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A major focus for SSN this year was updating and expanding our member and chapter programming to make the value of being a part of the network clear. SSN launched Member Digest, a monthly newsletter featuring all that the network has to offer, and bimonthly orientation sessions. Member-only training and writing sessions have also activated prospective, new, and current members. In addition, SSN established a Chapter Advisory Council this year. Four experienced chapter leaders have channeled their knowledge and enthusiasm into building the capacity of our chapter program. A new interactive discussion series was created for current chapter leaders, providing them a space to learn from each other, brainstorm ideas together, and develop solutions to common challenges.

SSN’s training program continued to grow, introducing core concepts on academic public engagement to thousands of researchers nationwide. And after 8 years on the air, No Jargon, SSN’s monthly podcast, released its 250th episode in August, featuring three experts discussing different aspects of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.

In addition to sustaining its long-running programming like No Jargon, SSN also innovated this year. The network added the Child Tax Credit Working Group to seize opportunities at the state and federal level.
level to inform tax credit legislation. We also launched the Elections Protection and Enhancement Program to foster collaboration among researchers, community organizations, and practitioners in the field of voting and elections.

Reviewing all that our members, chapters, and partners accomplished, we are not only *kvelling*—we are brimming with optimism about what is possible in the year to come.

**IN GRATITUDE & SOLIDARITY,**

**Paola Maynard-Moll,** Executive Director

& **Theda Skocpol,** Director and Victor S. Thomas Professor of Government and Sociology, Harvard University
Year in Review

MEMBERSHIP MILESTONES
New member onboarding process & programming led to a substantial increase in new members

1800+
TOTAL 2023 SSN MEMBERS

34
SSN Chapters Nationwide

77
Chapter Meetings and Events Held

13
SSN Staff Visits to Support Chapter Leaders
37 EXPERT LISTS COMPILED FOR REPORTERS, HIGHLIGHTING 100+ SSN MEMBERS

57 INBOUND REQUESTS FROM REPORTERS FOR EXPERTS TO INTERVIEW

70 PEOPLE ATTENDED SPRING 2023 MEMBER ORIENTATION SESSIONS

111 REQUESTS FOR OP-ED WRITING & PITCHING SUPPORT

80,000+ UNIQUE DOWNLOADS OF THE NO JARGON PODCAST

119 SSN TRAININGS OFFERED

Nebraska SSN hosts Erin Grace, former Omaha World-Herald reporter, at their “On the Record: Talking to the News Media” workshop in November 2022.

Member Digest

Dear Taylor,

I am excited to introduce our inaugural SSN Member Digest, a monthly newsletter exclusively for SSN members that includes member-only skill-building opportunities, member perks, and spotlights of policy and media impact across the network. The newsletter will also highlight registration information for monthly policy and media writing sessions that include optional office hours with members of SSN’s policy and communications teams.

MEMBER DIGEST

The revamped newsletter better highlights SSN members’ successes and makes it easier for members to find and access valuable SSN programming and information.
2022-23 Scholars Strategy Network Highlights

SSN formed the **Chapter Advisory Council**, established the Chapter Leader Discussion Series, and developed the Chapter Leaders Resource Site.

SSN successfully piloted the **Election Protection and Enhancement Program**, with 8 projects across the country focused on increasing voting access and trust in elections.

**SSN’s monthly newsletter** for chapter leaders and fellows expanded to highlight a broad array of opportunities & resources for chapters.
Chapter Highlights

Connecticut

Through their media partnership with the CT Mirror, members of Connecticut SSN published seven op-eds this past academic year. Chapter leader Kerri Raissian and Chapter Fellow Mekaila Carey proactively forwarded the columns to relevant state legislators to inform state policy debates on issues ranging from early voting to gun violence prevention to free school lunches.

