their research. Scholars left energized, equipped with practical tools to inform policy at both the state and local levels, and grateful for the opportunity to build community across disciplines and institutions. Attendees came away with a renewed sense of purpose at a time of mounting pressure on publicly engaged scholars.





# Education





## 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 second cohort of 15 ESTP fellows research key education issues across the United States, including teacher retention, bilingual education, AI in education, and more. Each has developed an individual policy engagement plan, delineating 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, fellows in both the inaugural and second cohorts have already had over 60 meetings with these decision makers to discuss evidence-based policy changes.



## Ten Scholars Testify on Federal Student Loan Reform

On May 1st, ten SSN scholars testified during a **Department of Education public hearing** on revisions to federal student aid programs like Public Service Loan Forgiveness and Income-Contingent Repayment. SSN partnered with the Association for the Study of Higher Education to identify participants and provided hands-on support to help scholars craft compelling, research-based statements highlighting the impact of these policies on access and affordability. For many, this marked their first experience engaging in the federal regulatory process, one they described as meaningful and empowering.

## No Jargon Podcast



**Episode 275: Cecilia Orphan on Higher Ed on the Frontlines**



**Episode 268: Justin Ballenger on Does AI Have a Role in Education?**





## Advancing Bipartisan Policy Engagement and Bridge-Building

SSN MEMBER DEMETRI MORGAN

With the ambitious goal of **engaging across partisan lines**, **Demetri Morgan** met with the office of Rep. Nancy Mace (R-SC) to discuss a bill proposing major changes to how nonprofits are regulated. Morgan offered key insights, explaining the bill's uneven impact on institutions of different sizes. The office expressed interest in reintroducing the bill with his continued input. Building on this experience, Morgan launched the Center for Strategic & Inclusive Governance, crediting SSN with shaping its emphasis on bridge-building, relationship development, and sustained policy engagement.

## Other Highlights

For reporters covering **the Impacts of Trump's Executive Order to Dismantle the Department of Education**, eight experts made themselves available to answer questions about what the effects of such a move would be for K-12 and higher education.



## Supporting Scholar Impact and Resilience

SSN MEMBER JUSTIN BALLENGER

Believing that the benefits of AI belong in all classrooms, especially in underserved communities, **Justin Ballenger** worked with SSN to sharpen the policy and media strategies tied to his research. Ballenger published a piece in Higher Education Digest, and **participated in two congressional meetings** with his colleague, Valeria Bennett, to inform AI and digital literacy legislation under development by Reps. Haley Stevens and Shri Thanedar (both D-MI). In December, he secured a \$500,000 grant from Google to expand data science programs across historically Black colleges and universities.





# Immigration

## Highlights

Nebraska SSN, led by [Lissette Aliaga-Linares](#), [Jodi Benenson](#), and [Laurel Sariscsany](#), formed a chapter working group focused on shifting narratives around the need for immigrant workers.

San Diego SSN, led by [Brian Adams](#) and [Stacey Livingstone](#), also formed a chapter working group to lend research support to nonprofits and community groups affected by immigration policy changes.

At the outset of the new Trump administration, SSN assembled a roster of 10 members who could comment on [immigration-related Executive Orders](#), and in advance of the [Supreme Court's birthright citizenship hearing](#), also circulated the names of three members available to speak with reporters.



## Centering Immigrant & Migrant Well-Being



FLORIDA

Florida SSN, led by [Elizabeth Aranda](#) and [Heide Castañeda](#), co-sponsored the second biennial conference of the Im/migrant Well-Being Scholar Collaborative, a convening of scholars and local community organizations focused on the lived experiences, challenges, and successes of new populations within and across generations in the United States. Presentations explored the intergenerational impacts of U.S. policies and programs in shaping the daily lives and well-being of new populations and their families. The public event provided a space to share this research with the Tampa Bay community—especially those working in nonprofit organizations and service agencies—so that they could better understand the issues they are seeing in their day-to-day work with clients. By centering the voices and experiences of new populations, the convening generated empirical work that promotes the humanity of new populations and informs evidence-based policymaking at the local, state, and national levels.

## No Jargon Podcast



**Episode 270: William Lopez on The Ripple Effects of Immigration Raids**

## Navigating Access to the Health Care System in Immigrant Communities



BOSTON



VIRGINIA



MARYLAND-DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Boston SSN, led by [Tiffany D. Joseph](#) and [Mary Churchill](#), collaborated with the Maryland-DC and Virginia chapters to host a book launch and discussion in Arlington, Virginia, for Joseph's new book, *Not All In: Race, Immigration, and Health Care Exclusion in the Age of Obamacare*. The event drew members of the DC policy community and featured a conversation with SSN members Ernesto Castañeda and Judith Feder, with Rashawn Ray (Brookings Institution and University of Maryland) on the book's key themes—how Massachusetts health reform and the Affordable Care Act sought to fix the healthcare system, and the challenges that remain for immigrant communities in navigating access.





