

2017-2018 Priorities

The Scholars Strategy Network (SSN) is uniquely positioned to organize and empower researchers to respond to radical shifts in U.S. politics and public policymaking. With nearly 800 member researchers located in 195 colleges and universities in across 43 states, scholars can supply research and evidence to civic leaders, policymakers, and journalists in the communities they represent. Through 24 state chapters, SSN is organizing scholars to impact federal, state and local policy debates far outside of the echo chambers of coastal elites. Over 170 scholars contributed ideas to inform SSN's plan to promote good public policy and defend democracy in 2017 and 2018. For the years ahead, SSN has three core priorities.



Existing SSN Chapters, December 2016

Communicate the impacts of radical policy shifts.

In the new political environment, leaders in Washington are advancing many new policies, including some that disregard research and evidence in favor of extreme ideology. Many scholars believe that some of these policies could have profoundly negative effects on millions of ordinary Americans. Yet there is no guarantee that people will identify those harms, connect cause and effect, and take effective public action in response. Voters, civic organizations, grassroots leaders, and journalists need research, evidence, and analysis to make thoughtful, deliberate decisions and hold leaders accountable.

In a time of rapid policy change, researchers are well positioned to analyze new policies and explain who will benefit and who will be harmed. SSN will organize scholars to deliver timely, accurate information from a variety of perspectives. To make that information matter, SSN is helping scholars combine data and evidence with narrative story-telling, repetition, and targeting to deliver research-based perspectives through the media to the districts and states that matter most to today's decision makers. In a time when legislators often operate without the research and information they need, SSN helps scholars offer their expertise as researchers and express their values as constituents to legislators and policy staffers on both sides of the aisle. And perhaps most importantly, SSN scholars are creating relationships with grassroots civic organizations to offer research and support in collaborations that are more lasting and less transactional than traditional technical assistance. SSN's Trump Transparency Initiatives have begun to help people understand what is at stake and what can be done over coming months and years. Issues include:

- Climate Change and the Environment
- Democracy and Voting Rights
- Immigration, Race, and Inclusion
- Medicaid, Medicare, and the Affordable Care Act
- Taxes, Wages, Poverty, Prosperity, and Inequality
- Women's Rights

Fight for evidence-based policy and innovation in the states.

States matter. SSN's state chapters offer a unique way to make research and evidence matter in state decision making, not based on topic by topic initiatives, but through an ongoing, organizational approach to connect university experts to civic groups, legislators, and journalists grappling with state issues. SSN helps scholars become trusted collaborators in state and local policymaking. Individual chapters identify substantive projects

based on the needs of stakeholders in their states. SSN members are speaking out for cutting-edge policymaking in some states while defending basic rights in others – and even doing both simultaneously in the same state, depending on the issue. To increase impact and share research, SSN members collaborate with organizations with grassroots capacity across states, like the Center for Community Change, and with organizations with relationships with policymakers, like the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities State Priorities Partnership.

To ramp up these efforts, in 2017 and 2018 the network’s chapter system will grow. Existing chapters will grow larger and more responsive to their communities. SSN will recruit scholars who bring a wide range of disciplines, backgrounds, and approaches. Chapters will connect Senators, Members of Congress, and state policymakers to policy-relevant research and researchers who live in their own states, often in their own districts in states as varied as Maine, Oklahoma, Ohio, and Utah. Beginning with chapters in Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia, SSN will initiate post-doctoral fellowships to provide organizing support on the ground to growing chapters. SSN is now organizing new chapters in many places, including Cleveland, Denver, East Lansing, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Sacramento, Syracuse, Tampa, and Washington, DC.

Defend democracy.

People of all political persuasions are concerned about threats to the robustness of American civil inclusiveness, tolerance, the right to vote, and freedom of public discussion and assembly. SSN will sponsor and share historically grounded work on what happens in periods when democracies drift toward intolerance and authoritarianism – and how all of us can push back effectively. Researchers will work with civic groups to offer a full-throated defense of fundamental freedoms and institutions. SSN scholars will offer research to help in nomination battles, discussions over executive actions, and Congressional, state and local debates on legislation, as well as litigation to defend basic rights.

Despite these challenges, now is a time for evidence-based innovation at the state and local levels. SSN will help scholars offer ideas to ensure that every adult citizen is able to vote and that everyone is welcomed in civic life. SSN members will advance ideas for innovation in election administration, election timing, redistricting, and representation – and help stakeholders understand the nuances and pros and cons of reforms. Researchers will help their colleges institutionalize best practices to graduate a diverse generation of students into voters. They will work civic groups to boost civic engagement and increase the power of organizing. And they will think about new ways to mitigate the power of wealth in politics.

The Scholars Strategy Network is a new organization for a new time.

At every level, public debates and policy decisions are rarely informed by the best research and evidence. As the 2016 election demonstrated, too often public debates aren’t even grounded in facts. The nonprofit sector and higher education alike are both littered with an alphabet soup of small, staff-driven centers and initiatives. When researchers act only as technical assistant providers and not as citizens, democracy is not well served.

SSN draws on a tried and true (and too often forgotten) principle of American democracy that goes back to De Toqueville. A voluntary, federated organization that offers members meaningful benefits and transformational relationships can improve policy debates at every level in an extremely cost-effective way. SSN offers no single organizational company line. Members take responsibility for their own work and hold a variety of views. Instead, SSN offers evidence and research without jargon, and connects civic organizations, policymakers, and journalists to researchers who want to make a difference. The Scholars Strategy Network offers a proven solution that is now ready to grow to scale. America’s policy decisions are too important to allow relevant research to sit wasted in unread journals, and today’s policy debates are too urgent to let the nation’s researchers sit out on the sidelines.