

# TRAINING FOR PUBLIC AND POLICY ENGAGEMENT

## Lessons from 20 Years of Bridging the Gap Programming

New Era Workshop (NEW)

International Policy  
Summer Institute (IPSI)

FEBRUARY 2026  
WASHINGTON, DC



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## ABOUT BRIDGING THE GAP

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In 1993, Stanford professor Alexander George published *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy*.<sup>1</sup> Reflecting on the book fifteen years later, Harvard professor Joseph Nye, a distinguished scholar and practitioner, noted that George used the term “bridging,” rather than “eliminating,” very deliberately. George believed that academics were best suited to contributing to general knowledge about the types of problems policymakers face, and to demonstrating how carefully drawn historical lessons and applications of theory could prove helpful to them. Nye commented that in the period since George wrote his book, it seemed that the gap was growing, rather than being bridged.<sup>2</sup> Other scholars raised similar concerns.<sup>3</sup>

In that vein, the Bridging the Gap (BTG) initiative, named in recognition of George’s efforts, began in 2006 with its first New Era Workshop (NEW), held at the University of California, Berkeley. Several political science graduate students at Berkeley had raised with one of their professors their concern that there was little opportunity for them to discuss how to pursue policy-relevant research. Held annually, NEW has grown to include Ph.D. students from a wide range of American and international universities, further developing and refining its scenario-based method for analyzing future drivers of world politics for the purpose of generating policy-relevant research questions.<sup>4</sup>

In the 20 years since its creation, BTG has grown beyond NEW to encompass a broad portfolio of programs, including the International Policy Summer Institute (IPSI), begun in 2011, which provides faculty and post-docs from universities within and outside the United States with the tools and networks to produce and disseminate policy-relevant scholarly research for policy and public audiences; New Voices in National Security, which connects established and emerging scholars doing innovative research with members of the policy community to share knowledge and ideas on pressing policy challenges; Foundations for International Relations Studies and Training (FIRST), which helps undergraduates prepare for careers in international affairs; the Oxford University Press–Bridging the Gap book series, which publishes manuscripts written to engage both academic and policy audiences and make significant contributions to debates in both communities; and the Research on International Policy Implementation Lab, a BTG affiliate, which fosters the co-creation by scholars and practitioners of research-based policy solutions.

While BTG’s programming and initiatives are geared to our home disciplines of political science, public policy, and international relations, we see important potential for adaptive replicability in other disciplines. In this Report, as per the terms of a National Science Foundation subaward to BTG from American University, we focus particularly on our lessons learned from NEW and IPSI, our graduate student, post-doc, and faculty professional development programs.

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<sup>1</sup> George, Alexander. 1993. *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy*. US Institute of Peace Press.

<sup>2</sup> Nye, Joseph S., Jr. 2008. “Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Policy.” *Political Psychology* 29, 4: 593.

<sup>3</sup> See Feaver, Peter D. 1999. “The Theory-Policy Debate in Political Science and Nuclear Proliferation,” *National Security Studies Quarterly* 5, 3: 69-82; Jentleson, Bruce W. 2002. “The Need for Praxis: Bringing Policy Relevance Back In,” *International Security* 26, 4: 169-183; Nincic, Miroslav, Joseph Lepgold, eds. 2000. *Being Useful: Policy Relevance and International Relations Theory*. University of Michigan Press.

<sup>4</sup> Barma, Naazneen H., Brent Durbin, Eric Lorber and Rachel E. Whitlark. 2016. “Imagine a World in Which?: Using Scenarios in Political Science.” *International Studies Perspectives* 17, 2: 117-135.

# 1. THE NEW ERA WORKSHOP

Prepared by Naazneen H. Barma, Danielle Gilbert, and Michael Lee Weintraub

The New Era Workshop (NEW) is an annual three-day training program for PhD students in international affairs and related disciplines. It is a flagship program of Bridging the Gap (BTG), a two-decades-long endeavor to equip international affairs scholars with the skills to produce and disseminate policy-relevant and public-facing research, thereby promoting engagement between the scholarly, policy, and public spheres. The Carnegie Corporation of New York has funded the delivery of NEW since 2006, when it was established as the original professional development workshop and a cornerstone of Bridging the Gap.

This report takes stock of twenty years of the New Era Workshop. We describe its origins, goals, and programming, and we reflect on the lessons we have learned over two decades of delivering the workshop. Throughout the report, we draw on the results from a survey of our alumni, which we conducted in Spring 2025. Where relevant, we address key takeaways from the NEW experience for potential professional training programs for advanced PhD students in other disciplines. Although NEW is squarely focused on the international affairs arena in a substantive sense, some of the approaches we have developed could be of value for diverse networks of PhD students seeking to ask and answer questions of interest to policymakers and public, especially centered around interdisciplinary and methodologically pluralist lines of research.

## 1.1. What is the New Era Workshop?

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The New Era Workshop is intentionally distinct from traditional academic conferences. The NEW agenda integrates group activities and facilitated conversations with expert panels designed for PhD students in political science and related disciplines who are interested in conducting policy-relevant research and pursuing publicly engaged careers. At the core of the program is a scenario analysis exercise intended to help participants generate and shape policy-relevant research ideas by assessing key medium-term global challenges and opportunities. Past participants have incorporated ideas generated at NEW into dissertation projects, conference papers, peer-reviewed articles, and pieces in policy journals. Throughout the workshop, participants also learn from a series of foreign policy practitioners, scholars, and commentators about effective communication and responsible engagement in the policy and public spheres, along with concrete examples and strategies for pursuing careers that bridge academic research and policy practice. Although NEW was developed for emerging scholars of international affairs, each of these components holds relevance for other disciplines and scholars with an interest in engaging policymakers and the public with research.

The overall goals of and approach to NEW connect directly with the BTG leadership team's commitment to a specific perspective on "bridging the gap": Conducting policy-relevant research does not simply mean elaborating implications emerging from a pre-established research agenda, but instead represents a philosophy that influences the questions we ask and the role that we as scholars

embody in the world. NEW began as and remains a training program through which we impart this philosophy and a related set of skills to emerging scholars in our network. In addition, one way that BTG drives cultural change in the international relations discipline and in academia writ large is by fostering an ever-growing and influential community of scholars who are trained in—and committed to—this work. In doing so, we are helping to cultivate some of the changes we wish to see in academia, with particular attention to mentorship; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and the role of responsible scholarship in improving the practice of international politics. Such goals are shared by numerous other disciplines.