Michigan

Newly elected Representative Penelope Tsernoglou, whose district includes Michigan State University’s campus, joined Michigan SSN to share her legislative priorities, particularly as Chair of the House Elections Committee, and learn about the expertise of Michigan chapter members. Rep. Tsernoglou expressed interest in follow-up communication with chapter members on topics related to voting, gun violence, criminal justice, and PFAS contamination.
Dallas Fort-Worth

Dallas-Fort Worth SSN hosted a special session on Sustainability and Social Equity, organized as part of a larger University of Texas - Dallas annual conference on Public and Nonprofit Management that brings together private, public, and nonprofit leaders throughout the state. As a result, the chapter was able to make connections to city officials engaged in equitable urban planning, which they plan to leverage for future chapter initiatives in this area.

Florida

In the fall, Florida SSN presented “Teaching on Eggshells,” a panel discussion of the implications of HB 7 (the “STOP WOKE Act”). Panelists Amanda Phalin (University of Florida), Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman (University of South Florida), and Holly Bullard (Florida Policy Institute) clarified what the legislation would mean for faculty and teaching.

Florida SSN hosts an op-ed workshop in February 2023.
Alabama

Alabama SSN hosted its second annual Policy-Palooza, bringing university researchers, policymakers, and nonprofit leaders together to identify key health policy issues in need of research support and data. The chapter, in collaboration with the UAB Lister Hill Center for Health Policy, then issued a call for project proposals and selected two for funding: one at Tuskegee University that focuses on Black maternal wellness and support, and the other at the University at Montevallo with a focus on building environmental sustainability networks.
The dangerous impacts of man-made PFAS “forever chemicals” on public health are increasingly becoming understood in Maine and in communities across the country. Maine SSN members Michael Haedicke and Jean MacRae wrote multiple columns on PFAS and engaged in public forums focused on the severity of the issue and potential policy action. They even had the opportunity to meet with members of the legislative committee charged with determining how to allocate millions of dollars in federal funding to address the crisis. SSN Graduate Media Fellow Josh Mangin also tackled this issue in an op-ed grappling with the legal implications of a recent amendment enshrining a “right to food” in the Maine Constitution.
San Diego

San Diego SSN virtually convened the Safe Parking Community of Practice, Research, and Collaborative Learning. The event brought together 31 providers, researchers, and persons with lived experience from San Diego, Los Angeles, the Bay Area, and Oregon. They shared new developments in their practice, from their research, or new ideas and suggestions from their experience. From there, the event moved into brainstorming goals the group could collectively tackle.

Wisconsin

State Representative Francesca Hong joined Wisconsin SSN to discuss how best to engage policymakers with research. The opportunity to meet directly with scholars led to many productive connections, including with Dr. Melody Harvey, who subsequently offered expertise on AB 109, a bill on financial literacy in K-12 schools currently in the legislature.

Lisa Hernandez, SSN’s Senior Reproductive Health & Rights Associate, interviews Wisconsin State Representative Francesca Hong.
No Jargon

Our monthly podcast, *No Jargon*, presents interviews with America’s top researchers on the politics, policies, and social issues facing the nation—powerful research, intriguing perspectives and no jargon.

**EPISODE 239**

Supporting the Needs of Refugees

Anna Nicole Kreisberg argues refugee resettlement agencies’ current strategy of job placement—prioritizing immediate yet low-wage work over long-term reliable employment—is deeply flawed and must be reformed if the U.S. is to truly support incoming refugees.

**EPISODE 240**

Falling Through the Social Safety Net

Christopher Howard identifies holes in the U.S. social safety net—which includes programs like Medicaid, food stamps, and unemployment insurance—that must be fixed if the net is truly to support the millions of Americans who are poor, food insecure, housing cost-burdened, or medically uninsured.
EPISODE 241

In Search of a Home

Prentiss Alan Dantzler describes the ways racial discrimination persists in the housing market, despite laws such as the Fair Housing Act of 1968, and offers policy solutions that would help make homes a human right for all rather than a privilege for some.

