

A Five-Year Plan 2026-2031



UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

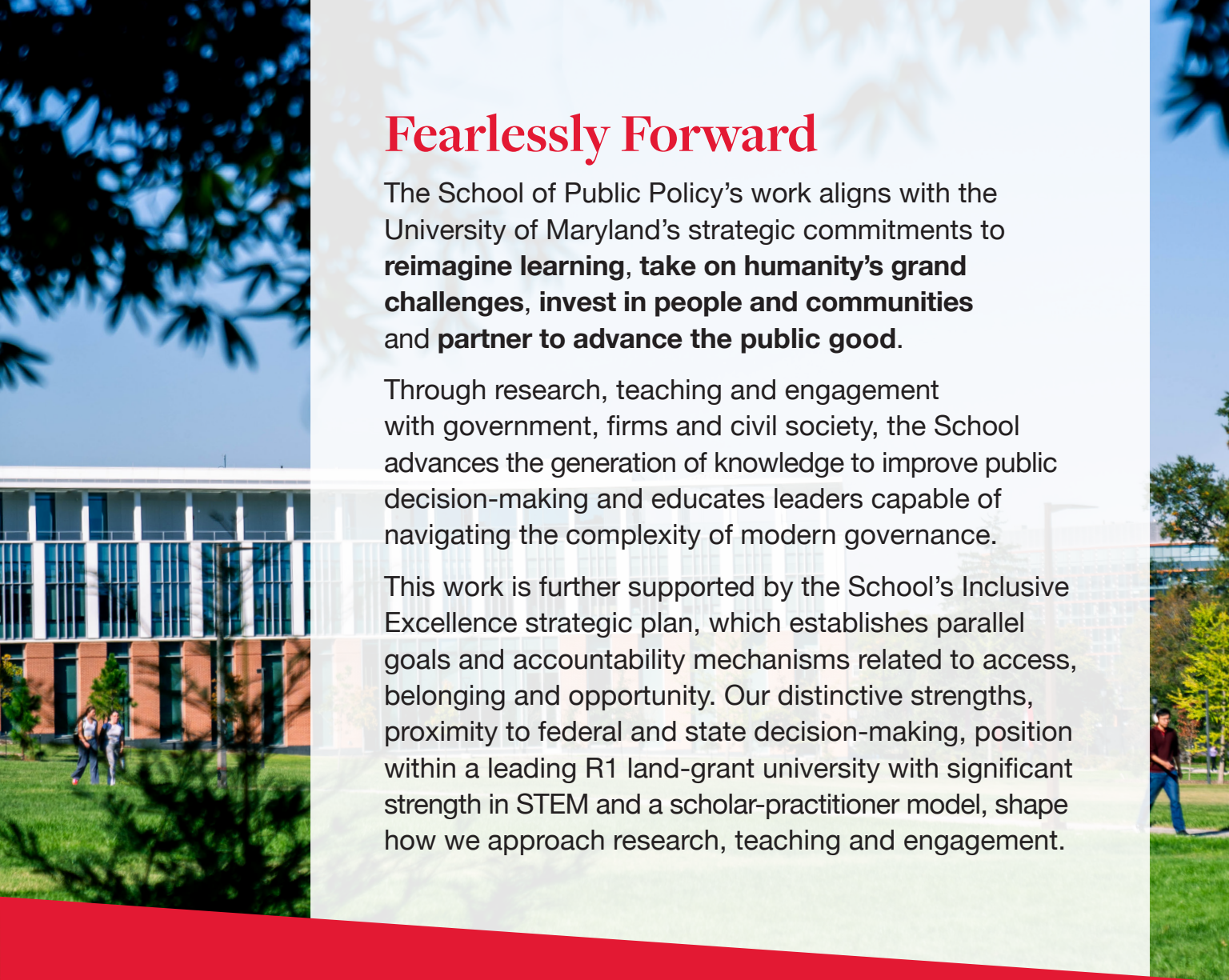


Introduction

Public policy determines how societies confront their most consequential challenges—from economic transformation and democratic resilience to environmental degradation and technological change. Addressing these challenges requires ethically grounded leaders who can combine analytical depth with practical judgment and who understand how evidence, institutions and politics interact to produce real-world outcomes.

