

Translating Government Experience Into Practical Policy Guidance

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[The Aspen Institute's Policy Academy](#) turns professionals into policy advocates. We offer innovative training programs to equip leaders across sectors – from tech to climate, science to social impact – 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

[Ross Gillfillan](#) joined the Aspen Policy Academy's Train the Trainer program in 2023 after serving in the first Trump White House. While he came into the program with extensive experience in tech policy and strategic communications, the Train the Trainer program fundamentally deepened Ross's understanding of how policy is made and how to teach it effectively. He also gained a clearer framework for translating his government experience into practical guidance for others. Today, Ross is a regular guest instructor for the Academy's webinar programming, where he equips executives, emerging leaders, and policy newcomers with the tools to analyze, inform, and impact policy.

BACKGROUND

Prior to his involvement with the Academy – and after 15 years as a private sector communications leader in Silicon Valley – Ross served as a Senior Policy Advisor in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), the Domestic Policy Council, and the Office of Management and Budget during President Trump's first term. In these roles, he directed strategic communications, guided policy decisions, and reviewed legislation. His experience in the federal government shaped not only how he understood policymaking, but also his understanding of who could be a policymaker. For instance, Ross oversaw OSTP's policy internship program, getting passionate and curious young people involved in the policy space.

After leaving government, Ross applied to the Academy’s Train the Trainer initiative – a program that trains experienced policy professionals to teach the Academy’s methods for policy impact – because it combined his expertise in tech, policy, and communication with his interest in bringing more people into the policy conversation. In the program, Ross says he immediately resonated with the material—it built on everything he knew about policy and communications from the private and government sectors. Ross says the program gave him the tools and structure to translate his government experience into effective guidance for others who want to impact policy.

"Even with my White House experience, I feel like the way I talk about policy and how it's made is more informed and more approachable now based on what I learned in the Train the Trainer program."

Ross Gillfillan

IMPACT

Ross now regularly serves as a guest instructor for Academy courses. In the Academy’s 2024 Tech Executive Leadership Initiative, Ross shared his government and policy expertise, teaching STEM executives how to analyze government documents, advocate for policy solutions, and develop policy outputs. As a frequent instructor for our How to Write an Op-Ed webinar, Ross continues to apply his Academy training to teach others how to effectively share their ideas for policy change. He has even developed an Academy curriculum segment on bipartisan policymaking and communication.

Ross says it has been exciting and fulfilling to see how his teaching impacts his students: They actively engage in his Q&A sessions, eagerly share their op-eds for review, and gratefully receive his feedback. Ross also believes that the takeaways from the Train the Trainer program have strengthened his private consultant practice, giving him a more informed way to talk about policy and how it’s made. “No matter what [someone’s] personal objectives are, they’re going to walk away with a much more informed, intelligent, and grounded approach to policy,” Ross said of the program.

At the Aspen Policy Academy, he said, “You’re training the next great policy thinkers in how to do and think about policy.”