



**ASPEN POLICY  
ACADEMY**

 **aspen institute**

**Annual Report 2025**



# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	ii
<b>Thousands of New Policy Changers</b> .....	1
Driving Change Across Government.....	2
Committing to Policy Work.....	4
Learning from Policy Leaders.....	5
Leading the Policy Conversation.....	6
<b>The Road to Policy Impact</b> .....	7
Shaping the Future of Tech Policy.....	7
Equipping Environmental Changers.....	12
Democratizing the Policy Process.....	14
Strengthening Policy Advocates.....	17
<b>Our Community</b> .....	18
<b>The Way Forward</b> .....	19

# Executive Summary



This year, the Aspen Policy Academy helped more people than ever turn their ideas into action. In 2025, thousands of people strengthened their policy skills by participating in our webinars, short courses, fellowships, and mentored policy projects—our largest reach to date.

What makes this work special is that it makes a difference in the real world. One-quarter of our projects since launch have already achieved real policy change, including new artificial intelligence (AI) guidance [adopted by New York City](#) and [the State of Utah](#).

And we’re growing quickly. Our alumni network grew to 845 experts – a more than 50% increase from last year – and more than two-thirds report they now work in, or are moving toward, policy roles. Alumni are serving at every level of government, from city halls to federal agencies, and are influencing change through nonprofits, advocacy, and civic engagement in their own communities.

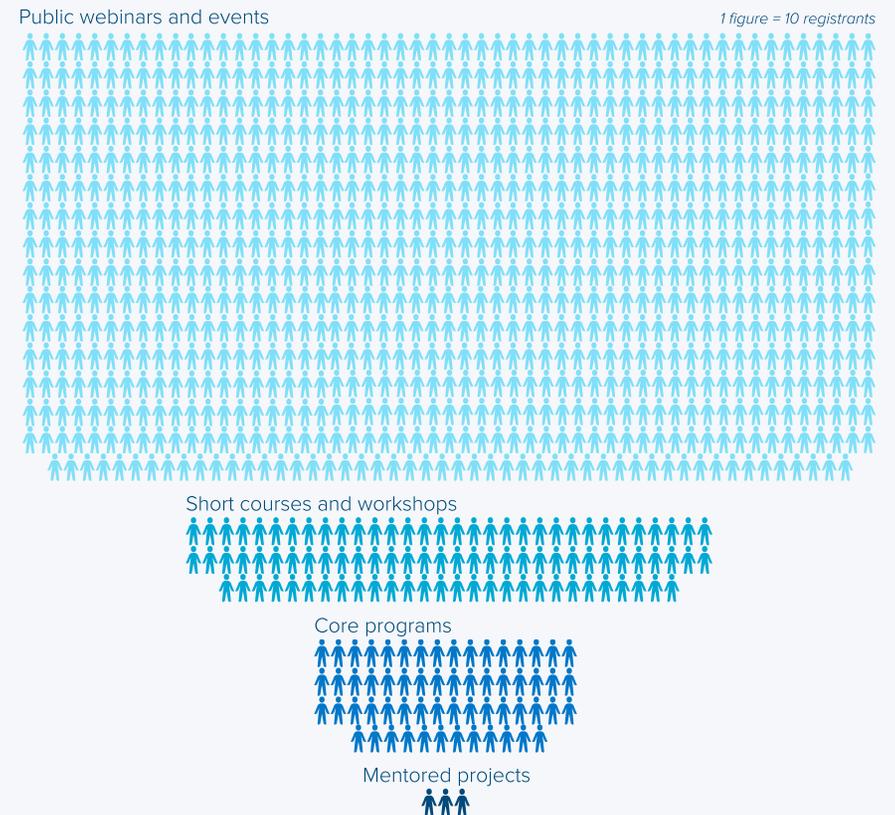
We’ve also expanded who gets to participate in policy, by launching a new civic engagement arm of our work. In 2025, we rolled out new programs for civic technologists, rural educators, nonprofit leaders, climate advocates, and people directly affected by cyber fraud. We published [Getting Through To Governments](#), a practical guide designed to demystify advocacy and make civic participation more accessible to everyone. And [we brought on former Mayors London Breed \(D-San Francisco, CA\) and G.T. Bynum \(R-Tulsa, OK\)](#) to give our students a sense of what policy really looks like.