The University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy exists to prepare those leaders and to generate research that advances the public good. Situated at the intersection of the nation’s capital and a flagship land-grant research university, the School is uniquely positioned to connect world-class scholarship with real-world policymaking and to further achieve national and international visibility.

Drawing on expertise across disciplines—from data science, engineering and economics to ethics, history, law, physics, political science and public management—the School generates policy solutions that are analytically sound, operationally feasible and responsive to the needs of communities locally, nationally and globally. From helping eliminate food insecurity in Prince George’s County, to mitigating the effects of climate change in Maryland neighborhoods, to informing federal responses that affect families impacted by the opioid crisis and partnering with communities in developing countries seeking sustainable infrastructure and economic opportunity, we serve people at every level by translating research and education into meaningful action.



Fearlessly Forward

The School of Public Policy's work aligns with the University of Maryland's strategic commitments to **reimagine learning, take on humanity's grand challenges, invest in people and communities and partner to advance the public good.**

Through research, teaching and engagement with government, firms and civil society, the School advances the generation of knowledge to improve public decision-making and educates leaders capable of navigating the complexity of modern governance.

This work is further supported by the School's Inclusive Excellence strategic plan, which establishes parallel goals and accountability mechanisms related to access, belonging and opportunity. Our distinctive strengths, proximity to federal and state decision-making, position within a leading R1 land-grant university with significant strength in STEM and a scholar-practitioner model, shape how we approach research, teaching and engagement.

Purpose

The purpose of this strategic plan is to articulate the School's priorities and guide its development over the coming years. It provides a framework for aligning our research, teaching and engagement activities with the most pressing policy challenges, while focusing institutional resources on areas of greatest impact. By clarifying our goals and strengths, the plan also communicates the School's vision to faculty, staff, students, alumni, partners and supporters, ensuring that our efforts remain coordinated, forward-looking and responsive to the evolving demands of public leadership and governance.

Our Mission

The School of Public Policy's mission is to advance the public good by producing evidence-based, policy-relevant research; educating ethical, effective public leaders and policy analysts; and engaging meaningfully with governments, communities and institutions locally, nationally and globally. As part of a flagship public, land-grant university, our work must be simultaneously excellent, accessible and impactful.

Our Values

At the School of Public Policy, we are guided by and model these values in practice:

- Purposeful discovery
- Ethical leadership and responsibility
- Free and open inquiry and discussion
- A community of belonging and respect
- Enhancing the public good through engagement and impact

Our Vision

In the next five years, the School of Public Policy will be recognized as a hub where rigorous analysis, innovative approaches and evidence-driven insight advance society and strengthen communities. Leveraging the University of Maryland's STEM expertise and the state's strategic investments in emerging technologies, our research, academic programs and policy engagement will inform complex, real-world decisions and connect scholarship directly to action across government, industry and civil society. Faculty, staff and students working together will strengthen the School's community, laying the foundation for lasting impact and positioning SPP as a nationally and internationally recognized place for evidence-informed policy analysis, educational excellence and leadership.

About the School of Public Policy

Founded in 1981, the School is home to eight centers and institutes and offers degree programs at the undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels as well as three graduate certificates:

Degree Programs

- Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy
- Bachelor of Arts in Global and Foreign Policy
- Master of Public Policy (MPP) and dual MPP/MBA, MPP/JD and MPP/MSW
- Master of Public Management (MPM) and an Executive MPM
- Master of Professional Studies in Public Administration (MPS-PA)
- PhD in Policy Studies
- Combined Bachelor's/Master's of Public Policy

Certificate Programs

- Intelligence Analysis
- Nonprofit Management and Leadership
- Public Sector Finance and Federal Acquisitions

Centers and Institutes

- Center for Global Sustainability (CGS)
- Center for Governance of Technology and Systems (GoTech)
- Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM)
- Civic Innovation Center (CivIC)
- Do Good Institute (DGI)
- Institute for Public Leadership (IPL)
- Global Policy Institute (GPI)
- Southern Population Aging Research Center (SPARC)

Our Plan

How We Developed the Strategic Plan

The strategic plan was developed over the course of the fall 2025 and spring 2026 semesters. A group of faculty and staff served as facilitators to collect input through community conversations moving from broad input in the fall to a final plan in the spring.