## 1.2. Why NEW?

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Scholars have increasingly valued extracurricular professional development for PhD students in political science and related disciplines.<sup>5</sup> These programs implicitly recognize and account for two gaps in traditional graduate training in international affairs that are also present in other disciplines. First, institutional PhD programs cannot devote sufficient time or resources to delivering the full range of skills that students desire. Second, graduate students seek to build professional networks with like-minded peers who share their interests, and many of those networks exist outside their home institutions. Over the last three decades, a new set of extra-curricular programs in international affairs have continued to expand on these two goals. Such programs embody a recognition that junior scholars seek not only additional research training, but broader professionalization and career advice beyond their institutional homes.<sup>6</sup>

We launched the New Era Workshop into this budding ecosystem with the shared goal of providing extracurricular training and networking building. NEW was initiated by a group of Political Science PhD students at the University of California, Berkeley, who sought to infuse their doctoral studies in international relations with more conversations about contemporary foreign policy. The workshop was explicitly intended to bring together and build a network of PhD students seeking to ask and answer questions of interest to policymakers and the public. The project emerged from a desire for connection—to the “real-world” policy debates often absent from PhD programs; to other PhD students interested in policy; and to mid-career experts in potential career fields (e.g., policymakers, professors, policy commentators). Once the network was firmly established, we also intentionally

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<sup>5</sup> Since 1963, the University of Michigan has hosted a summer training program in quantitative methods as part of the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (<https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/pages/sumprog/about.html>). In 2002, the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (IQMR) launched a similar summer program for training in qualitative and mixed methods research (<https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/research/center-for-qualitative-and-multi-method-inquiry/institute-for-qualitative-multi-method-research>). In 2018, the Advancing Research on Conflict (ARC) Consortium began training junior scholars in the ethics and challenges of conducting social science fieldwork in fragile environments (<https://advancingconflictresearch.com/aboutus>).

<sup>6</sup> For nearly 30 years, the Summer Workshop on the Analysis of Military Operations and Strategy has provided extra-curricular training on military strategy and defense policy (<https://www.sivps.org/programs/summer-workshop-on-the-analysis-of-military-operations-and-strategy/>). Twenty years ago, a group of female scholars, led by Sara Mitchell and Kelly Kadera at the University of Iowa, launched Journeys in World Politics—a workshop for women in international relations centered on scholarly feedback and gender-focused career advice (<https://www.saramitchell.org/journeys.html>).

broadened our applicant pool, welcoming a more diverse set of participants than programs that continued to place a premium on their exclusive nature. Compared to many other programs, NEW is today more methodologically and substantively plural, welcoming scholars across subfields and even disciplines.

In the early 2000s, the core International Relations canon was still defined by debates on the relative ontological and epistemological merits of three core IR paradigms (realism, liberalism, and constructivism). Yet mainstream international scholars were beginning an evident turn to middle-range theory, employing increasingly sophisticated methodological techniques to more deeply examine puzzles narrower in substantive scope. The New Era Workshop (originally the New Era Foreign Policy Conference) emerged out of a related and contemporaneous desire to find different ways to ask and answer questions about the real world, with a particular emphasis on policy relevance as a key criterion in developing a research agenda.

In roughly the same time frame, international relations scholars interested in writing public commentary about global affairs, both based on their own research and with a view to influencing policy discourse as subject matter experts, began to carve out and employ spaces to do so. Some began blogging on their own, while others formed and joined collective blog platforms such as the Duck of Minerva and The Monkey Cage. Similarly, scholars seeking to share their commentary found it more possible to do so as traditional policy journals such as *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, and *The National Interest* began publishing a higher volume of such work through nascent online platforms. This early wave of scholarly engagement in the policy sphere focused heavily, and appropriately, on “translating” esoteric research into more digestible findings and shaping implications for policymakers.

The New Era Workshop framed the policy-relevance challenge differently, centering the insight that focusing exclusively on the challenge of *translating* or *disseminating* research on international affairs often comes too late in the research process to develop meaningful impact. Instead, for research to be inherently relevant to policy and to the public, it must be conceptualized and framed with pressing policy problems or questions relevant to the public in mind. This mindset applies beyond international affairs scholarship to many disciplines. Since social science research—and PhD dissertations, in particular—take years to produce, anticipating future problems offers one way to help shape forward-looking research agendas with the potential to inform unfolding policy challenges. To illustrate a concrete approach to generating policy-relevant research agendas, NEW employed a structured, comparative scenario analysis exercise—a tool designed to generate imaginative, plausible futures that could serve as a testing ground for identifying emerging problems and research opportunities.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Naazneen H. Barma, Brent Durbin, Eric Lorber, and Rachel E. Whitlark, “Imagine a World in Which: Using Scenarios in Political Science,” *International Studies Perspectives* 17 (2), May 2016: 117–135; Danielle Gilbert and Rachel Whitlark, “Borders, Blinders, and Mental Maps: Assessing Scenario Analysis in Light of COVID-19,” *Duck of Minerva* blog, June 8, 2020.

### 1.3. The NEW Scenarios

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A bespoke scenario-based exercise has always been at the heart of the New Era Workshop experience. From its earliest iteration, the workshop aimed to challenge participants to truly engage with the complexity and uncertainty that characterize international affairs and thus the context in which policy actors must make decisions. The scenario exercise rests on a simple but powerful analytical logic: a structured, comparative framework to imagine plausible alternative futures and ask what kinds of knowledge and research would be needed to inform decision-making in those futures. While this approach is intuitively appealing for research in international affairs, there are interesting parallel avenues to imagining how similar “what-if” type thinking might be fruitfully applied to generate pressing research questions in other disciplines.

To construct the NEW scenario set, facilitators work each year to identify a set of key macro-level trends—demographic, environmental, geostrategic, political, economic, technological, and sociocultural—and combine them in unexpected or underexplored ways. The exercise challenges participants to reflect on the causal logic of the world to which they’ve been assigned, to identify the underlying structures and dynamics at play, and to consider how a social scientist might investigate them. The resulting scenarios are plausible but unfamiliar: they ask participants to grapple with uncertainty and, crucially, to identify the kinds of knowledge that would be valuable in guiding decisions under such conditions. The goal is to move beyond simply naming trends or topics and toward framing analytically tractable and policy-relevant research questions. Since the trends we explore are located in and beyond the social world, some of the scenarios—e.g., those geared toward exploring demographic, zoonotic, and technological possibilities—are immediately relevant to other disciplines as well.