EPISODE 242

Midterm Trailblazers

Nadia E. Brown explains what’s contributing to the rising numbers of Black women seeking office, what the combined identity of being Black and female means for those who enter into politics, and how prior political participation becomes a key motivator for them to run for office.

EPISODE 243

Prison Cell or Recovery Center

Robert W. Glover shares new findings about Mainers’ attitudes about current drug policy in their state, which had a record-breaking 627 drug overdose deaths in 2021, and what reforms they favor.

EPISODE 244

Avoiding a Cyber Catastrophy

Jeremy Straub explores how the U.S. government might better protect itself against increasingly sophisticated cyber attacks, emphasizing what needs to happen to prevent a truly catastrophic data breach – and what such a breach could mean for everyday Americans.
EPISODE 246

No Box to Check

Neda Maghbouleh explains what steps need to be taken to increase visibility for Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) Americans on government forms such as the census and other surveys.

EPISODE 245

Invisible Barriers in STEM Education

Lara Perez-Felkner lays out the invisible barriers that racially minoritized and economically disadvantaged students pursuing STEM face, and discusses ways that school administrators, policymakers, and families can increase opportunity from kindergarten classrooms to college laboratories.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

Neda Maghbouleh

An estimated 3 million Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) Americans live in the United States, but their racial and ethnic identities are often overlooked because they have no box to check on the census or most surveys and forms. Middle Eastern and North African Americans may not be perceived, nor perceive themselves, to be White. Professor Neda Maghbouleh is helping to pave the way for the census, the American Medical Association, and other organizations to start counting this group.

In February 2022, Maghbouleh published an op-ed in Newsweek with fellow SSN members René D. Flores and Ariela Schachter on the need for a MENA-specific box on the census, which would allow researchers to better examine the social, economic, and health status of this population, while also aligning more closely with how members of this group understand their own identity and are seen by others. Following the publication of their op-ed, the researchers were contacted by NPR’s Hansi Lo Wang for a reported story focused on their findings.

This then led to an invitation for Maghbouleh to present her MENA research to the entire staff of the Census Bureau in July 2022, which she described as “a life changing experience.” After her visit, the Federal Interagency Technical Working Group on Race and Ethnicity Standards issued a federal proposal to add MENA to official documents, like the census. While the Biden Administration’s proposal awaits approval, there are non-governmental groups like the American Medical Association that have already added a MENA box after speaking with Maghbouleh.

Read more in Maghbouleh’s member spotlight.
EPISODE 247
The Flurry of Anti-Trans Legislation
Zein Murib discusses why transgender people have become the focus of so much legislative activity, and what laws barring access to gender-affirming healthcare for youth and banning transgender people from competing in athletics mean for the future of the LGBTQ+ movement and American society as a whole.

EPISODE 248
Fifty Years of Mass Incarceration
Nazgol Ghandnoosh delves into the different costs of incarceration – both on the incarcerated and on our society – and highlights efforts needed to reduce the population of nearly two million people, disproportionately Black, currently living in U.S. prisons and jails.

EPISODE 249
Unhoused and Underserved
Megan Welsh Carroll argues that the lack of public restrooms – a critical service that is out of reach for over half a million Americans experiencing homelessness on any single night – has led to serious public health issues.

EPISODE 250
Climate, Health Care & the IRS
The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA) was signed into law, but Americans are still learning how this giant legislative package impacts them. We spoke to experts to learn what research can tell us about these major provisions.