The facilitators gathered broad input from the community through guided listening sessions designed to surface ideas, priorities and strategies from every corner of our community, including students, staff, faculty and alumni. This exercise served as a foundation for discussions with the Assembly's subcommittee for strategic planning and the School's senior leadership team.

Based on this input and conversations, the dean circulated a draft of the strategic plan with the facilitators, Assembly subcommittee for strategic planning, School's senior leadership team and the broader School community for further comment. Following additional listening sessions and opportunities for written feedback, revisions were made to the draft and shared again with the facilitators, Assembly subcommittee for strategic planning and school's senior leadership team for final input prior to completion of the plan.



Overview of the Strategic Plan

We have organized our strategic priorities under three pillars and four cross-cutting themes across our six strategic focus areas.

Pillars

- Purpose-Driven Research
- Educational Excellence
- Policy Engagement

Cross-Cutting Themes

- Foster a Respectful and Thriving Community
- Drive Impact with Purpose
- Invest Strategically in Cutting-Edge Methods and Approaches
- Build an Ethos of Collaboration

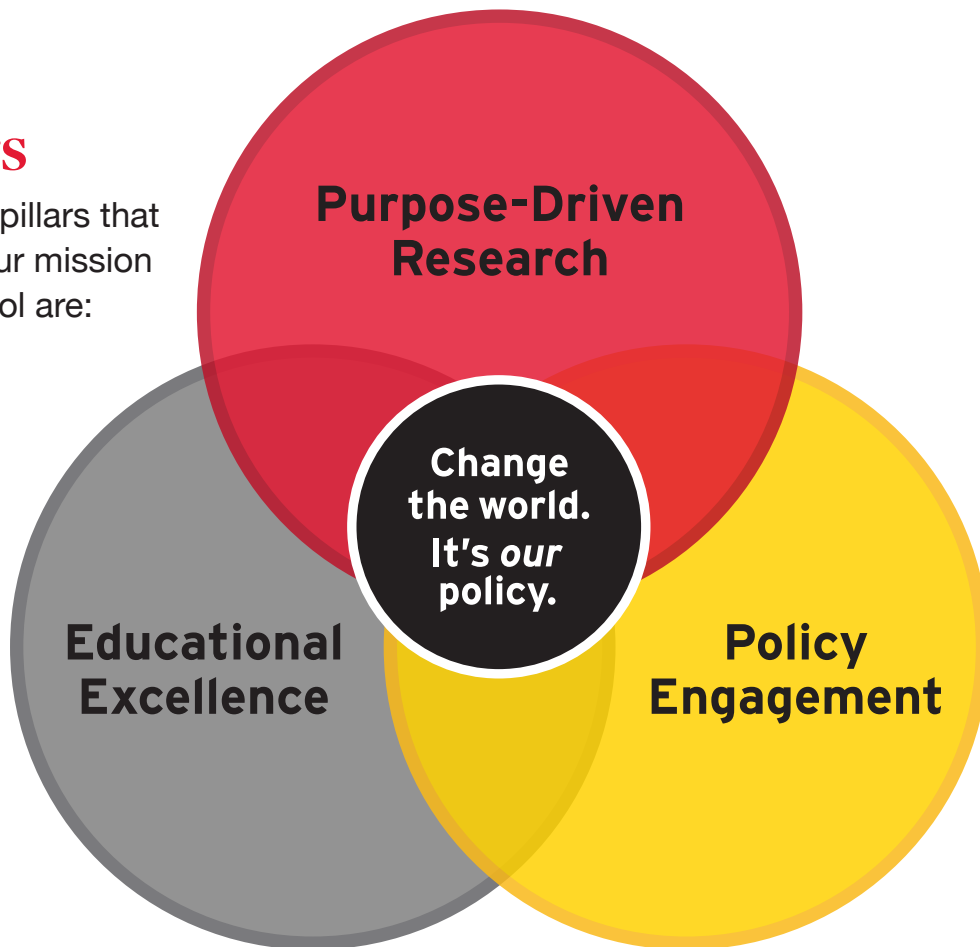
Strategic Focus Areas

- Global and Foreign Policy
- Leadership, Finance and Management
- Philanthropy and Nonprofits
- Science and Technology Policy
- Social Policy
- Sustainability



Pillars

The three pillars that support our mission as a School are:



Purpose-Driven Research

We will produce high-quality disciplinary and interdisciplinary research that informs decision-making and tackles the most consequential policy issues facing society.

Educational Excellence

We will equip civic-minded, ethical policy leaders with a comprehensive, practice-oriented education that builds the quantitative, qualitative, ethical, leadership and management skills they need to succeed in the workplace and improve outcomes for communities.

Policy Engagement

We will serve as a trusted, visible partner for policymakers and communities by translating research into practice, communicating evidence clearly and embedding real-world engagement into teaching and learning.



Pillar 1: Purpose-Driven Research

We will produce high-quality disciplinary and interdisciplinary research that informs decision-making and tackles the most consequential policy issues facing society.

Pillar 1: Purpose-Driven Research

Goal 1

Strengthen policy-relevant research that addresses urgent public challenges and builds depth in SPP's priority areas of strength.

ACTION 1: Recruit and retain leading scholars, practitioners and scholar-practitioners whose work is diverse across expertise and perspective and combines analytical expertise with practical policy impact, enhancing the School's national and international reputation.