At the inaugural 2006 workshop, participants were tasked with assessing the medium-term challenges and opportunities facing the United States. Drawing inspiration from University of California Berkeley professor Steve Weber’s work in strategy and decision-making, the original format encouraged groups to formulate foreign policy objectives and develop specific recommendations using a structured approach informed by scenario thinking. The first workshop featured breakout groups organized around themes such as international security, liberalism, and transnationalism. The “cross-fertilization” session—where ideas were shared and compared across thematic lines—emerged as a critical moment for reflection and synthesis.

By 2007 and onward, the format shifted toward a more formalized scenario structure, with each year featuring two or three richly imagined future worlds, devised or revised for the purpose of the workshop. Participants engaged in deep analysis of these scenarios, considering both long-term trends and unexpected shocks. Over the years, NEW participants explored scenarios such as “World Without the West,” “Power to the People,” and “A Sick, Sick World”—provocative narratives that invited participants to grapple with shifts in global power, governance, and transnational challenges. As the world changed, so too did the content of the scenarios: by 2014, we brought to the fore

themes such as global pandemics, authoritarian resurgence, and the rise of non-state governance.<sup>8</sup> The evolution of the scenario process has thus mirrored broader shifts in the international relations discipline and in the substantive interests and research priorities of our participants. From early macro-level, state-centric perspectives, the NEW scenario set has paid increasing attention to sub-state dynamics, fragmented sovereignty, regime type, and global governance.

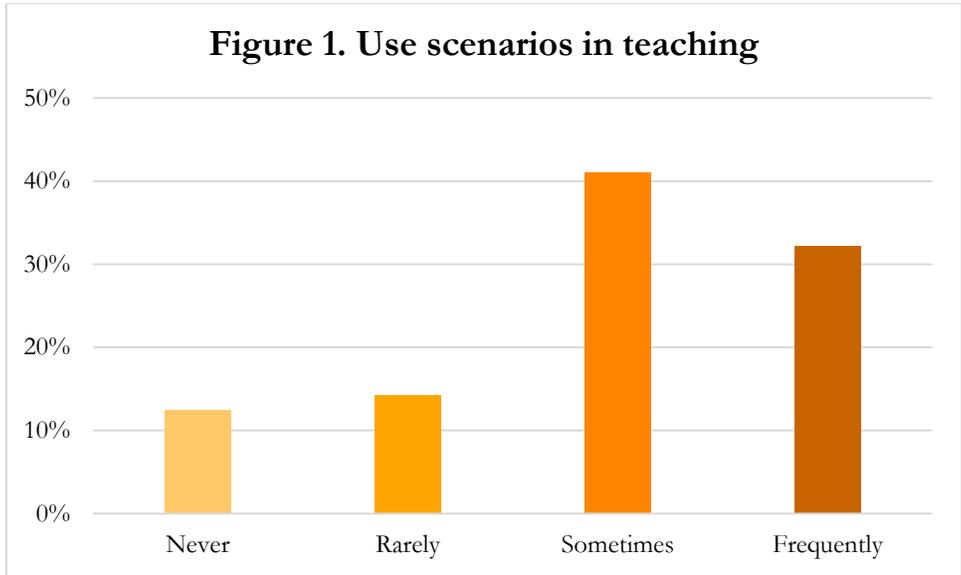
Throughout the evolution of NEW, the team’s scenario construction has been guided by two core principles. First, we have sought to avoid utopian and dystopian extremes. Instead, we designed scenarios to present participants with surprising tradeoffs that reflect and motivate the kinds of difficult decisions policymakers face in the real world. Second, we have striven to incorporate diverse trends and potential sources of disruption to reflect the complex and interconnected nature of contemporary global affairs. Between 2017 and 2021, for example, we experimented with introducing a single “shock” mid-session across all scenario groups. Participants spent the entire morning immersed in one scenario world, then responded in real time to a breaking news alert that introduced a disruptive event—initially a fictional global pandemic, and later a geoengineering experiment gone awry. This approach was pedagogically rich but limited participants’ exposure to the breadth of alternative futures and made the cross-fertilization session more difficult—and we ultimately returned to the previous format of multiple parallel scenarios while incorporating elements of those shocks into the scenarios themselves.

One core objective of the New Era Workshop was to elaborate, implement, and continue to adapt an innovative approach to generating policy-relevant research ideas and agendas. An open question is whether, in practice, the use of scenarios had a lasting impact on participants, especially the research questions they have asked, their pedagogical decisions in the classroom, and new collaborations forged beyond the academy. Our survey of participants helps us to begin to answer this question.

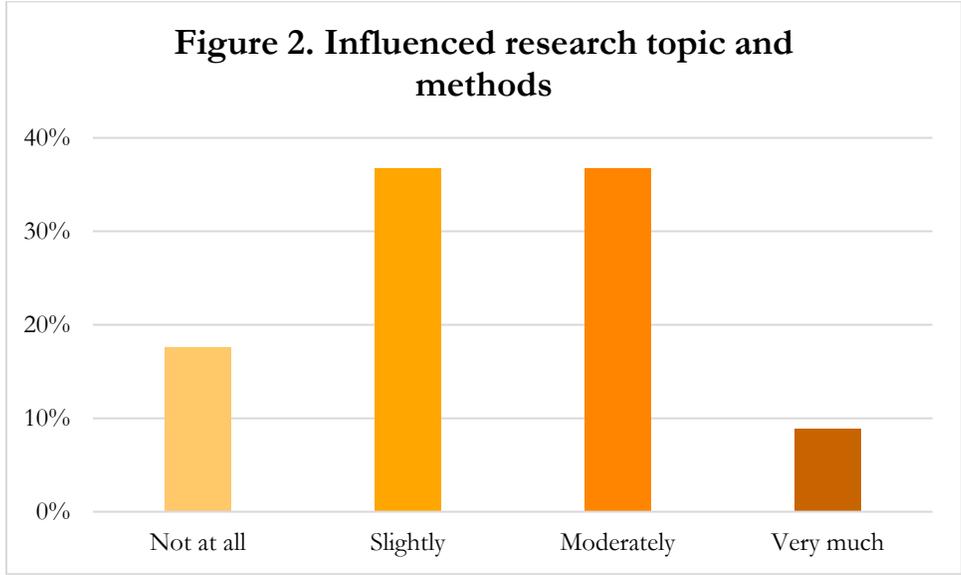
As seen in Figure 12, more than 70% of our alumni survey respondents said that they “sometimes” or “frequently” use scenarios in their teaching. For many, our workshop provided their first exposure to scenario thinking, demonstrating its pedagogical and research-generation utility. As one survey respondent wrote, “I worked on a project that involved predicting a future event and used some of the techniques we used [during NEW] to make such predictions. After reading my draft, the study’s commissioners asked all of the writers to use the technique in their drafts as well.”