Looking ahead to 2026, we plan to deepen and expand our reach—significantly growing our work in civic engagement, launching new policy accelerators for veterans and place-based communities, and continuing our flagship fellowships for subject-matter experts and senior technology leaders. Our goal remains the same: to build a society where everyone has the skills and confidence to shape the policies that affect all of our lives.

# Thousands of New Policy Changemakers

Throughout 2025, a record 10,500 people registered for our trainings, entering our programming “funnel,” from our free, public webinars to short courses and workshops, our core programs, and policy projects developed under Academy mentorship.

## 2025 Academy Registrants By Program



What sets our Academy trainings apart is that the skills we teach are immediately usable. Our students are already applying the lessons they’ve learned and, with effort and persistence, are having an impact across all branches of government, from the federal to the local level. Read on for just a handful of examples from 2025.

# Driving Change Across Government

The State of Utah passed a bill that aims to compel data centers to report their water usage, adopting recommendations made by 2024 Science and Technology Policy Fellows Mary-Clare Bosco, Jonathan Gilmour, and Rebecca Kilberg in their project, “Reducing the Tech Industry’s Water Consumption in the Great Salt Lake Basin.”

On the other side of the country, 2021 Tech Executive Leadership Initiative (TELI) alum and current New York Assemblymember Alex Bores played a key role in introducing several tech policy bills, including safeguards against AI deepfakes, which passed in 2025.

2024 TELI graduates Sumant Dhall, Luis Gomez, George Mathew, Heather Morelli, and Raquel Romano convinced Georgia’s Commission on Equal Opportunity (GCEO) of the importance of improving its Fair Housing Division’s intake and investigations capacity. Since meeting with the TELI team, the GCEO has adopted many of the team’s ideas to improve the efficiency of its software and reduce the burden on citizens sending documents to the Commission.

A whistleblower submission from 2020 TELI graduate and former chief data officer at the Social Security Administration Chuck Borges uncovered key issues with the agency’s handling of Americans’ sensitive data. The District of Maryland court case has the potential to set key precedent for how agencies manage federal data and use cloud services.



The Utah Office of Artificial Intelligence Policy (OAIP) adopted AI evaluation recommendations developed by 2024 Science and Technology Policy Fellows Jordan Loewen-Colón, Ayodele Odubela, and Jeanette Jordan. Their policy project recommended that Utah establish a standardized evaluation framework for its AI partners in order to build public trust in AI innovation. The project also inspired Jordan and Ayodele to found the AI Alt Lab, a nonprofit to help governments and organizations evaluate and responsibly implement AI tools.

The New York City Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI) incorporated policy recommendations from Academy fellows in its latest AI Action Plan. 2025 Science and Technology Policy Fellows Hande Güven and Jessica Wang suggested that OTI share more user-friendly guidance on how city agencies can responsibly implement generative AI. Their framework, which was largely adopted by the City, will unify city agencies’ protocols under NYC’s AI Principles, which were created by fellow Academy alum Neal Parikh.



**“Keeping our planning and guidance current is one of our top priorities, which Academy fellows were critical in helping with this year.”**

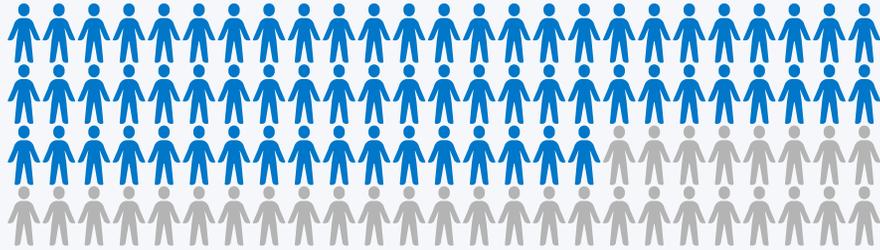
**ALEX FOARD, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OF  
NYC’S OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION**

# Committing to Policy Work

## Alumni In Policy

Two-thirds of our alumni report working in or planning to work in policy.

1 figure = 1% of respondents



This year the number of graduates from our fellowship and short courses grew to 845—a more than 50% increase since 2024. More than two-thirds of this alumni network surveyed in December 2025 now report either working in a policy role or being interested in moving into a policy role.

