

IMPACT CASE STUDY

Responsibly Employing Emerging Technologies in State Government

Stephen Leonardi via Pexels

[The Aspen Institute's Policy Academy](#) turns citizens into changemakers. We offer innovative training programs to equip leaders across sectors – from tech to environment, science to civic engagement – with the practical policy skills to craft solutions for society's most pressing challenges. Based in the Bay Area, the Policy Academy is the first comprehensive nonpartisan and non-university training program in the United States offering a step-by-step process to learn practical strategies for policymaking. The Academy's predecessor, the Aspen Tech Policy Hub, has helped more than 500 alumni and staff gain government experience and seek policy impact.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

[Ivy Teng Lei](#)'s 2024 [Tech Executive Leadership Initiative \(TELI\)](#) training equipped her with the policymaking and advocacy skills to direct California's digital strategy and inform state policies as the State's inaugural chief digital strategy officer. Ivy joined TELI committed to bridging the private and public sector, responsibly incorporating emerging technologies into government systems, and equitably distributing these benefits to communities across California. She then brought TELI's policymaking lessons into her role as the chief digital strategy officer, leading key initiatives including a first-of-its-kind data privacy platform for Californians, paid parental leave for non-civil-servant state executives, and disaster recovery systems for survivors after the January 2025 Los Angeles fires.

BACKGROUND

After nearly 5 years of advising technologists across the private, public, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors on how to use tech for social good, Ivy joined TELI looking for an opportunity to understand the inner workings of government and to bridge rapidly developing technologies and government systems. Having grown up in New York City as an undocumented immigrant and a former Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals recipient, Ivy intimately knew how government policies can concretely impact people's livelihoods. She was committed to getting directly involved in state policymaking to scale her impact, driven by a sense of responsibility to the communities that raised her and the desire to leverage emerging technologies to advocate for marginalized groups in her new home state of California.

Shortly after joining TELI – an executive education program in collaboration with the [Tech Talent Project](#) that prepares senior technologists with the skills critical to state government service – Ivy received an offer to become California’s first chief digital strategy officer. In this role, she worked to responsibly integrate technological advancements into government systems, oversee the State’s digital strategy, including a statewide digital identity framework, and manage the State’s technology innovation services with communities at the center. Ivy relied on TELI to help her build credibility and a network of passionate peers working to better apply their technical skills in government settings and advocate for programmatic policy change. Her hands-on experience working with the State of Georgia on a TELI project to increase housing evaluators’ efficiency when placing residents based on key priorities also revealed to her that there is no single way to solve a policy problem.

“The Academy supported my transition into government by helping me build credibility and a network in the intersection of government and technology innovation in the age of AI adoption before, during, and after my time at the State of California.”

Ivy Teng Lei

IMPACT

The Academy’s career support and lessons on policy writing and pitching prepared Ivy to directly push for major policy reform as the chief digital strategy officer for the State of California. She led the application launch under the DELETE Act within the California Department of Technology, which created [a platform that allows all 4.0 million Californians to request the deletion of their personal data](#) from over 600 data brokers. Then, while she was a few months postpartum, Ivy successfully advocated to change California disability insurance policy – which the State uses to provide paid family leave and job protection – so that private sector executives who joined the California government without prior civil servant status, like herself, would qualify for these protections. After the Los Angeles fires in January of 2025, Ivy also worked closely with the California Office of Data and Innovation and disaster recovery partners to use technology to strengthen recovery resources for survivors, successfully establishing a digital disaster recovery center where victims could request vital records online with expanded e-notary capabilities and digital identity verification services.

Ivy is now widely recognized as a thought leader in the responsible adoption of technology to improve government efficiency and effectiveness in highly regulated spaces. She was celebrated at [Baruch College’s alumni Changemakers Awards](#) and worked with Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab’s Advancing Human with AI to [develop a report on the benchmarks for human flourishing](#). Ivy now advises social good oriented founders and executives working in government and technology and is publishing a [children’s book about her life as an immigrant](#).