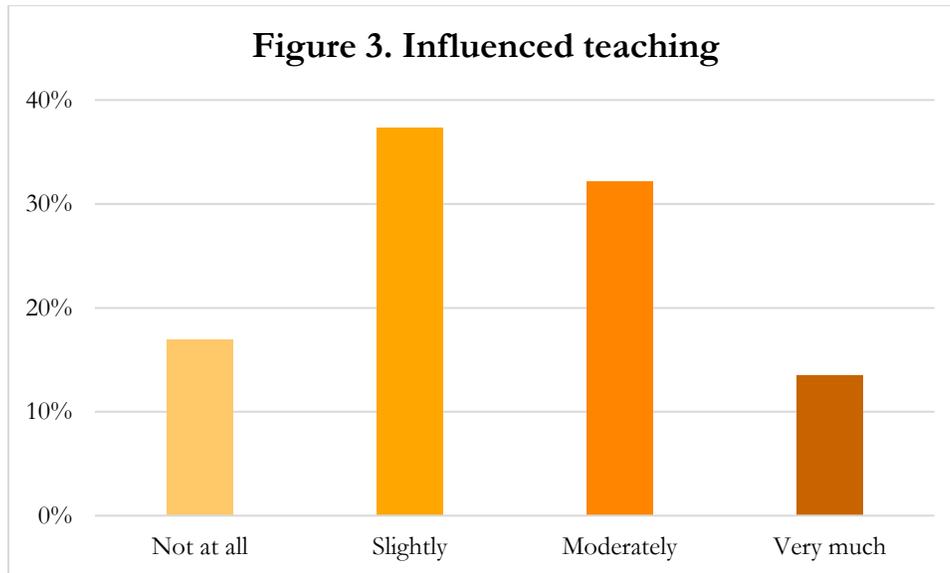
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<sup>8</sup> Some of these scenarios have since proven eerily prescient, reflecting not uncanny foresight on the part of the organizers but instead the analytical value of grappling with complex and intersecting driving forces in a structured way. [Annexes of core scenarios—or perhaps all that we can gather.]



Many of our alumni also credit their time with scenarios during NEW with moderate influences on their research or teaching output. Two thirds of our participants said that the New Era workshop “slightly” or “moderately” had an influence on their research topic or methods, although fewer than 10 percent of respondents agreed that the workshop influenced their research “very much.” (See Figure 2.) In addition, about 50 percent of respondents said that NEW influenced their teaching “moderately” or “very much.” (See Figure 3.)





## 1.4. Professional Development Elements

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Also explicit in the thinking and language of the New Era Foreign Policy Conference founders was a core objective: to build and shape an emerging cohort of next-generation doctoral graduates who self-consciously identified as being interested in the relevance of their work to policy and public audiences. Thus, in addition to scenario analysis, the New Era Workshop has always included a robust professional development component designed to support graduate students interested in publicly engaged careers. While the structure of this programming has evolved over time, its core aim has remained the same: to demystify the policy world and equip participants with the tools to communicate and operate effectively within it. Other disciplines might fruitfully adopt a similar approach to helping emerging scholars better comprehend the “real” worlds in which their research has significance.

In the early years, we pursued professional development through extended interaction with early- and mid-career policy professionals who joined us for the entire workshop. By including journalists, think tank fellows, RAND researchers, and CIA officers and other intelligence professionals along with the workshop cohort, we established relationships with policy professionals we hoped would guide the group in practical ways in negotiating careers on either side of the gap. In later years, we shifted from an extended-contact approach to instead inviting a series of speakers for deliberate conversations on gap-bridging. Other disciplines, similarly, produce researchers and practitioners on career pathways that are outside but adjacent to the academic sphere— including, in many instances, in industry—and who are interested in actively engaging with university-based scholars.

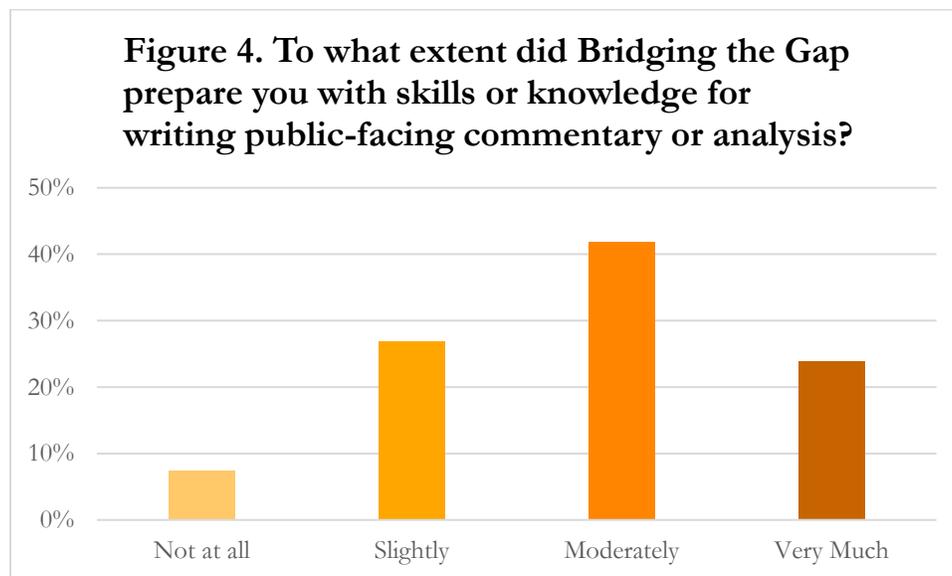
The professional development components of NEW are organized around three goals, even as the speakers and panel themes vary each year. First, we host conversations about strategies for communicating policy-relevant research to the public. We have invited editors from outlets including the *Washington Quarterly*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *War on the Rocks*, *Inkstick*, the

*Washington Post*, *The Conversation*, *Good Authority*, and *Global Dispatches* to speak to participants about communicating to non-academic audiences. In recent workshops, we've supplemented the panel with pitch sessions, in which the guest editors give our participants feedback on draft pitches. Many of our participants have parlayed the connections they have made and lessons they have learned at NEW into publications at these and other outlets.