Alumni who started new policy jobs in 2025 include:



Saad Asad, 2023 Nonprofit Fellowship alum, moved into policy work as a communications manager at California YIMBY.



Meghan Cochran, 2023 TELI alum, became the director of digital services at the Federal Emergency Management Agency.



Reggie Darby, an alum of our Influencing AI from the Outside and Cyber Civil Defense short courses, joined the US House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs as a professional staff member.



Asha Keddy, 2024 TELI alum, started a new role as vice president of global technology standards at Cisco Systems.



Jaida Nabayan, 2022 Climate Fellowship alum, accepted a role as the senior advisor for sustainability policy at the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office.

# Learning from Policy Leaders

To give our students a first-hand look at how policy gets done at the local level, we were honored to welcome former Mayors G.T. Bynum (R-Tulsa, OK) and London Breed (D-San Francisco, CA) to our bipartisan Civic Innovation Advisor-in-Residence program. Throughout the year, Mayors Bynum and Breed supported our goal of uplifting the next generation of policy leaders by mentoring more than 50 Academy Fellows and trainees. The mayors advised these students on how to effectively impact the policy process, speaking on virtual and in-person panels and hosting 1:1 office hours. The mayors also contributed their expertise to the Academy's Getting Through To Governments civic engagement report and helped develop 2 new curriculum modules for our programs: Running for Office and Legislative Advocacy. These projects will ensure their impact carries forward to future Academy students.



**“During a very divided time in America, I have loved getting to know the Fellows, who are so smart and idealistic about our future. I've also enjoyed the opportunity to work with Mayor Breed, who is from a different political party and governed a very different city than I did—yet we have found so much in common. All of it has been a reminder that what unites us is so much greater than what could divide us.”**

**G.T. BYNUM,**  
FORMER MAYOR OF TULSA, OK

**“Working with emerging policymakers has been especially meaningful, helping them refine bold ideas, pressure-test real-world challenges, and design innovative solutions that can truly move communities forward. Empowering the next generation of leaders to think creatively about policy is the kind of impact that lasts.”**

**LONDON BREED,**  
FORMER MAYOR OF SAN FRANCISCO, CA

# Leading the Policy Conversation

Academy staff and alumni were featured in the media more than 380 times in 2025, reaching an audience of more than 700,000 people. From sharing cybersecurity tips on podcasts to penning op-eds on AI safety, we brought key policy conversations into the spotlight. 2025 Science and Technology Policy Fellows even launched *The Contours*, a bi-monthly journal of tech policy essays and analyses. The following are highlights of some of our community's best features of the year:



"Cloudflare outage exposes reliance on a handful of Internet companies" featuring Director Betsy Cooper. [Read more.](#)



"I broke ChatGPT's new parental controls in minutes. Kids are still at risk." by Fellow Geoffrey Fowler. [Read more.](#)



"Research: Do LLMs Have Values?" coauthored by Fellow Jordan Loewen-Colón. [Read more.](#)



"Former SF Mayor London Breed Reveals her Post-City Hall Career Plans" featuring Advisor London Breed. [Read more.](#)



"Why Platforms Don't Catch Climate Misinformation – and How to Change That" coauthored by Fellow Theodora Skeadas. [Read more.](#)



"Think You've Been Scammed? AI Is Making It Harder to Tell—Here's What to Do" by Director Betsy Cooper. [Read more.](#)



"Organización ofrece cursos gratuitos para batallar contra el cambio climático" featuring Associate Director of Programs Gloria Molina-Estolano and Fellow Esther Sosa. [Read more.](#)

# The Road to Policy Impact

Policy change doesn't happen overnight. It's often the result of months or years of dedicated, consistent efforts like attending town meetings, calling representatives, writing public comments, and meeting with policymakers. The most effective policy advocates are those who know how to communicate their ideas, know who the real decisionmakers are, and know how the systems of policy work. These are the skills we teach our students through comprehensive, targeted programming. Here is how we equip them to impact policy at the local, state, and federal levels.

## Shaping the Future of Tech Policy

### RISING CIVIC AI LEADERS

With government data and innovation teams increasingly grappling with AI policy, we launched the 3-month Rising Civic AI Leaders program in partnership with Aspen Digital. This course brought together 21 new and onboarding state and local government officials in charge of AI portfolios to deepen their policy toolbelts and build a nationwide community of practice. Over weekly sessions, the Leaders met with nearly a dozen civic AI trailblazers and developed actionable policy outputs to implement in their communities.