No Jargon Celebrates its 250th Episode!
The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA) was signed into law almost one year ago. With provisions targeting different sectors of the economy, the IRA has focused most prominently on clean energy investments, prescription drug pricing, and funding for the IRS. To learn what research can tell us about these major provisions, we spoke to experts who study each of these issue areas. Professor Matto Mildenberger took on the climate provisions, Professor Soumitra Bhuyan discussed health care, and Vanessa Williamson analyzed the increase in IRS funding.
Member Highlights

Expert Interviewed about Wisconsin Residents’ Right to Abortion Before the State’s Supreme Court Election

When Wisconsin elected new members of the Supreme Court in April 2023, reproductive health was the central concern driving voters to the polls. Two weeks before the election, MSNBC invited SSN member Tiffany Green, an associate professor at The University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Population Health Sciences and Obstetrics and Gynecology to join American Voices to explain how the election could affect state residents’ access to abortion services. Green reached out to SSN policy associate Lisa Hernandez and director of policy Lizzy Ghedi-Ehrlich, who helped Green prepare and practice talking points for the interview.

Tackling the Time Tax: How the Federal Government Is Reducing Burdens to Accessing Critical Benefits & Services

For the Office of Management Budget (OMB), incoming SSN Board member Alex Hertel-Fernandez contributed to a burden reduction initiative that culminated in a public report, *Tackling the Time Tax*. The report cites the work of SSN members Don Moynihan, Jamila Michener, Pamela Herd, and Suzanne Mettler, and proposes a slew of burden reduction initiatives across federal government agencies, including unemployment insurance applications, Social Security disability review, HUD housing program eligibility, and Head Start eligibility for SNAP recipients. The OMB’s Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs also released *Broadening Public Participation and Community Engagement in the Regulatory Process*, which cites new work from SSN member Dan Carpenter.
Cost of Unity: A Research-Media Partnership in South Carolina Spurs Municipal Investment in Affordable Housing

Ken Kolb, Professor of Sociology at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina collaborated with his local newspaper, Greenville News, to shed light on a $66 million dollar urban revitalization project that is tied to the displacement of longtime Black residents. Kolb worked closely with investigative reporter Fred Clasen-Kelly to provide data analysis and visualizations that would culminate in an award-winning series of six articles on gentrification and racial segregation in the city. Building off this media attention, Kolb worked with community organizers to increase public interest and support for evidence-based policy solutions to address the issue. In late March, 2023, Greenville city officials voted to leverage existing funding, as well as private equity and other resources, to create a $33 million loan or bond program to increase affordable housing in the city and quickly address the issues of segregation and gentrification while saving money in the long term. Additionally, city leaders decided to support a state bill to give the city permission to use its tourism taxes to pay for worker housing. Pressure from residents moved these measures forward more quickly and increased the amount of funding dedicated to affordable housing. Read more in Kolb’s member spotlight.

“Ken’s work was absolutely essential to the Greenville News project. He met with reporters individually and talked to us as a group. He leveraged relationships he built in the community to help reporters make contacts. This totaled an untold number of unpaid hours. It was a great illustration of how academic research can reach out from campus and have a ripple effect across the entire community.”

- FRED CLASEN-KELLY
Senator Tim Kaine Reads SSN Member Op-Ed During Senate HELP Committee Hearing on Abortion Access and Women’s Health Care

Professor Jamie Abrams of American University authored an op-ed for NBC in June 2022 connecting the overturning of Roe v. Wade to her personal experience of being diagnosed with breast cancer and moving from Kentucky to Virginia. The state in which cancer patients live has important implications for the medical decisions they make, and Abrams argues that society must support women’s medical decision-making autonomy in full, including the ability to seek abortion care. Following the op-ed’s publication, Abrams heard from colleagues, friends, and strangers about the many ways the overturning of Roe v. Wade has affected their healthcare. The op-ed also led to several public engagement opportunities, including an on-air interview about the story. Most excitingly, at a July 13, 2022 Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee hearing on the impact of the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn Roe v. Wade, Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA) read Abrams’ op-ed into the record and used it as the basis for a question to Dr. Kristyn Brandi (Physicians for Reproductive Health) about the extent of the impact of state laws on cancer patients.
Baby Bonds Move from Legislation to Implementation in Connecticut

