

Strategic Plan

2025 – 2030

The School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs

Northeastern University

cssh.northeastern.edu/policyschool

Boston · Arlington · Oakland

Message from the Director

The Policy School stands at a distinctive moment. Over twenty years, we have grown from a primarily Boston-focused urban affairs institution into a dynamic, globally engaged community of scholars, students, and partners. Over the past three years, we have built a multi-campus presence spanning Boston, Arlington, VA, and Oakland, CA. Our enrollment has grown and our research has extended from neighborhoods to nations to the United Nations. We achieved reaccreditation for the Public Administration Program and accreditation for the Urban Planning and Policy Program. We are strengthening the graduate programs across all three of our campuses and building out our undergraduate presence.

This Strategic Plan charts our next phase. It is built on a clear conviction: that policy education must go beyond classrooms and academic analysis. Students must experience public service directly. Scholarship must contribute to positive societal impact. And the institution itself must help society imagine and create more just, sustainable, and humane futures.

Five strategic directions guide our work through 2030:

- deepening experiential public service education
- advancing engaged scholarship that reshapes the field
- building inclusive excellence and strategic partnerships
- strengthening visibility through authentic intellectual leadership
- realizing One Policy School across our global cities: each campus with a distinctive identity rooted in place

This plan belongs to our entire community: faculty who bring expertise and passion to every classroom, staff who sustain our operations across three campuses and online, students who inspire us daily with their dedication to public service, and partners and alumni who carry our mission into the world. I invite you to join us in turning these aspirations into reality.

Maria Ivanova

*Director, The Policy School
Northeastern University*

Vision, Mission, and Values

VISION

To foster just, enduring, and transformative change through global insight, local experience, and collaborative education.

MISSION

The Policy School prepares students to be ethical, collaborative, and impactful leaders through interdisciplinary education, experiential learning, and inclusive community engagement. We equip future policy innovators with rigorous skills to address global challenges, advance social justice, and promote sustainable development through research, collaboration, and public service.

VALUES

Equity and Inclusiveness

We champion a culture of diversity, inclusion, justice, and belonging—ensuring every voice is valued and empowered to contribute to impactful change.

Excellence and Impact

We pursue academic excellence and pedagogical innovation that bridges theory and practice, with success measured by meaningful community impact and the highest scholarly standards.

Engagement and Collaboration

We act as a policy hub connecting local insights to global solutions through our tri-city presence, mobilizing resources and centering community voices in policy decisions.

Experiential Learning

We equip students with real-world skills through research, teaching, and community collaboration—creating measurable improvements in people's lives.

Ethics and Leadership

We cultivate ethical, creative leaders who drive impactful policy change for societal benefit, promoting transparency, accountability, and trust through sustained engagement.

Institutional Identity

The Policy School is defined by five interconnected commitments that shape how we teach, research, and engage with the world.

Experiential Public Service

Students learn public service through study and through practice. Experiential learning is embedded throughout the educational model—via co-ops, community partnerships, applied research, and collaboration with governmental, nonprofit, international, and civic organizations.

Engaged Scholarship

Our scholarship contributes to public understanding, informs policy, and strengthens communities. Faculty research is grounded in intellectual rigor while remaining connected to practice, lived experience, and societal impact.

Local-to-Global Governance

We approach governance as an interconnected system linking neighborhoods, cities, nations, and global institutions. Rather than separating local, national, and international policy domains, we address challenges across scales of governance in an integrated manner.

Policy, Culture, and the Arts

We recognize the role of culture, storytelling, and the arts in shaping public imagination and societal transformation. Through collaborations across disciplines and sectors, the School creates spaces where policy, creativity, and civic engagement intersect.

Leadership through Collaboration

We prepare students to listen, collaborate, lead, and serve. Leadership is understood as a collective endeavor grounded in responsibility, humility, and the capacity to transform individual aspirations into shared action.

Areas of Focus

The Policy School advances research, education, and public engagement across five interconnected areas central to contemporary public service and governance. These areas reflect our historic strengths, evolving expertise, and commitment to addressing complex challenges across local, national, and global contexts.

Urban Innovation

Building on the School's roots in urban affairs and public administration, we address challenges related to cities, planning, mobility, housing, civic systems, urban analytics, and public sector innovation. We advance equitable, sustainable, and responsive institutions and communities.