### Nationwide Impact

The Rising Civic AI Leaders cohort convened government officials who are working on AI teams that impact more than 40 million Americans.

**"The [Rising Civic AI Leaders] program expanded my perspective on AI policy and plugged me into a generous network of civil servants who continue to support and challenge my thinking. It has been a powerful accelerator for my public service journey."**

**DARIA KIRILENKO**, ADVISOR IN THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF INFORMATION SECURITY OFFICER OF NYC'S CYBER COMMAND



## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY FELLOWSHIP

In June, we held our full-time 2025 Science and Technology Policy Fellowship, the 7th annual iteration of our cornerstone bootcamp. This paid program welcomed 15 experts from across the country, including leaders in emerging technology, cybersecurity, and the environment, to San Francisco for a month of rigorous policy training. The cohort dove headfirst into experiential learning, meeting with more than 35 guest speakers, visiting policymakers at California's State Capital in Sacramento, and presenting locally grounded policy solutions to government partners in Tulsa, OK; Santa Fe, NM; and Napa, CA. These collaborative learning opportunities helped Fellows acquire key policy development and communication skills while nurturing a robust community of policy leaders. At the program's conclusion, the Fellows reported a more than 170% increase in their understanding of the policy process.

Following the Fellowship's bootcamp, more than half of the cohort joined the program's optional project phase and developed policy outputs for government stakeholders. These projects have explored cutting-edge AI and cybersecurity topics, spanning Julia Lane and Blair Palmer's "[A Framework for Computer Vision Deployment](#)" for New York City and Amber Turner's "[Privacy in Pennsylvania: Educating Policymakers on Mobile Driver's License Security](#)."

### Speedrunning Policy Pitches

The Fellows' training culminated in our signature "48-Hour Exercise" group project, a policy sprint inspired by the tech world's "hackathon" model. Over just 2 days, teams developed policy proposals for how to improve civic engagement in the City of Napa. The groups presented to the Napa City Manager's Office, mayor, and vice-mayor, and Fellow Christina Steinbrecher-Pfandt went on to advocate for the cohort's policies at a City Council meeting.

**"The Aspen Fellows demonstrated creativity, curiosity, and genuine interest in understanding the Napa community and arriving at policy solutions that will become meaningful components of our strategy in the future."**

LIZ HABKIRK, NAPA ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER

## Our 2025 Science and Technology Policy Fellows



**DARAGH BYRNE**, associate teaching professor at Carnegie Mellon University's School of Architecture



**ARFA REHMAN**, cofounder of Chorus Health



**GEOFFREY FOWLER**, technology columnist at *The Washington Post*



**MICHELLE SIPICS**, director of special projects at Accenture Innovation



**HANDE GÜVEN**, senior security researcher at Microsoft



**CHRISTINA STEINBRECHER-PFANDT**, CEO of Tech Diplomacy Network, Bay Area, and PhD student of economics, science, and technology studies at the Universität Klagenfurt, Austria



**ANAND HABIB**, hospitalist physician and health policy researcher



**CARLOS JAVIER TORRES**, director of policy and strategic partnerships at the Hispanic and Immigrant Center of Alabama



**JULIA LANE**, assistant vice president for science at the University of Chicago and federal strategy advisor at Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park



**AMBER NICOLE TURNER**, information science PhD student at the University of Colorado Boulder



**LAUREN MUSHRO**, head of product and academic research at Sapien



**JESSICA WANG**, software engineering leader



**SARAH NEKOUFAR**, sustainability strategist and environmental health expert



**MARCELO YATES**, software engineer at Indeed



**BLAIR PALMER**, epidemiologist, partnerships and resource mobilization at UNICEF Office of Innovation



## Demo Day 2025: Policy In Action

The Fellowship culminated in our Policy In Action event in New York City in November. We brought together community members, policy leaders, students, and more to talk about how we can all get more engaged in our communities. This open-to-the-public convening featured Fellow and staff presentations and a civic innovation panel with Mayors Bynum and Breed and Ryan Pierce from Bloomberg Philanthropies.