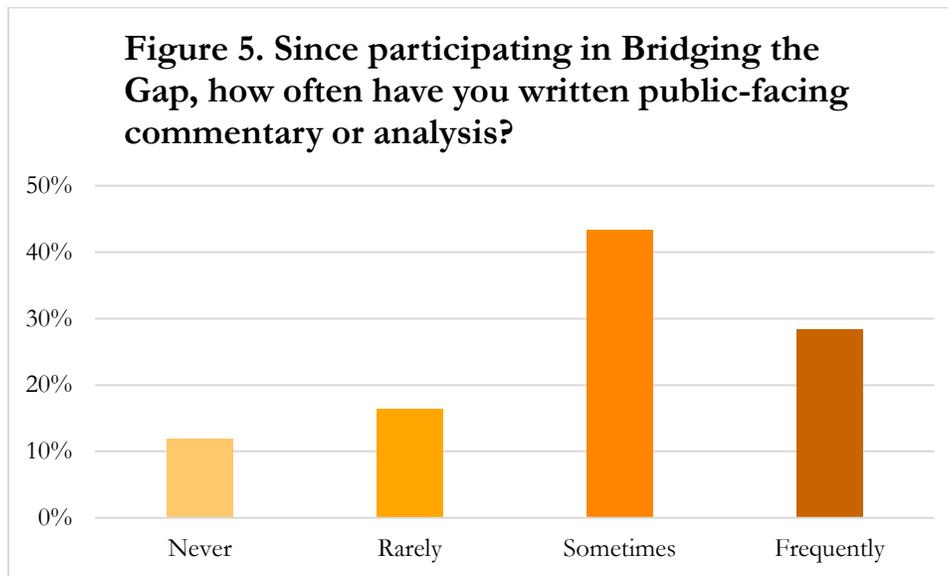
Second, we foster dialogue on responsible and ethical public engagement. Partnering with another Carnegie-funded program, the Responsible Public Engagement Initiative hosted at the Josef Korbel School's Sié Chéou-Kang Center at the University of Denver, we have bolstered our program with a panel discussion aimed at raising awareness of the myriad ethical dilemmas that arise in public-facing work and preparing ourselves to confront them.

Finally, we assemble panels and fireside chats with members of our network who can talk about career pathways to bridge the gap. Alumni and friends of our organization have pursued fruitful careers in academia, government, think tanks, the private sector, advocacy organizations, and international organizations—and we believe that a PhD in international affairs or related fields can serve any of these pathways well.<sup>9</sup> Speakers share their experiences with our participants, reflecting on how their graduate training, extracurricular pursuits, and networking helped them succeed.

In terms of the impact of the professional development components of NEW, more than two thirds of our survey respondents said that our programming either “very much” or “moderately” prepared them with skills or knowledge for writing public-facing commentary or analysis—an impressive result from a single workshop session. (See Figure 4.) As Figure 5 shows, around seven in ten of our workshop alumni have “sometimes” or “frequently” written public-facing commentary or analysis since participating in the workshop.



<sup>9</sup> See James Goldgeier and Tamara Cofman Wittes, *Foreign Policy Careers for PhDs: A Practical Guide to a World of Possibilities* (Georgetown University Press, 2023).



Curious about what our alumni have gleaned from these sessions, we asked respondents if they have had any valuable professional opportunities (excluding job offers) that they attribute at least in part to their experience in Bridging the Gap. More than 40% of respondents say that they have. In open-ended responses, alumni attributed a wide range of professional opportunities to their Bridging the Gap experience. For some, Bridging the Gap helped them meet policymakers, who “would have been hard to access without the introduction from a respected mutual connection.” Several participants learned about fellowship opportunities during the workshop, which they then successfully pursued. Alumni have collaborated with others they met through BTG on policy writing, substantive workshops, and multi-year projects.

One aspect that continues to distinguish NEW from other workshops is our radical agnosticism about participants’ career paths: while we hope our alumni will bridge the gap, we place no premium on the side from which they do so. We intentionally design our programming to support a wide range of careers. In this way, we distinguish our “professionalization” from strictly academic workshops, like Journeys in World Politics,<sup>10</sup> designed for women pursuing academic careers, or IPSCON,<sup>11</sup> geared toward supporting PhDs pursuing policy careers.

Across 20 years of NEW, participants have mentioned the real and perceived stigmatization facing early-career scholars interested in engaging with the policy world, motivating their interest in NEW and their desire to join the BTG network. Every year, without fail, someone attending NEW says that they are relieved to have now found a “safe space” for early career scholars that enables them to feel free to express and explore their real interests without feeling the need to censor themselves to meet disciplinary expectations. The discovery of a like-minded cohort and resources via the BTG network has created important and lasting bonds among participants.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.saramitchell.org/journeys.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://sais.jhu.edu/kissinger/ipscon>

Many of our survey respondents highlighted precisely the unique space that NEW has created in the discipline. As one of our alumni wrote, “Exposure to scholars who share the same values and vision for what academia should be about has been incredibly valuable.” Another wrote:

*Bridging the Gap is one of the most welcoming communities I participated in during and after grad school. It showed me that someone can do both high quality IR scholarship and have a voice and impact in the policy conversation. In grad school, I felt like a bit of an odd duck for not wanting to pursue a traditional tenure-track role. Bridging the Gap showed me that I could use my IR training in the policy world in different ways, and, if I decided to go to a think tank or policymaker role full-time, I could continue to contribute to academia.*