Baby bonds programs are designed to narrow the wealth gap and spur long-term economic growth for families and the economy. They work by investing a set amount for every child born into poverty into a bond that matures when that child turns 18. In 2021, the Connecticut legislature created the Baby Bonds Trust based in part on the research of Darrick Hamilton, a member of the SSN Board and economist at The New School. Though the legislature approved the program two years ago, Governor Ned Lamont needed time to fund and implement the program. In May 2023, the state announced a July launch of the Connecticut Baby Bond Trust, which will invest approximately $50 million for every eligible baby born over the next 12 years. Funds can be used in adulthood to buy a home in Connecticut, start or invest in a Connecticut business, pay for higher education or job training, or be invested for retirement.

Presenting to Federal Policymakers on Food as Medicine

Just three weeks after attending an SSN training at Stanford Impact Labs, Lisa Goldman Rosas, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology, Population Health and Primary Care at Stanford University, was invited to participate in a Food as Medicine roundtable moderated by U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA), U.S. Secretary of Health & Human Services Xavier Becerra, and Supervisor of Alameda County, CA, Lena Tam. As the Principal Investigator on a study of the Alameda County Recipe4Health program, Rosas spoke about the model’s key impacts on health outcomes and social drivers of health, and provided the policymakers with a fact sheet to take with them. Rosas attributed her success to the SSN training, where she “learned so much, took away tangible action steps, and was inspired.”

“The policymakers (mostly Xavier Becerra) made a point at the beginning to say that we really need the ‘proof’ that this works. Then at the press conference following the event, one of them called me out and said we really need evidence like what Dr. Rosas presented—so that was cool!”
Sharing Research with State Legislators to Improve Student Well-being

Hanne Hoffmann, Assistant Professor of Animal Science at Michigan State University, was inspired to take action after attending an SSN workshop on how to engage with state legislators. Following the steps laid out in the workshop, she wrote a powerful policy brief based on her research on how early school start times cause teenagers to experience severe sleep deprivation that negatively impacts their well-being. Hoffman then reached out to Michigan legislators, taking care to note the relevance of this topic in the state; most Michigan high schools start before 8 am, meaning teens do not get the 8-10 hours of sleep per night that they need to succeed in school. She was able to quickly schedule meetings at the state capitol, and secured a lead sponsor for a bill to reform school start times.

Read more in Hoffman’s member spotlight.

“SSN provides me with a network of experts who can help me successfully initiate and build relationships with state representatives, allowing me to provide the scientific basis for bills associated with my expertise.”
Changing Alabama’s System Of Fines And Fees with Budget Research

On May 16, the Alabama House of Representatives passed a bill, SB154, to reform the state’s punitive policy of suspending drivers’ licenses for missed court dates or unpaid fines and fees. Alabama SSN chapter leader and public budgeting professor Peter Jones collaborated with a local civic organization, Alabama Appleseed, to precisely calculate the cost of suspended licenses to the state: $804 per person. His report made it possible for the bill’s supporters to point to research-based evidence showing that the state was losing more income and gas tax revenue than they stood to collect in court fines and fees.

Read more in Jones’ member spotlight.

“Lawmakers were worried that our proposed change in law would reduce revenue. Pete’s research gave us a formidable response to that concern, showing that overall tax revenue would likely increase with reform. I don’t think we could have gotten the bill over the finish line without his contribution.”

- LEAH NELSON, Research Director of Alabama Appleseed
The Scholars Strategy Network established the Election Protection & Enhancement Program (EPEP) in summer 2022 to better foster collaboration among researchers, community organizations, and practitioners in the field of voting and elections. SSN selected eight pilot projects for the 2022-23 academic year. Projects’ efforts included registering college students in Mississippi and Florida and incarcerated individuals in the Bay Area to vote; informing voters in St. Louis, San Diego, Atlanta, and the Shenandoah Valley about election rules and polling locations; and surveying poll workers in Maine to gauge their perceptions of election security.