## POLICY PRIMER

Building on the success of our 2023 cohort, we ran the second iteration of our Policy Primer program. The cohort convened 33 scholars, ranging from engineering researchers to environmental advocates, to transform their subject-matter expertise into real-world policy action. They completed a 4-week policy training bootcamp then collaborated in teams to publish 5 policy proposals for government clients in Santa Fe, Salt Lake City, and New York City.

### Taking the Lead

Primer alum Janice Mak coauthored a guide for the National Association of State Boards of Education for how states can think about integrating AI into schools. The article outlines 5 key questions state boards should consider, from why states need AI policies to what ethical principles and professional development support are necessary to ensure AI is used responsibly and effectively in K-12 education.

**“Aspen's Policy Primer was a fantastic crash course on how policy actually gets done. They brought in helpful partners to ground what we're learning with real-world examples, and the fast-paced assignments helped stretch how quickly I thought I could learn and execute on these learnings.”**

**CANDICE AMMORI, FOUNDER AND CEO OF CLIMATE VINE**

### BY THE NUMBERS

**200+** registrants

**12** speakers

**4** policy projects launched



# Equipping Environmental Changemakers

## EMERGING CLIMATE LEADERS

Our Emerging Climate Leaders course trained dozens of young environmental advocates on the basics of policy advocacy. Over this weeklong short course, our trainees learned about skills like stakeholder mapping and finding effective policy solutions, and heard from environmental leaders from Climate Imperative, the *Los Angeles Times*, and more.

## Reaching Young Advocates

Program graduates have already made a concrete difference in the environmental policy space. For example, alum Grace Cordsen went on to host the 2025 Next Generation Explorers Network symposium, platforming other young climate scientists' research and proposals.



## ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACCELERATOR

Through our Environmental Policy Accelerator, emerging policy leaders translated urgent environmental challenges into actionable solutions. More than 20 participants applied our policy impact framework to advance 12 policy ideas addressing critical gaps, including protecting Florida residents from utility shutoffs during emergencies, aligning US Department of Agriculture crop insurance with conservation outcomes, and ensuring communities have a meaningful voice in energy projects in Virginia. The result is a pipeline of policy solutions designed to improve resilience, equity, and public accountability in environmental decisionmaking.

**“We have a much more cohesive strategy around our decisionmakers, solutions, and outputs now that I’ve gone through the program, and I’m confident it will boost our effectiveness and impact.”**

**HOLLY ALPINE, COFOUNDER OF ENABLED EMISSIONS CAMPAIGN**



## Building Momentum

The Accelerator’s teams are already transforming their advocacy plans into action across the country. The team from Appalachian Voices, for example, has [received funding from Google’s Sharing the Power Foundation](#) to create clean energy “community resilience hubs” in Southwest Virginia. The hubs fit into the team’s 2026 roadmap developed during the Accelerator.



### TEACH FOR AMERICA PARTNERSHIP

Stepping up to serve a new group of leaders, we began training 70 educators through Teach for America (TFA)'s Rural School Leadership Academy. Our hybrid workshop series is helping these educators from rural communities across the country build the policy entrepreneurship skills to drive district- and state-level policy change. [Read more about the partnership here.](#)



**“Our partnership with the Aspen Policy Academy has been invaluable in helping rural educators see themselves as critical leaders of change within their buildings. We deeply appreciate how Aspen honors their expertise while building the policy understanding they need to influence what happens next.”**

**CASEY DEFORD**, PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF TFA'S RURAL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