Environment and Sustainability

We advance interdisciplinary work on sustainability, climate governance, environmental policy, environmental justice, and global environmental governance, engaging questions of institutional transformation, science-policy collaboration, plastics and circularity, and the governance of complex environmental systems at multiple scales.

Thriving Communities, Equity, and Justice

We strengthen inclusive, resilient, and thriving communities through research, teaching, and public engagement focused on equity, justice, democratic participation, human services, public health, civic empowerment, and community well-being. Our work is grounded in dignity, inclusion, and community participation.

International Affairs and Global Governance

We advance understanding of international institutions, diplomacy, development, multilateralism, migration, sustainability, and transnational cooperation. We prepare students to navigate an increasingly interconnected world shaped by global interdependence and shared public challenges.

Policy, Culture, and the Arts

Building on our institutional commitment to policy, culture, and the arts, we develop curriculum, research, and public programming that use creative and narrative methods, from documentary and public art to oral history and design, to advance civic dialogue and policy impact.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1**Experiential Public Service Education**

Students don't just study public service, they practice it.

At the Policy School, experiential public service is the foundation of our educational model. Students examine real policy challenges in their coursework, collaborate with community partners on crafting solutions, and complete co-ops with government agencies, nonprofits, and international organizations. We believe transformative policy leaders are built through action.

Goal 1.1 — Shape the Future of Policy Education

Redefine policy education by integrating experiential public service at every level — from undergraduate exploration to graduate specialization to executive and lifelong learning.

OBJECTIVES

- Build comprehensive educational pathways spanning undergraduate, graduate, professional certificate, and executive education.
- Develop distinctive program identities that reflect evolving policy challenges and labor market needs.
- Innovate curriculum in emerging fields, including AI policy and governance.

Goal 1.2 — Advance Experiential and Lifelong Learning

Expand flexible, accessible learning opportunities that serve students throughout their careers, embracing both online and place-based modalities.

OBJECTIVES

- Expand online learning infrastructure to serve a multi-campus network and diverse learner needs.
- Create certificate programs that reflect the dynamics of the job market and are suitable for degree-seekers and working professionals.
- Develop executive education programs serving government employees and nonprofit leaders.

Goal 1.3 — Cultivate Policy Leadership across Generations

Create pathways for emerging and established leaders to engage with cutting-edge policy challenges, fostering a community of scholars and practitioners committed to public service excellence.

OBJECTIVES

- Establish fellowship and scholar programs connecting emerging and senior policy leaders with Policy School faculty and research.
- Build international exchange and visiting scholar programs that bring global perspectives to our campuses.
- Strengthen partnerships with leadership development initiatives including PPIA fellowship (Public Policy and International Affairs Program) and Opportunity Scholars programs.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2**Engaged Scholarship that Advances the Field**

Research connected to communities, designed to influence policy and practice.

The Policy School's research mission extends from creating knowledge to shaping policy, practice, and the field. Our faculty pursue a wide range of rigorous scholarship, independently and collaboratively. The Policy Innovation Hub brings together six interdisciplinary research centers, several of which engage faculty from across Northeastern, to strengthen collaboration and advance engaged scholarship informed by policy and community priorities. Together, these forms of inquiry connect academic rigor with practice, lived experience, and societal impact.

Goal 2.1 — Reshape Public Service through Engaged Scholarship

Advance research that shapes the evolving field of public service connecting academic rigor and community wisdom.

OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen collaboration across Policy Innovation Hub centers to amplify research impact.
- Establish dedicated funding mechanisms for community-engaged research partnerships.
- Create processes for participatory and co-designed research with community partners.

Goal 2.2 — Embed Experiential Engagement throughout Programs

Move beyond traditional co-ops and internships to infuse participatory and experiential practices throughout the curriculum, ensuring every student performs public service in addition to studying it.

OBJECTIVES

- Integrate experiential and participatory methodologies into coursework across all programs.
- Develop programs and certificates informed by consultation with community partners, employers, alumni, and students.
- Create opportunities for students and faculty to engage in public service action through community events and collaborative problem-solving.