# State Policy Engagement







## Expanding Policy Engagement with 2nd Annual Moving Beyond Implications Convening

 CONNECTICUT

Connecticut SSN, led by [Kerri Raissian](#), [Abby Williamson](#), and [Jacob Hacker](#), hosted its second annual [Moving Beyond Implications: Research to Policy](#) convening at the State Legislative Office Building in Hartford. This year's convening doubled in size, featuring over 200 participants from the Connecticut General Assembly, Executive Branch, and universities, and 24 presentations to legislators and staff of six legislative committees.

## Providing a Hands-On Experience for Students: Virginia Government Simulation

 VIRGINIA

Virginia SSN, led by [Bobbi Gentry](#) and [Benjamin Blankenship](#), set out to build civic engagement among college students by developing teaching strategies and classroom resources that provide students with hands-on learning experiences. SSN members organized the inaugural three-day Virginia Government Simulation for undergraduates at the Virginia State Capitol in Richmond. The simulation provided students with an opportunity to “live the life of a lawmaker,” taking on the role of a sitting Virginia legislator, researching their positions, electing party leadership, proposing laws, reviewing and amending bills, debating and engaging in floor action, and sending legislation on to an internally-elected Governor.



## Introducing SSN at the Opening of the 2025 Legislative Session

 SOUTH CAROLINA

South Carolina SSN, led by [Ken Kolb](#), hosted a two-day State Capitol visit, meeting with state legislators and their staff to learn about the state legislative process and begin building relationships with lawmakers. Scholars attended committee hearings, and the chapter was officially introduced at the South Carolina Statehouse at the opening of the 2025 legislative session.



## Engaging with State Government



MICHIGAN

Michigan SSN, led by **Mark Axelrod**, **Sarah Reckhow**, and **Adam Zwickle**, hosted a day-long event and workshop on how to communicate and connect with state government on policy-relevant research. The day began with an introduction to Michigan state politics and policy, followed by a panel with state policymakers Rep. Julie Brixie, Molly Korn (Chief of Staff for Senator Sam Singh), and Chris Janzer (Assistant Director of the Michigan Department of Education). After a networking lunch, MSU researchers led a panel discussion on effective communication with state policymakers.

## Amicus Brief Filed in Maine Voting Rights Case

SSN MEMBERS AMY FRIED

DAVID KIMBALL

DAN SMITH

CARRIE ANN LEVAN

Four SSN members from across the U.S. collaboratively authored **an amicus brief in a Maine case** that will determine how a high-stakes referendum on voting rights appears on the ballot this November. The brief, written at the request of the League of Women Voters of Maine, argued for the Secretary of State's more inclusive ballot language. All four authors are current or former SSN chapter leaders whose relationships and collaborations were forged through their involvement with SSN, making this not just a legal intervention but an example of the civic infrastructure SSN has helped build over time.



## Bringing Research Directly to the State Legislature

SSN MEMBER ELIZABETH ARANDA

After releasing a **research report** highlighting the negative impacts of Florida SB 1718 in November, **Elizabeth Aranda** worked with SSN to create an outreach list to connect with Florida state legislators on both sides of the aisle. The report quickly gained traction, leading to media interviews with outlets such as the *Orlando Sentinel*, **Axios**, the Kaiser Family Foundation's newsdesk, and the **Wall Street Journal**. Aranda then successfully met with the offices of Sen. Kristen Arrington (D) and Sen. Geri Thompson (D), who expressed strong interest in the report's findings and suggested potential collaboration on legislative proposals for the next session, paving the way for meaningful policy discussions rooted in Aranda's research.



## Informing Legislation on Prosecutorial Immunity for Sex Workers Reporting Violent Crimes

SSN MEMBER BARB BRENTS

Wanting Nevada to join nine other states with immunity laws for sex workers, **Barb Brents** shared her research and interviews with members of the sex work community in support of Assembly Bill 209, sponsored by her colleague, law professor and Assemblymember David Orentlicher (D). The legislation proposed to improve public safety by allowing victims and witnesses of serious violent crimes to report them to law enforcement without putting themselves at risk of prosecution for prostitution, controlled substance, or vagrancy offenses. While the state legislature passed AB 209, Governor Joe Lombardo ultimately vetoed the bill.



## SSN Media Fellowship

The SSN Media Fellowship equips a small cohort of scholars with skills and strategies to communicate their research findings across various media platforms. Marshaling SSN's substantial network of publicly engaged scholars, SSN pairs the fellows with SSN members who have a similar research agenda and significant experience in the media. Now in its second year, the five current fellows have benefited from their mentors' advising on op-eds and book promotion strategies. Alumni from the inaugural year of the fellowship have also continued to communicate their research through the media. After helping to organize the New Mexico Stand Up For Science rally, Nina Christie published [an op-ed in the \*Albuquerque Journal\*](#) on Trump's cuts to science funding. Christie applied for and was selected to be an AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellow for the 2025 cohort, inspired by the media engagement support and mentorship she received from SSN.