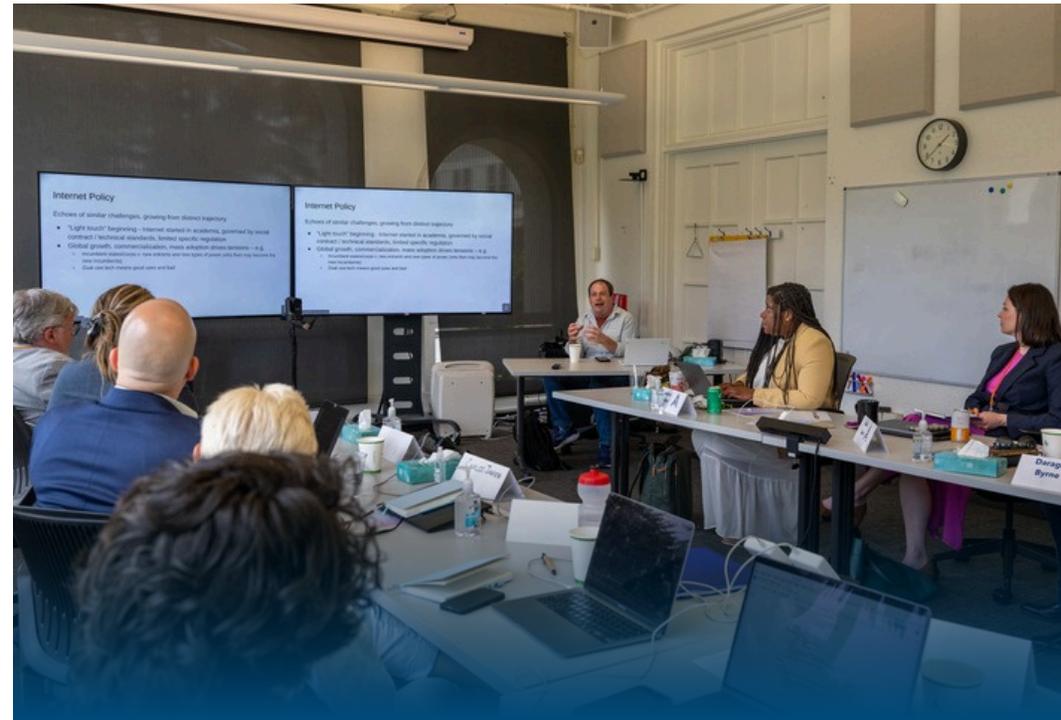
## Democratizing the Policy Process

### CYBER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Our Cyber Civic Engagement program, piloted this year, empowers everyday individuals to become effective advocates for stronger cybersecurity protections. We're giving people who have been scammed the tools to push their local governments and utility providers to take cybersecurity risks more seriously. To date, we've worked with dozens of individuals personally impacted by cyber fraud and scams, equipping them to advocate for stronger cybersecurity policies locally. This work has been covered by leading technology and cybersecurity publications and podcasts including [Dark Reading](#) and [CyberScoop](#).

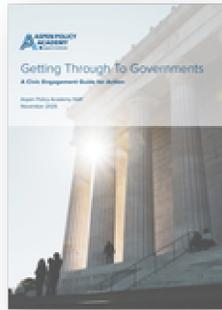
### Protecting Vulnerable Communities

Our alumni are out in the field exemplifying what cyber civic engagement can mean for local communities. Alum Tim Pappa has partnered with the Vermont Rural Water Association to safeguard a small town's water system from hackers. You can read more about his impact in [this NPR feature](#).



## GETTING THROUGH TO GOVERNMENTS

In fall 2025, our team published “[Getting Through To Governments](#),” a first-of-its-kind guide designed to help everyday people and subject-matter experts advocate for issues they care about. Drawing on our curriculum and dozens of conversations with government staff and elected officials across the political spectrum, the guide offers practical guidance on clarifying advocacy goals, identifying and reaching the right government contacts, and communicating effectively once engaged. Through this guide, we aim to demystify how individuals can engage with government in meaningful, productive, and effective ways.



## WEBINARS

Our most accessible programs – our free, public webinars – saw almost 8,200 sign-ups from people eager to join the policy space. In addition to teaching our core lessons, including Policy 101 and Communicating for Policy, we also introduced new trainings to meet community demand. For example, our How To Tell Governments What You Think webinar debuted in March with the goal of training ordinary citizens to speak up about policy issues in their communities. Nearly 1,200 people have signed up for those trainings so far. We now look forward to continuing this momentum through 2026, iterating on our offerings to reach even more policy newcomers.

**“The Aspen Policy Academy webinar trainings have not only given me courage in uncertain times, they’ve provided tools to help me better engage parents, caretakers, and partners in policy initiatives and campaigns.”**

JASON B. ALLEN, NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF PARTNERSHIPS, NATIONAL PARENTS UNION

### BY THE NUMBERS

**32 webinars**

**8,192 registrants**

**86%** of surveyed trainees found the webinars **very or extremely useful**

# Strengthening Policy Advocates

## NONPROFITS IN AN AGE OF POLICY CHANGE

This 1-week training helped 27 nonprofit leaders thoughtfully create policy advocacy plans in light of shifts to the federal policy ecosystem. Throughout the course, trainees drafted proposals to Congress, the courts, and state and local officials to practice convincing government stakeholders to listen to their ideas.