Goal 2.3 — Demonstrate Research Excellence and Public Impact

Showcase our engaged scholarship through innovative platforms that make research accessible, actionable, and visible to practitioners, policymakers, and communities.

OBJECTIVES

- Launch platforms for sharing research, including an Engaged Research Showcase and a public service lecture and action series.
- Increase competitive research funding supporting community-engaged and interdisciplinary work.
- Create visibility for research impact through multiple channels across academic and public audiences.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3**Community, Excellence, Partnership**

A community defined not by proximity, but by shared purpose and values.

The Policy School's strength lies in our community — students and faculty, staff and alumni, research partners and practitioners — united by a belief that rigorous policy analysis, ethical public service, and sustained community engagement can spark lasting change. Our community extends beyond our campuses through strategic partnerships that amplify our impact and create more opportunities for students and faculty to connect, lead, and contribute.

Goal 3.1 — Build a Community Grounded in Inclusive Excellence

Create a learning environment where diversity actively shapes our scholarship, pedagogy, and community culture, and every member finds an opportunity to contribute.

OBJECTIVES

- Recruit and retain diverse students and faculty across all campuses.
- Expand financial support for students.
- Foster an inclusive climate through regular assessment, dialogue, and community building.

Goal 3.2 — Cultivate Collaborative Culture and Shared Purpose

Strengthen our collective identity and purpose through intentional community building, mentorship, and opportunities for collaboration across programs and campuses.

OBJECTIVES

- Create regular opportunities for community gathering and collaboration.
- Enhance mentorship pathways supporting professional growth for faculty, staff, and students.
- Recognize and celebrate excellence in community-engaged scholarship and public service.

Goal 3.3 — Build Strategic Partnerships that Extend Our Impact

Develop mutually beneficial partnerships with organizations, institutions, and networks that amplify our research, expand experiential learning, and connect students to careers in public service.

OBJECTIVES

- Establish formal engagement with professional associations (NASPAA, ASPA, APPAM) and other professional communities.
- Develop strategic partnerships with peer policy schools nationally and internationally.
- Build alumni networks supporting student recruitment, mentorship, and career placement.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4**Visibility through Authentic Engagement**

The most powerful form of communication is the work itself.

The Policy School's approach to visibility is grounded in a conviction that reputation is built through impact. Research that shapes communities, students engaged in public service, partnerships that produce genuine policy change, and faculty whose expertise informs urgent public discourse are the foundations of our visibility strategy. We are transitioning from traditional communications toward a model that showcases our intellectual leadership and public contributions.

Goal 4.1 — Establish a Distinctive Identity in Public Policy Education

Articulate and communicate what makes the Policy School unique: our commitment to experiential public service, our local-to-global engagement, our place-based network across cities, and our role in shaping the fields of public policy and practice across issue areas.

OBJECTIVES

- Develop a comprehensive reputation and visibility strategy rooted in intellectual leadership.
- Position the Policy School as a nationally and internationally recognized leader in experiential public service education.
- Explore pathways to becoming a named school, reinforcing our distinctive identity.

Goal 4.2 — Innovate Visibility Strategies for the Digital Age

Embrace innovative visibility approaches that reach and engage diverse audiences through video content, innovative digital platforms, and community-building events rather than relying on traditional marketing alone.

OBJECTIVES

- Shift toward a video-first visibility strategy optimized for AI-driven search and digital discovery across platforms.
- Enhance digital infrastructure including the School's website and multimedia platforms.
- Create visibility through community-building events and public service action in addition to the traditional broadcast communications.

Goal 4.3 — Showcase Research Excellence and Societal Impact

Make our research, teaching, and community engagement visible and accessible to practitioners, policymakers, scholars, and communities through multiple platforms and formats.

OBJECTIVES

- Publish regular research communications showcasing faculty and student scholarship and its real-world impact.
- Create public convenings that bring together scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.
- Launch thought leadership platforms including a Policy Perspectives Series, a public service lecture, and alumni stories.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5**One Policy School across Global Cities***Distinctive places with shared purpose.*

The Policy School's presence in Boston, Arlington, and Oakland is our most distinctive strategic advantage. We are a unified network where students and faculty are deeply engaged with the neighborhoods, government agencies, and policy challenges of each city while remaining connected to global policy conversations and international collaborations. Each campus brings distinctive strengths; together, they make us something no single-location institution can replicate.