ACTION 2: Anchor research in strong disciplinary methods while encouraging collaboration across fields to generate insights that inform both scholarship and practice.

ACTION 3: Invest in and expand the capacity of centers and institutes and assess opportunities for new ones to serve as collaborative platforms for interdisciplinary, high-impact policy research.

ACTION 4: Translate and share research through leading policy outputs such as peer-reviewed journals, books, policy briefs and sustained engagement with policymakers, practitioners and communities to broaden reach and influence.

ACTION 5: Foster a supportive research culture that values integrity, collaboration and scholarship.



Pillar 1: Purpose-Driven Research

Goal 2

Expand and strengthen SPP's externally funded research portfolio including through grants and philanthropic opportunities.

ACTION 1: Establish a comprehensive research support structure throughout the grant lifecycle, including investment in skilled research development and administrative staff, as well as seed funding to help faculty build and sustain competitive grant-funded programs, with particular attention to early-career scholars.

ACTION 2: Proactively support the pursuit of larger, multi-investigator and center-scale opportunities, such as collaborative grants, training programs and institutional awards.

ACTION 3: Align faculty hiring with areas of research growth by prioritizing candidates who strengthen the School's research portfolio.

Goal 3

Strengthen strategic partnerships across the University of Maryland and beyond to advance high-impact, policy-relevant research.

ACTION 1: Work with campus partners to expand access to shared technical and analytical resources that support rigorous, transparent and reproducible research, including data acquisition, management, security, computing and archiving.

ACTION 2: Develop joint initiatives with complementary UMD units, such as the Artificial Intelligence Interdisciplinary Institute at Maryland (AIM) and the Maryland Democracy Initiative (MDI), to deepen interdisciplinary scholarship in priority policy areas and coordinate faculty recruitment that builds shared strengths.

ACTION 3: Cultivate and sustain international collaborations that extend the School's global engagement and amplify the reach and relevance of our research.

ACTION 4: Expand long-term relationships with government, private, nonprofit and community organizations to translate research into practice and improve outcomes locally in Prince George's County, the state of Maryland and beyond.

Pillar 1: Purpose-Driven Research

Goal 4

Enhance the strength, competitiveness and career outcomes of the public policy doctoral program as part of the School's broader research ecosystem.