### Building Partnerships

The nonprofit leaders have since put their training into practice and launched new, far-reaching policy initiatives. Alum Kendra Parlock is the vice president of partnership development at NPower, a nonprofit helping young adults and military-connected folks access tech career training. She credits the course as directly influencing NPower’s expanded government relations and advocacy in 2025.

## BUILDING NONPROFIT ADVOCACY CAPACITY

To close off the year, we trained 35 public interest leaders through our Building Nonprofit Advocacy Capacity course. This 1-week program helped community-based nonprofits without prior policy experience create their first policy strategies. With goals ranging from reducing gender-based violence to preserving local historical sites, trainees left the program with concrete advocacy plans for pursuing policy change.

**“The cohort was a powerful and deeply generative experience. Having dedicated time, expert speakers, and practical tools allowed me to step back, strengthen our approach to policy and advocacy, and leave with a clear, actionable plan for my team.”**

NADA AHMED, PHD, CEO OF ESKOLTA RESEARCH AND DESIGN

# Our Community

## Leadership

The Academy's 2025 achievements were a direct result of our internal team's vision and dedication. Our 7 full-time and 5 part-time team members collaborated to deliver new programming and solidify the Academy's role in the policy ecosystem. We also welcomed 4 interns to our team, increasing our capacity to recruit and engage a growing network of policy changemakers.

 <b>BETSY COOPER,</b> director	 <b>LAURA FRANZINI,</b> strategy and operations manager	 <b>KATERI GAJADHAR-SMITH,</b> senior project manager
 <b>KATE GREEN,</b> program and communications coordinator	 <b>ANDREW LEWIS,</b> policy advisor	 <b>GLORIA MOLINA-ESOLANO,</b> associate director of programs
 <b>CONNIE MOORE,</b> communications and events coordinator	 <b>MAI SISTLA,</b> senior climate policy advisor	 <b>EMMA CALKINS,</b> part-time program coordinator
 <b>JESSICA COLE,</b> senior advisor	 <b>BROOKE HUNTER,</b> senior advisor	 <b>NICOLE TISDALE,</b> senior advisor
 <b>QISMAH BALOGUN,</b> communications intern	 <b>SARAH FAZIOLI,</b> social media intern	 <b>LAUREN PHAN,</b> design intern
 <b>AUBREY SPRINGER,</b> design intern		

## Supporters

We could not do this work without the support of our talented contractors, who help with everything from ensuring our website functions properly, to copy editing and designing our policy outputs, to supporting our communications. We are so grateful for their work, as well as the work of countless individuals who have supported the Academy in other capacities, such as by serving as guest speakers, reviewers, and mentors. We also extend our gratitude to our funders and partners who have made this year of impact possible. We could not do our best work without you. Our partners include:



# The Way Forward

2025 was a year of robust policy change in the United States. We saw major overhauls of domestic and foreign policy at the federal level, and continued momentum at the state and local levels on topics ranging from housing to artificial intelligence.

The Academy's core belief is that these policy changes should reflect the will of the residents and constituents most affected by them. To that end, we will continue to expand our civic engagement programming in 2026. Among other initiatives, we are planning to run a policy accelerator for veterans focused on technology and innovation policy, as well as to continue our partnership with Teach for America by equipping educators to shape education policy. We are also exploring an opportunity to capture people at the moment they have a "civic spark," an idea about something in their community that they want to change.

Alongside this work, we will continue training subject-matter experts to engage effectively in policy change. We will run our flagship Science and Technology Policy Fellowship and launch the 6th cohort of our Tech Executive Leadership Initiative, in partnership with Tech Talent Project, which this year will focus on preparing senior technology leaders for state-level roles in Medicaid delivery.

We're looking forward to this growth, and to ultimately building an America where everyone has the power to impact policy.

**"Your sessions reminded me that effective policy change doesn't start with government, rather it starts with people who can tell the right story, backed by evidence, at the right moment."**

**OLANREWAJU ONIYITAN,** FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SEED CARE AND SUPPORT FOUNDATION





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