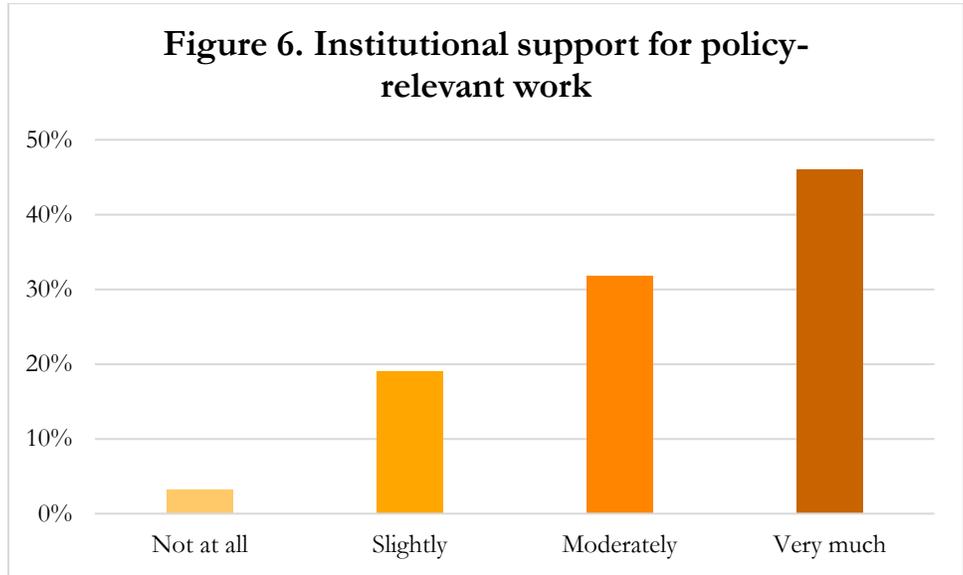
Similarly, another respondent said, “BTG was essential in validating my career path as someone working ‘in between’ academia and policymakers.”

## **1.5. Lessons learned from twenty years of programming**

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Over two decades, NEW has evolved in response to shifting academic and policy landscapes. We have notched key successes, witnessed unexpected developments, and confronted ongoing challenges that inform both the sustainability of the initiative and how it might be replicated in other contexts.

One of the program's most enduring successes is its longevity. Having delivered NEW's 20th iteration in Fall 2025, we can attest that demand remains strong, with a consistently high number of applications from graduate students eager to participate. The program has also been instrumental in normalizing policy engagement within academia. In the early years, many participants were hesitant to disclose their policy interests to their advisors; today, policy-relevant research and public engagement are increasingly valued. Indeed, more than three quarters of our survey respondents now say that their institution recognizes or incentivizes public or policy engagement “moderately” or “very much”—a finding we could not have imagined twenty years ago. (See Figure 6.)



Public and policy engagement have become more accepted—and, some would say, expected—from academics. At the same time, the academic job market has become increasingly challenging and much more uncertain for almost everyone. The concrete skills, mindset, and network that NEW offers are increasingly relevant for a greater set of PhD students in international affairs and adjacent fields like comparative politics. Moreover, we continued to work with the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which has expressed a consistent preference for continued next-generation cohort-building via the New Era Workshop.

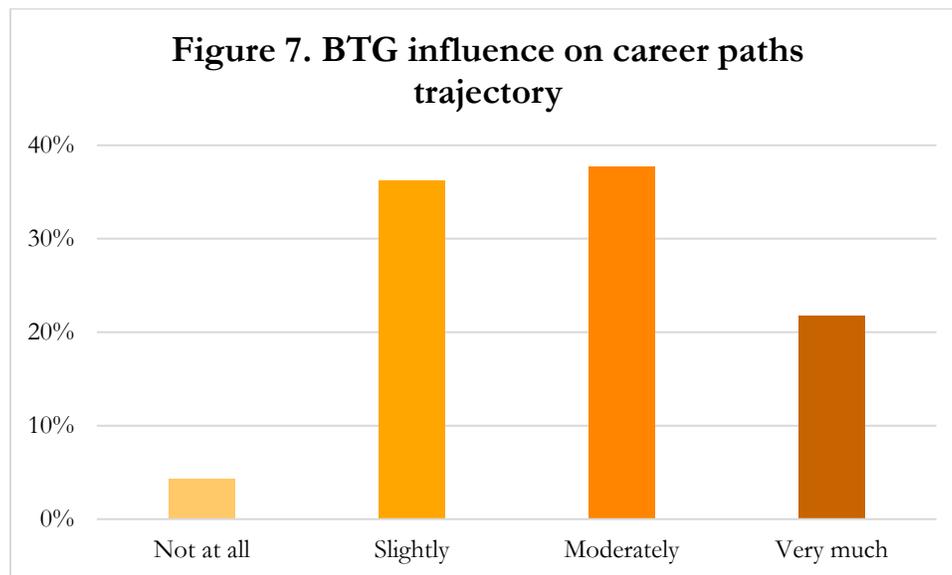
We have also recognized the need for intentional programming to support diversity, equity, and inclusion as ongoing commitments—clearly a set of objectives that go beyond the international affairs discipline. Over time, we have actively expanded recruitment beyond elite institutions and mainstream international relations topics, welcoming participants from a wider range of disciplines, research interests, and backgrounds. Our efforts have led to a more representative and vibrant network in some dimensions. Historically, though, most of our applicants emerge through network effects and word of mouth—applicants learn of our workshop from graduate students at their own institutions. Past participants make good recruiters, but this approach admittedly limits our ability to reach new networks.

One of the most important lessons from BTG’s evolution is the network's capacity to adapt to changes in the academic and policy environments, prompting us to alter our strategies for engagement, networking, and training. Maintaining relevance has required continual reassessment of our programming, particularly in the face of shifting geopolitical developments, changing interests among Ph.D. students, and evolving career trajectories for these students.

Additionally, BTG has demonstrated the importance of structured mentorship and professionalization. Many participants have cited the program as a pivotal experience in their career development, reinforcing the necessity of training that bridges academic and policy-oriented skill sets. As one survey respondent wrote, “I have received extensive support and mentorship from