ACTION 1: Implement a consistent, multi-year funding model that sets up students for success and enables SPP to compete effectively with leading doctoral programs.

ACTION 2: Pursue new and diversified funding streams to stabilize the size and disciplinary breadth of the PhD cohort in alignment with faculty strengths and strategic priorities.

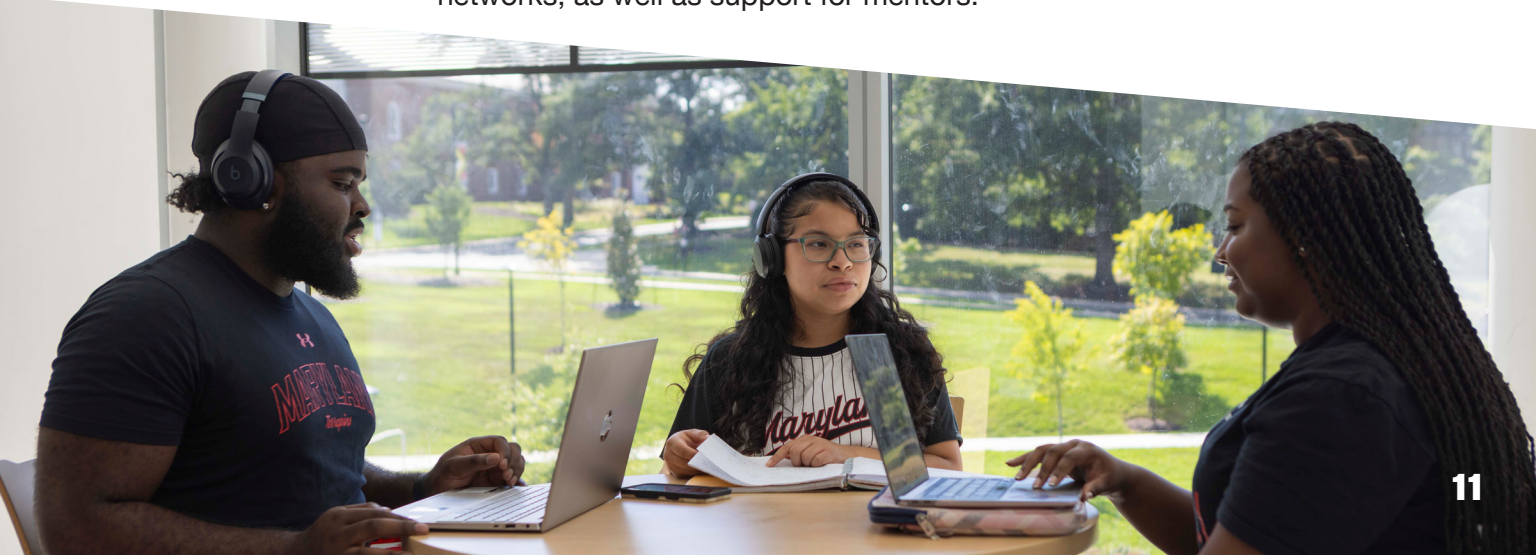
ACTION 3: Elevate doctoral education through advanced coursework, research opportunities with faculty, structured professional development and targeted advising and career support to prepare graduates for success across academic, policy and applied career paths.

Goal 5

Strengthen pathways that cultivate and support the next generation of policy research scholars.

ACTION 1: Expand funded research opportunities and partnerships, including grants, philanthropy and faculty-led projects, to provide students across our programs with meaningful, hands-on research experience.

ACTION 2: Offer coordinated professional development and research support for emerging scholars, including advanced methods training, grant writing and policy communication workshops, responsible research practices and peer-based accountability and mentoring networks, as well as support for mentors.





Pillar 2: Educational Excellence

We will equip civic-minded, ethical policy leaders with a comprehensive, practice-oriented education that builds the quantitative, qualitative, ethical, leadership and management skills they need to succeed in the workplace and improve outcomes for communities.

Pillar 2: Educational Excellence

Goal 1

Attract and support a student body of talented, purpose-driven leaders.

