



**SCHOLARS**  
STRATEGY NETWORK

## SSN in the Trump GOP Era

DECEMBER 21, 2016

President Donald Trump and the Republican-controlled Congress have set out to take national debates and policy in abrupt new directions. Scholars have a role to play, providing journalists, policymakers, and citizens with research, evidence and analysis to make sense of these rapid changes and their consequences. SSN has a plan for 2017, unveiled in a [public letter](#) from SSN Director Theda Skocpol and explained in a recent [podcast](#) and [webinar](#).

### SSN 2017 Priorities

The Scholars Strategy Network is uniquely positioned to organize and empower researchers to respond to radical shifts in U.S. politics and public policymaking. With more than 700 member researchers located in 191 colleges and universities in 43 states, and with 24 chapters across the United States, scholars can supply research and evidence to civic leaders, policymakers, and journalists in the communities they represent. Over 170 scholars contributed ideas to inform SSN's plan to promote good public policy and defend democracy in 2017. For the year ahead, SSN has three core priorities.

#### **Communicate the impacts of radical policy shifts.**

In 2017, Washington is likely to advance many new policies, including some that may 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 citizens will connect cause and effect. Citizens, journalists and policymakers need research, evidence, and analysis to make thoughtful, deliberate decisions.

In a time of rapid policy change, researchers are well positioned to analyze new policies and explain who benefits and who pays. SSN will organize scholars to deliver timely, accurate information from a variety of perspectives. To make that information matter, SSN will help scholars combine data and evidence with stories, repetition, and media targeting that breaks out of the echo chambers of coastal elites. In a time when legislators are often operating without the research and information they need, SSN will help scholars inform policy staffers and citizens alike. Working in many of the districts and states that matter most to today's decision makers, scholars will build relationships with grassroots civic organizations and journalists. SSN's Trump Transparency Initiatives will help citizens understand what is at stake and what can be done over coming months and years. Issues include:

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

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

Federalism matters. In 2017, SSN members will speak out for cutting-edge policymaking in some states while defending basic rights in others – or even do both simultaneously in the same state, depending on the issue. To ramp up these efforts in 2017, SSN will help scholars become trusted collaborators in state and local policymaking. The network's 24 existing chapters will grow larger and more responsive to their communities. Scholars will forge reciprocal relationships across the ideological spectrum in states as varied as Utah, California, Oklahoma, and Ohio. 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 in their home states, often in their own districts. To increase impact and share research, SSN members will collaborate with organizations with grassroots capacity across states, like the Center for Community Change and the PICO network, and with organizations with relationships with policymakers, like the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities State Priorities Partnership and the National Conference of State Legislatures. Individual chapters will identify substantive projects on issues and research questions, based on the needs of stakeholders in their states. And SSN will grow. In 2017, SSN will organize new chapters in many places, including:

- Tempe, Arizona
- Denver, Colorado
- Tallahassee and Tampa, Florida
- East Lansing and Ann Arbor, Michigan
- Cleveland, Ohio
- State College, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

SSN will also create and deploy a best-in-the-nation training to help scholars learn ways to engage in the policy process.

## **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 in nomination battles, discussions over executive actions, and Congressional debates on legislation, not to mention providing research for litigation and being part of state and local debates on these issues.

Despite these challenges, at the state and local level, now is a time for evidence-based innovation. SSN will help scholars be part of city and state debates to offer ideas to ensure that every adult citizen is registered and able to vote. SSN will also advance new ideas for innovation in election rules, election timing, redistricting, money in politics, and representation – and help stakeholders understand the nuances and pros and cons of various reforms. Additionally, researchers will help their own colleges and universities identify and deploy best practices to develop a new generation of civically-engaged young leaders.

## **SSN 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. Too often, as the 2016 election amply demonstrated, 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. American democracy is not being 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 cost-effectively improve policy debates at every level. 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.