At the conclusion of the pilot year, project leaders averaged 5 skills they felt they had improved. The activities that participants most commonly reported feeling more able or confident doing as a result of EPEP training and support were 1) incorporating community partners, 2) thinking creatively about dissemination, 3) writing for popular media, and 4) project management. These results reflect that EPEP achieved its primary goal of bridging the gap between academics and the wider community in which they work. Additional indicators reveal that EPEP incentivized scholars and community partners to collaboratively generate knowledge and create programming and resources that were inclusive of and responsive to the community.
Building Trust in St. Louis Local Elections (Confluence)

The Confluence project, led by Rebecca Clendenen, David Kimball, and Anita Manion, established a new polling place location on the campus of University of Missouri - St. Louis (UMSL) and used social media to advertise the location, explain local voting rules, and promote election integrity. Project leaders collaborated with officials from the St. Louis County Board of Elections to make the campus student center a polling place for the August 2022 primary and November 2022 general election. The project created videos explaining new voting rules in the state of Missouri, a new vote anywhere policy in St. Louis County and new approval voting rules in St. Louis City, as well as how to get to the UMSL polling place. These were posted regularly on social media. The project exceeded its goal for at least 1,000 voters to cast their ballots at the UMSL polling place. As a result of the project, project leaders have a closer working relationship with St. Louis city and county election officials.
Election Protection & Enhancement Projects by the Numbers

- **45 EVENTS HOSTED** (8 projects) & **13 RESOURCES CREATED** (5 projects)
- **662 INDIVIDUALS REGISTERED TO VOTE** (3 projects), and **5,532 voters provided with election information** (4 projects)
- **34 COMMUNITY PARTNERS** (8 projects) and **35 CAMPUS PARTNERS** at 20 campuses of 14 colleges (5 projects)
- **210 VOLUNTEERS** (3 projects) & **280 STUDENTS involved** (7 projects) in project efforts
- **24 TOTAL PROJECT-RELATED WRITTEN PIECES**, including op-eds, media and university promotional articles, interviews, policy briefs & chapter spotlights (8 projects)
- **9 ACADEMIC DELIVERABLES** including conferences, presentations, & journal articles (5 projects)
Child Tax Credit Working Group

In December of 2022 Congress went out of session having failed to renew the successful expanded federal Child Tax Credit (CTC). Since CTC payments ended in December of 2021, an overwhelming number of states across the country have introduced and passed their own expanded CTC legislation. In addition to action at the state level, there has been a renewed effort in Congress to bring back this program and continue sending checks to the lower-income families that are left out of the existing CTC.

As Congress and more and more states gain traction on these policies there is a major need for researchers and relevant expertise. In response to this need, in May of 2023 SSN launched a CTC Working Group. The growing group consists of 23 scholars with relevant expertise who are available to work with policymakers, write op-eds or policy briefs, collaborate with civic partners, or conduct further research. The group also has so far collaborated with nine civic and advocacy organizations.

Ahead of the June 14, 2023 Senate Finance Committee hearing on Tax Provisions for Supporting Children and Families, SSN policy associate Olivia Brochu reached out to working group members about writing statements for submission to the record. Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba wrote a statement with the guidance of her organization, Children’s Health Watch, and Harry Holzer also submitted a statement that he then turned into an SSN brief, which was tweeted out by the Brookings Institute.

In July, the working group held a strategy meeting with guest speakers Ellen Nissenbaum (SSN Board member and Senior Vice President for Government Affairs of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities) and Brendan Duke (Senior Advisor to U.S. Senator Michael Bennet, D-CO). The conversation provided insight into how members of Congress and their staff use research to make policy and generated ideas for how scholars can get involved with the CTC at the federal level.

Photo: Ellen Nissenbaum and Brendan Duke join the CTC working group for a strategy meeting in July 2023.
How Does Policy Change Happen?

This year, with the support of the William T. Grant Foundation, SSN produced a new two-minute video explaining the different ways policymakers use research.
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.