ACTION 1: Strengthen recruitment and outreach to engage high-achieving students who are motivated to advance the public good and prepared to succeed in policy-focused careers.

ACTION 2: Provide coordinated, high-quality support across the student lifecycle, including admissions, advising and mentoring, student services and career development, to promote academic success and strong employment outcomes.

ACTION 3: Expand peer, alumni and practitioner mentoring networks to foster connection, belonging and informed career pathways.

ACTION 4: Invest in curricular and co-curricular experiences that build community, enhance engagement and create an inclusive environment where students can thrive.

Goal 2

Strengthen existing degree programs and strategically expand offerings in areas of growth and demand so that students are equipped with the tools they need to succeed in the workplace, including quantitative and qualitative skills.

ACTION 1: Invest in degree programs in priority fields, including science and technology policy, that align with workforce needs and SPP's areas of expertise.

ACTION 2: Partner with units across campus to develop joint and collaborative degrees, flexible pathways and accessible options for working professionals and non-traditional learners.

ACTION 3: Regularly review and update curricula to ensure alignment with the School's mission and Inclusive Excellence strategic plan, emerging policy challenges and the skills required for professional practice.

ACTION 4: Blend faculty instruction across degree programs to leverage faculty strengths and create a more integrated academic experience for students.

Pillar 2: Educational Excellence

Goal 3

Expand innovative non-degree and lifelong learning opportunities to reach new student populations and expand access to policy education.

ACTION 1: Develop targeted outreach and recruitment initiatives to build a pipeline of undergraduate and graduate students and create early interest in policy careers.

ACTION 2: Grow online and certificate-based offerings, including entrepreneurial and short-format programs, in partnership with the University of Maryland to meet evolving learner needs.

ACTION 3: Create stronger connections between residential, executive and professional programs through shared courses, networking and alumni engagement.

Goal 4

Increase access and affordability while expanding experiential learning.

ACTION 1: Pursue fundraising priorities that support student access, including scholarships, fellowships and resources for experiential learning opportunities across all programs.

ACTION 2: Work closely with university development partners to secure philanthropic support that reduces financial barriers and strengthens applied learning experiences.





Pillar 3: Policy Engagement

We will serve as a trusted, visible partner for policymakers and communities by translating research into practice, communicating evidence clearly and embedding real-world engagement into teaching and learning.

Pillar 3: Policy Engagement

Goal 1

Equip faculty with the tools, incentives and support to integrate policy engagement into their research and teaching.

ACTION 1: Provide targeted professional development and training that builds faculty capacity to communicate research to policymakers, practitioners and public audiences.

ACTION 2: Launch an engaged scholar-practitioner or fellows program that offers mentorship and structured support for faculty seeking deeper, sustained policy engagement.

ACTION 3: Invest in media support structures and strategies to help project the School's intellectual contributions locally, nationally and internationally.

Goal 2

Make applied, real-world learning a core component of every student's experience.

ACTION 1: Expand access to policy labs, capstones, internships, study abroad and applied projects through courses and fostering experiential learning initiatives, including through our centers and institutes, so that all students participate in meaningful experiential learning.

ACTION 2: Create advanced opportunities for students seeking deeper involvement, including sustained placements and longer-term partnerships with external organizations.

ACTION 3: Secure philanthropic and grant support to remove financial barriers to participation in internships, fieldwork and other applied experiences.



Pillar 3: Policy Engagement

Goal 3

Build the infrastructure and partnerships needed to sustain engagement across the School.

ACTION 1: Establish and support fellows or practitioner-in-residence programs that bring experienced policy leaders and changemakers (including international voices) to collaborate with the SPP community.

ACTION 2: Develop a network of long-term partnerships with government, private, nonprofit and community organizations locally and nationally to create consistent opportunities for collaboration, research translation and student learning.



Cross-Cutting Themes

Our staff, students and faculty identified four cross-cutting themes to guide our collective approach. We are committed to implementing our strategic plan in a manner that allows us to:

Foster a Respectful and Thriving Community

We recognize that students, staff, faculty and alumni each play an essential role in the School's success. We are committed to cultivating an inclusive, high-performing environment grounded in human dignity, mutual respect, shared purpose and opportunities for every member of our community to contribute and grow. This commitment builds directly on the School's Inclusive Excellence strategic plan, which articulates goals for access, belonging, opportunity and success across all dimensions of our community.