Goal 5.1 — Build a Unified Network with Place-Based Strengths

Create One Policy School that operates as a coordinated network across Boston, Arlington, and Oakland, ensuring consistent quality while celebrating the unique contributions each location brings to our collective mission.

OBJECTIVES

- Implement unified standards for program quality and student experience across all campuses.
- Foster collaboration and exchange across campuses in faculty, students, and resources.
- Create seamless student pathways within our network.

Goal 5.2 — Develop Location-Specific Strategic Identities

Position each campus to leverage its unique geographic and institutional context: Boston as our interdisciplinary policy hub, Arlington as our federal and international policy center, Oakland as our West Coast urban policy base.

OBJECTIVES

- Establish Arlington as a premier destination for federal policy education and executive programs and cultivate relevant partnerships.
- Build Oakland's visibility as a hub for sustainability, climate policy, and West Coast urban engagement.
- Strengthen Boston's role as a policy hub for community partnerships and regional policy networks while anchoring the global campus network.

Goal 5.3 — Build Sustainable Institutional Capacity

Strengthen the operational, philanthropic, and leadership infrastructure required to sustain excellence, collaboration, and innovation across a multi-campus and globally engaged institution.

OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen faculty and staff capacity across the network to meet accreditation and quality standards.
- Increase philanthropic support through gift funds and strategic partnerships.
- Develop location-appropriate revenue streams including executive education and professional certificates that are aligned with academic quality standards and faculty capacity.

Goal 5.4 — Integrate Undergraduate and Graduate Pathways

Build seamless educational journeys that allow students to move through Northeastern’s global campus network — from undergraduate education in any city to graduate specialization in another — creating unique learning experiences unavailable elsewhere.

OBJECTIVES

- Develop integrated pathways connecting undergraduate and graduate programs across campuses and disciplines.
- Build partnerships with feeder institutions — including community colleges and undergraduate programs — to strengthen the graduate pipeline.
- Create transfer and exchange mechanisms that support student mobility across our network.
- Expand undergraduate co-op placements for a distinct policy education experience.

Implementation and Evaluation

This Strategic Plan is a living framework that is aspirational and directional, and responsive to changing conditions. Progress will be assessed through an annual review process conducted each spring, examining:

- progress toward stated goals and objectives
- resource allocation and utilization
- outcomes achieved relative to targets
- emerging challenges or opportunities requiring strategic adjustment
- stakeholder satisfaction among faculty, staff, students, alumni, Advisory Council, and external partners

Annual reviews will explicitly assess emerging opportunities and risks, ensuring our strategic directions remain responsive to the changing landscape of public policy education. This includes a range of current policy shifts, funding changes, enrollment trends, institutional priorities, and evolving labor market needs. However, we commit to remaining anchored in our mission and values.

Each strategic direction will have a designated faculty or staff lead, identified in consultation with the appropriate governance and administrative bodies and with consideration of available capacity and resources, responsible for coordinating implementation and reporting annually to the Director and the School’s advisory and governance bodies. Progress will be communicated on a regular basis.

Looking Toward 2030

By 2030, the Policy School seeks to be recognized — nationally and internationally — as a distinctive institution of public service education and engaged scholarship, defined by the depth of its experiential commitment and the breadth of its civic reach. We envision a future in which:

- students learn through public engagement and experiential practice and graduate prepared to lead with analytical rigor and practical wisdom
- faculty scholarship contributes to real-world policy change across the urban, environmental, international, and cultural domains
- communities in Boston, Arlington, Oakland, and beyond view the Policy School as a trusted and collaborative partner, as a neighbor and co-creator
- alumni are deeply connected to the School, serving as mentors and ambassadors
- the Policy School operates as a vibrant intellectual and civic hub connecting policy, sustainability, urban affairs, international affairs, civic engagement, and the arts.

This plan reflects the collective wisdom, effort, and aspirations of an entire community committed to developing ethical, effective policy leaders for an increasingly complex world.

Strategic Planning Contributors

This Strategic Plan integrates contributions of faculty, staff, students, alumni, advisors, and partners across multiple years of planning, reflection, and engagement. Titles and affiliations reflect contributors' roles during the strategic planning process.

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