### Using Media to Open Doors

SSN MEMBER ANDREW FLACHS

As a participant in the [SSN Media Fellowship](#), Andrew Flachs worked with mentor Sarah Bowen on strategies for using the media to drive policy conversations around his research interests of food systems, climate, and farming. Flachs [published a timely op-ed](#) in *The Indianapolis Star* highlighting the many positives of free school lunch programs for children, families, educators, and the agricultural economy. He then worked closely with SSN to translate his research into direct outreach to state and federal lawmakers, and met with Indiana state senators J.D. Ford (D) and Andrea Hunley (D) and a food access nonprofit, to advocate that they take action to provide free lunches in his home state and push back against the upcoming budget cuts in Congress that threaten such programs.





# Chapters Make Introductions

SSN chapters bring together scholars, journalists, policymakers & community leaders through projects, workshops, and casual gatherings. Here are some of the individuals SSN members met through their chapters this year.



**ALABAMA**  
Aliyya Swaby  
*ProPublica*



**CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA**  
Stephen Caruso  
*Spotlight PA*



**CHICAGOLAND**  
Karen Freeman-Wilson  
*Chicago Urban League*



**CONFLUENCE**  
Mark Maxwell  
*KSDK 5 On Your Side*



**FLORIDA**  
Leah Watson  
*ACLU*



**FLORIDA**  
Graham Brink  
*Tampa Bay Times*



**HAWAII**  
Nadine Burke Harris  
*First Surgeon General  
of California, 2019-2022*



**KENTUCKY**  
Bonnie Jean Feldkamp  
*Syndicated Columnist*



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Keith Ellison

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Scott Bass

*Richmond Times  
Dispatch*



#### WISCONSIN

Hugo Balta

*The Fulcrum and  
Latino News Network*



#### WISCONSIN

Francesca Hong

*State Representative*



## Introducing SSN's Newest Chapter

### ARIZONA

In many ways, Arizona is a policy laboratory where new ideas and approaches are tested. To **make the most of this dynamic policy landscape** and support scholars looking to contribute to policy change and innovation, **Jennifer Carlson** and **Bradley J. Bartos** teamed up to launch the Arizona SSN chapter. Carlson and Bartos introduced the Scholars Strategy Network at the inaugural fall retreat of the Arizona State University Center for the Study of Guns in Society, a center founded and directed by Carlson. In January, the chapter co-hosted the Inaugural Guns in Society Symposium, which included an SSN Media Engagement Workshop for symposium participants and Arizona-based scholars.



## Local Policy Engagement

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## Creating Synergies between Research & Community Initiatives



CHICAGOLAND

Chicagoland SSN, led by [Malik S. Henfield](#) and [Ana Genkova](#), brought together over 100 local policymakers, civic leaders, and scholars for an Evening of Scholarship and Impact, organized by the Institute for Racial Justice at Loyola University Chicago. The evening featured Chicago Urban League President Karen Freeman-Wilson's insights on the 2025 State of Black Chicago report and a panel with civic and business leaders on how higher education can more effectively support and engage with community-led efforts. Participants explored cross-sector project showcases—visual displays highlighting synergies between research and community initiatives—and engaged in bridge-building dialogue over food and drink. These exchanges created opportunities to translate academic insights into tangible community solutions and to transform community challenges into data-informed action.

## Pitching Policy Proposals to the Philadelphia City Council



NEW JERSEY-PHILADELPHIA

New Jersey-Philadelphia SSN, led by [Andrea Hetling](#) and [Laura Johnson](#), hosted a return of the Policy Shark Tank, first piloted by the chapter in 2021. This year, nine scholars rapidly pitched research-based policy ideas to Philadelphia City Council members and their staff. The event fostered direct dialogue between scholars and city policymakers, opening doors for future collaboration and evidence-based policymaking.

## Focusing on Local Civic Collaboration



OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma SSN, led by [Andrea Benjamin](#), [Naneida Lazarte-Alcalá](#), and [Emily Stacey](#), has developed [a set of chapter initiatives focused on local policy and civic engagement](#). The chapter co-sponsored an event with Sally's List, a non-partisan civic organization, that brought together 40 participants to hear from elected city council and school board officials on how SSN members can get involved in civic and policy issues at the municipal level, and series of candidate debates in partnership with NonDoc, a local non-profit media organization. Additionally, Stacey co-hosted CivicsCon at Rose State College, a convening of the "politically curious" as well as the politically engaged, where participants discussed strategies and opportunities for civic engagement. Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison delivered the keynote address on why Americans continue to fight for democracy and why civic engagement matters. Stacey also led Attorney General Ellison and a group of students on a tour of Black Wall Street and the Greenwood Rising history center in Tulsa.



## Our Board

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## Our Partners

We are grateful for the many individuals and foundations whose support enables SSN to continue uplifting research and evidence-based policy.





## Get Involved

### MEMBERSHIP

Learn about the benefits of joining SSN. Membership is free and our two-step membership process offers hands-on support for scholars interested in deepening their public engagement skills.

### CHAPTERS

SSN chapters build communities where research informs policy by connecting local researchers with key policy players in their area. Find a chapter near you and meet the chapter leaders.

### TRAININGS

SSN offers trainings to our chapters and other academic networks, developed and facilitated by our expert staff. Our workshops teach concrete skills for engaging in the public policy process and the media.

### DONATE

Giving to SSN helps make sure media coverage, public policy, and civic engagement strategies are grounded in research and meeting the challenges of our time.



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