- Build a shared sense of ownership for SPP's success and affirm the value of each individual's contribution to the School's future.

- Invest in staff development, recognition and career pathways to ensure staff are supported as essential contributors to the School's success.

- Strengthen internal communication to promote transparency, improve coordination and reduce silos across programs and units.

- Create regular spaces for connection, learning and exchange that promote belonging, encourage civil dialogue and thoughtful debate and foster engagement across various perspectives.

Drive Impact with Purpose

We will focus our time and resources on work that delivers measurable benefits for people and communities, ensuring that our research, teaching and partnerships translate into meaningful policy outcomes.

- Concentrate research agendas, courses and external collaborations on urgent policy challenges with clear public value, grounded in real-world policy needs to prepare graduates to contribute effectively to the wellbeing of their communities across public, private and nonprofit sectors.

- Attract and retain faculty whose scholarship and instruction shape decisions and advance policy change at scale.

- Invest in experiential learning experiences that connect students directly to real-world problems and decision-making contexts.

- Translate and share research through accessible communications that reach policymakers, practitioners and broader policy audiences.

- Prepare students for impactful careers by integrating experiential learning with strong advising, mentoring and career development support.



Invest strategically in Cutting-Edge Methods and Approaches

We will continue to expand the research, course-based and experiential opportunities to equip the next generation of leaders with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in an increasingly demanding job market.

Prioritize investment in areas of distinctive methodological strength and emerging opportunity where SPP can achieve national visibility and impact.

Integrate technology into policy education and research across research, teaching and impact.

Strengthen recruitment, advising, mentoring and career support to ensure students have the tools to succeed professionally after graduation.



Build an Ethos of Collaboration

We will strengthen connections across the School, the University of Maryland, Prince George's County, the state of Maryland, the United States and global partners to co-create solutions to complex policy challenges and extend the impact of our research, teaching and engagement.

Develop partnerships across SPP and the University to recruit outstanding faculty, advance interdisciplinary scholarship and deepen policy engagement.

Integrate students into faculty-led research and community- and partner-based projects as a routine part of their academic experience.

Establish regular opportunities for faculty, staff and students to share work, exchange ideas and identify cross-unit collaborations.

Cultivate long-term, reciprocal relationships with external organizations that support impactful research and hands-on learning.

Strategic Plan Rubric

Centering our work around these four cross-cutting themes will help focus us as we weigh the various trade-offs inherent in achieving our goals. For example, as we build our global policy footprint, we will prioritize strategies that are collaborative and high impact.

THRIVING COMMUNITY

PURPOSEFUL IMPACT

CUTTING-EDGE METHODS

COLLABORATION ETHOS

PURPOSE-DRIVEN RESEARCH



EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE



POLICY ENGAGEMENT





Strategic Focus Areas

The School has six strategic focus areas as identified in this plan. They reflect School strengths and provide a framework around which research, teaching and engagement activities of similar substantive focus can coalesce and continue to build. While recognizing the plurality of activity occurring within the School and the value of having such a diverse portfolio, the strategic focus areas seek to bring together the many parts into a more clear, cohesive and impactful whole.

The strategic focus areas help to organize the School across two distinct axes: 1) across the research, teaching and engagement functions; and 2) across our academic programs: undergraduate, master's, doctoral and executive education. The focus areas are an important means of organizing ourselves, leveraging our efforts to maximum effect and communicating our strengths and depth of activity in given spheres.

Global and Foreign Policy

A globalized world drives issues that cross borders and span jurisdictions and demands policy professionals that can navigate the complexity of multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary challenges. We generate research and prepare students to address these challenges and design policies that promote stability, cooperation and more equitable global outcomes.