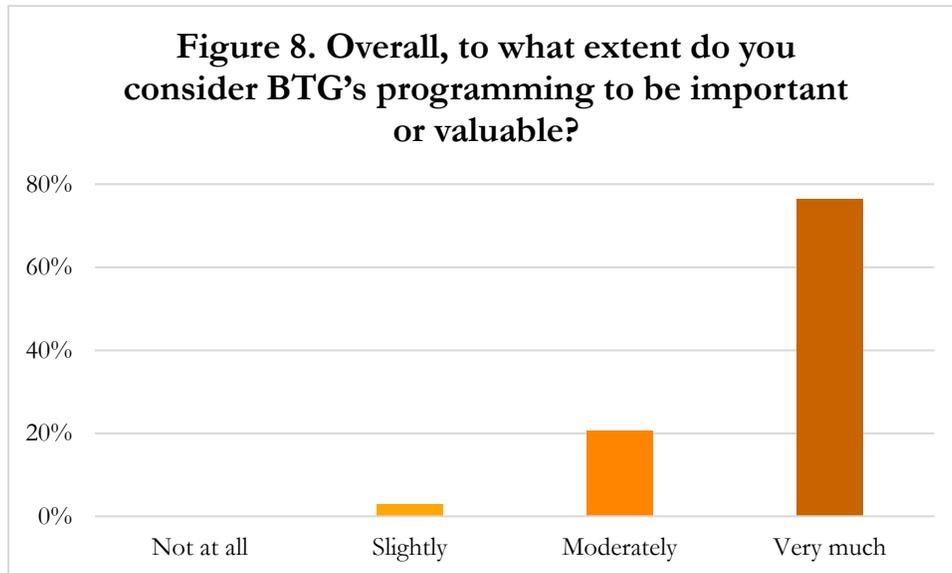
BTG affiliates to start my own organization, remain connected to academia, and continue to advance my research and advocacy agenda.” Another said, “I regularly reach out to people I met through BTG for advice on research design, public engagement, professional opportunities, and mentorship.” Aggregate findings from our survey provide more systematic evidence for the importance of mentorship emerging from NEW: nearly half of those surveyed responded that they agree either “very much” or “moderately” with the idea that a member of the Bridging the Gap community has served as their mentor, providing guidance on their professional trajectory and/or research/professional projects.

Our programming does not result in direct career outcomes. Only one former participant explicitly credited their NEW participation with their ability to secure a government job and very few of our alumni attribute their participation in NEW with helping them to secure a particular job. It is all the more striking, then, as Figure 7 shows, that the vast majority of our respondents credit Bridging the Gap with influencing their career trajectory. For some, that influence came through building skills to engage with policymakers, media, and the public. For others, Bridging the Gap’s leadership, participants, and guest speakers offered a model for engaging across the policy-academia divide. As one survey respondent wrote, “I appreciated that Bridging the Gap showed participants in the New Era Workshop how people in non-academic careers could still engage in academic endeavors.” Another said, “Bridging the Gap showed me that there was a path for someone like me in academia: I could engage with policymakers and policy-relevant questions through a scholarly career.”



Most participants found value in NEW not for explicit career-elevating connections, but in providing a kind and supportive network of colleagues and friends. One survey respondent wrote, “To my mind, the best parts of the political science discipline are found within the BTG community. It is a safe, collegial, engaged, and caring group of people who care deeply about the world and the academy, and who want to leave things better than they found them.” Another wrote, “The most valuable thing about BTG for me was and has continued to be the personal connections I made and have maintained since.” Survey respondents called the networking opportunities “incredible” and

“immense.” Others emphasized that it helped them feel at home in academia: “Participating in the New Era Workshop as a graduate student cemented my budding network of friends and colleagues in the discipline and means that I always know where to find familiar faces at big conferences.” As Figure 8 shows, the overwhelming majority—nearly 8 in 10 of our survey respondents—strongly agreed that they consider Bridging the Gap’s programming to be important or valuable.



## 1.6. Unresolved Tensions and Future Considerations

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As we look ahead, unresolved tensions within BTG’s programming raise questions for the future. One persistent tension has been the balance between serving PhD students pursuing academic careers and those aiming for policy engagement. In the early years, BTG primarily attracted scholars with a strong interest in U.S. foreign policy. As the participant pool diversified—both in terms of research focus and institutional affiliation—the program has had to adapt its structure and offerings. Today, scholars working on sub-state violence, political economy, and global governance engage in conversations at NEW that extend well beyond traditional IR topics, which sometimes results in a disconnect between participants’ expectations and the program’s original design.

A second challenge has been the limitations non-U.S. scholars face in engaging with American policy institutions. While our applicant pool has expanded across borders, participants who are not U.S. permanent residents or citizens do not have access to U.S. government roles or security clearances, complicating their ability to bridge the academic-policy divide in the same way as their American counterparts. Additionally, some of the debates and skills appropriate to those engaging with American policy institutions may simply not be relevant for those who strive to influence, design, or evaluate policies in non-U.S. contexts. These dynamics underscore the importance of tailoring BTG’s content—as well as that of similar programs in other disciplines—to better support scholars working across different policy environments.

Finally, shifts in the broader political and media landscape have altered the nature of public engagement.<sup>12</sup> The rise of populist movements and increasing skepticism toward expertise have made it increasingly difficult for scholars to influence policymaking. It may also reduce their desire to work in and around policy circles. At the same time, changes in the media ecosystem—including shifts in legacy media, the decline of academic public-facing platforms like *The Monkey Cage*, and the erosion of Twitter (now X) as a venue for scholarly public debate—have limited opportunities for scholars to publish accessible, policy-relevant analysis and disseminate research findings.

As we move forward, these tensions provide a roadmap for reflection and potential adaptation. How should NEW continue to evolve in an era in which academic and policy engagement landscapes are rapidly changing? What innovative strategies might be necessary to support participants facing different constraints in their respective countries and across different areas of expertise? Addressing these questions will be central to ensuring the continued success and relevance of BTG in the years to come.

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<sup>12</sup> See Jordan Tama, Naazneen H. Barma, Brent Durbin, James Goldgeier, and Bruce W. Jentleson. 2023. “Bridging the Gap in a Changing World: New Opportunities and Challenges for Engaging Practitioners and the Public.” *International Studies Perspectives* 24 (3): 285–307.

## 2. THE INTERNATIONAL POLICY SUMMER INSTITUTE

Prepared by Brent Durbin, James Goldgeier, Bruce W. Jentleson, and Jordan Tama

In 2011, BTG leadership launched the International Policy Summer Institute (IPSI) for faculty of all ranks and post-doctoral scholars. IPSI built on five years of success of the New Era Workshop (NEW) for graduate students, and the motivation was the same: foster and promote greater academic-policy world bridging. The programming was geared to the professional needs and interests of faculty.

While the expectation for the NEW PhD workshops is that attendees will go on to a range of careers in academia, government, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and the private sector, IPSI assumes that all or most of the participants are committed to academia as the principal locus of their careers but with strong professional interest in policy-relevant scholarship and in many cases with periods of government and other policy roles interspersed. So the focus is on helping academics understand how best to conceptualize and structure their scholarly expertise for broader audiences as well as learn more about opportunities and strategies for working directly in institutions outside academia.

Within that overall statement of purpose, the primary goals of IPSI are three-fold: to help academics learn how to (1) gain direct experience in government, NGOs, and IOs; (2) engage with think tanks and legislative branch staff; and (3) carry out forms of public engagement, such as writing op-eds, blogs, and policy journal articles as well as conducting media interviews.