Leadership, Finance and Management

Public policy practitioners, regardless of technical specialization, must lead people, manage resources and be held accountable for their actions. We advance evidence-based approaches to leadership, finance and management and equip students to lead with judgment and integrity, working across boundaries to deliver results that improve outcomes for the communities they serve.

Philanthropy and Nonprofits

The nonprofit sector serves as a vehicle for individual and collective action. Nonprofit organizations respond to policy by providing needed social services, funding and innovative solutions to pressing issues and shape policy through advocacy, systems change and implementation, among many other contributions. We recognize a thriving civil society as essential to democracy and reflective of a pluralistic society. We connect scholarship to practice, examining how resources, mission and partnerships drive philanthropy and nonprofits and equipping students with the tools to do good.

Science and Technology Policy

Science and technology play a central role in our contemporary lives, intersecting with multiple areas of public policy from the environment and human health to national security and international affairs. We produce research and prepare students to navigate these intersections, advancing policy approaches that guide innovation and strengthen cross-sector collaboration for public benefit.

Social Policy

Social policy examines how public policies and programs across contexts are designed and governed to organize social and economic life, from education and workforce systems to immigration, public safety, housing, health and child and family well-being. We bring expertise in institutional design, democratic governance, budgeting, markets and regulation to analyze how policy systems shape opportunity and outcomes across local, national and global contexts. We prepare students to evaluate policy impact and develop solutions that strengthen communities and improve lives.

Sustainability

Among the most pressing challenges of our time are sustainability issues, including energy, climate change, resilience and sustainable development. We strive to contribute to addressing them through evidence-based research and the development of future leaders. We bridge evidence-based analysis and real-world implementation to turn sustainability solutions from ideas into action.

Implementation and Progress

Implementation of the Strategic Plan

To implement the Strategic Plan, for each goal and action we will:

- Establish defined timelines and milestones to guide progress and sequence implementation
- Identify measurable indicators to track performance and improvement over time
- Align resources with priorities by developing funding plans where additional investment is required
- Evaluate whether our efforts are producing the intended results

Pillars → Goals → Actions → Metrics → Outputs → Outcomes





Using Data to Assess Progress

For every goal and action, we will establish clear measures to monitor progress, evaluate outcomes and inform decision-making through the School's shared governance processes. Implementation planning will include the development of timelines, operational priorities and appropriate indicators of success to ensure that progress is regularly assessed and aligned with the School's strategic direction. The School's senior leadership team, in partnership with faculty, staff and students, will work collaboratively to enhance these measures over time and identify opportunities for adjustment as conditions and priorities evolve.

We will analyze student data, from admissions through career outcomes, to better align curricula, student support and workforce preparation with evolving student needs and labor market demands to inform the continued growth and refinement of academic programs. We will also track indicators of faculty research activity including external funding and awards, scholarly recognition, policy engagement and research impact to assess the growth and reach of our scholarly enterprise. Additional qualitative and quantitative measures will be developed as needed to evaluate effectiveness, strengthen coordination across the School and guide continuous improvement across programs.

This strategic plan spans five years, from fall 2026 to summer 2031. In 2029, we will conduct a mid-cycle review to evaluate progress, identify areas where goals are off track and make adjustments to ensure the plan remains responsive, realistic and impactful.

Looking Forward

Through this strategic plan, the School of Public Policy will further strengthen its reputation as a dynamic hub for purpose-driven research, educational excellence and policy engagement. At the center of this effort is our responsibility to equip future policymakers with the cutting edge tools needed to understand rapid technological change and succeed in a competitive job market. We will continue to prepare graduates who can lead organizations, analyze complex policy problems and translate evidence into action across sectors.

We will be guided across all that we do by a commitment to fostering a respectful and thriving community, driving impact with purpose, investing strategically in cutting-edge methods and approaches and building an ethos of collaboration based on inclusive excellence. Together, these themes reflect the University of Maryland's pledge to reimagine learning, take on humanity's grand challenges, invest in people and communities and partner to advance the public good.

Building on our strengths and grounded in our shared purpose, we are dedicated to shaping policy that improves lives and communities at the local, national and global levels for generations to come. ●