### 2.1. IPSI's structure and core components

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From its initial iteration in 2011, IPSI has consisted of a five day, in-person workshop in June in Washington, DC. IPSI 2011 took place at George Washington University, where one of the BTG organizers was serving on the faculty. When he became Dean of the School of International Service at American University (AU) later that year, BTG moved IPSI to AU, where it took place for each of the next 12 years. In 2024, BTG convened IPSI at the Duke in D.C. Center and the Brookings Institution, in an effort to have the event take place closer to the workplaces of many foreign policy practitioners and others speaking on panels during the week. (The Duke in D.C. Center and the Brookings Institution are located in downtown Washington, while AU is located several miles from the center of the city.)

The June timeframe for the workshop has made it easier for many faculty to participate in the workshop given that most faculty do not have teaching commitments during that time of year. The in-person format has fostered intensive engagement and networking among the participants. During the pandemic, BTG postponed IPSI 2020 and convened it remotely in 2021, offering placements for those who were accepted into the 2020 cohort. The organizers of IPSI 2021 found that the quality of engagement and the value of the experience were significantly lessened by the lack of in-person interaction.

In addition to an introductory framing session and breakout discussions, IPSI has consistently featured several core components to advance its primary goals:

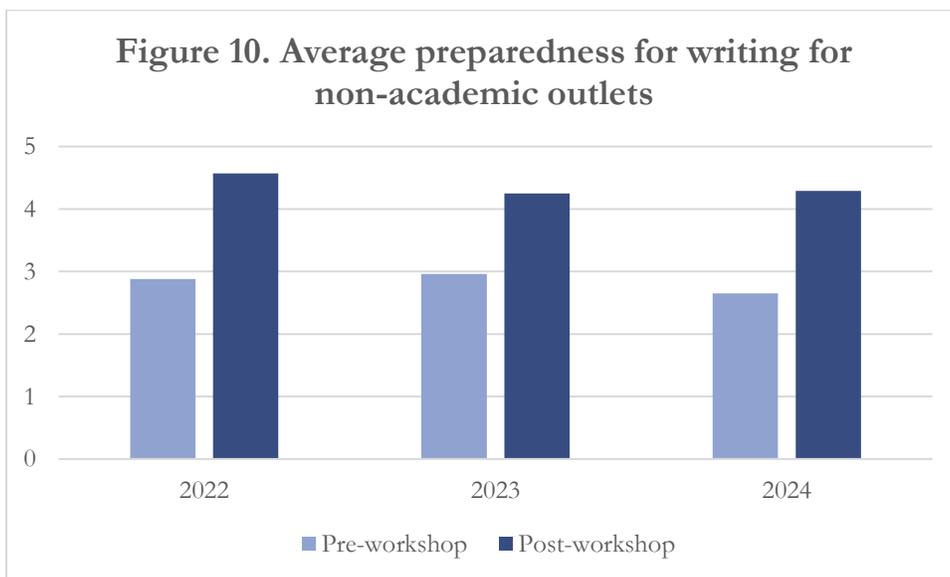
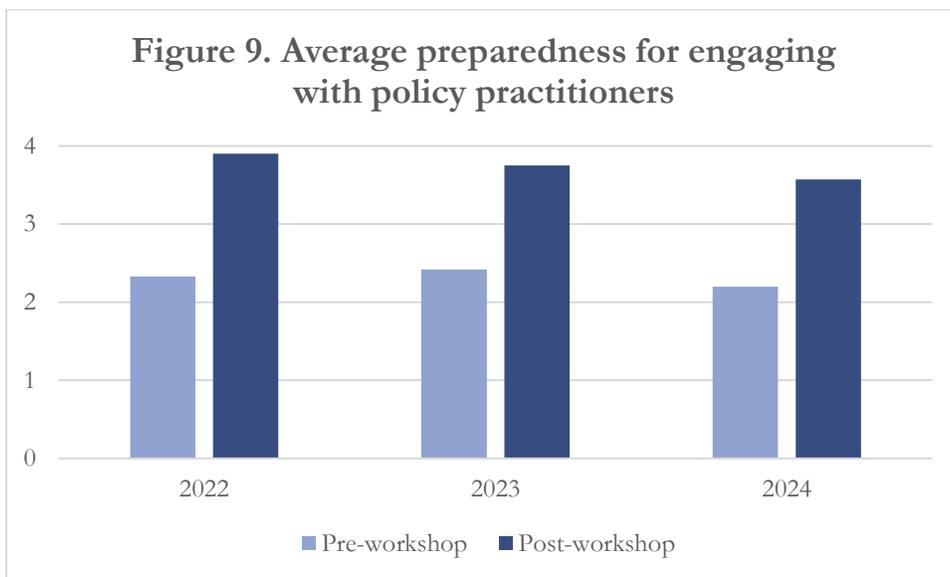
- 1) Participants learn from scholars who have engaged directly in policy, including in the U.S. executive branch, Capitol Hill, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations (IOs), and who draw on their own experiences focusing on policy processes and the roles that academic research can play within them. In many instances, these scholars have received fellowships, such as the American Political Science Association Congressional Fellowship, Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellowship, or American Association for the Advancement of Science Fellowship, that have facilitated their service in policy institutions. In other cases, faculty have been granted public service leaves from their university. A senior scholar who has been especially successful in carrying out high-level or highly impactful policy engagement typically serves as the IPSI keynote speaker.
- 2) Participants learn from think tank scholars and legislative branch practitioners. Think tank scholars explain how academics can engage with their institutions, including by joining projects as resident or non-resident scholars. Former Capitol Hill staffers give tips on becoming sought after for Congressional testimony and other means of influencing legislative branch policy.
- 3) As part of interactive communications and media training, participants learn from editors of policy journals (such as *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, and *The Washington Quarterly*), podcast and blog hosts, and op-ed editorial staff how to create pitches and shape arguments for non-academic audiences. Prior to the IPSI week, each participant drafts a short op-ed or blog post. Then, in small group settings moderated by BTG team members, they workshop their pieces with the goal of generating submissions.

The interactive communications and media training also feature each participant taking part in a short video segment focusing on their own research moderated by a BTG team member mimicking a television or online video appearance, followed by a session with former television producers giving constructive comments to each participant. The overall program and week also provide many opportunities for networking (in its positive sense), including during breaks in the program and over meals.

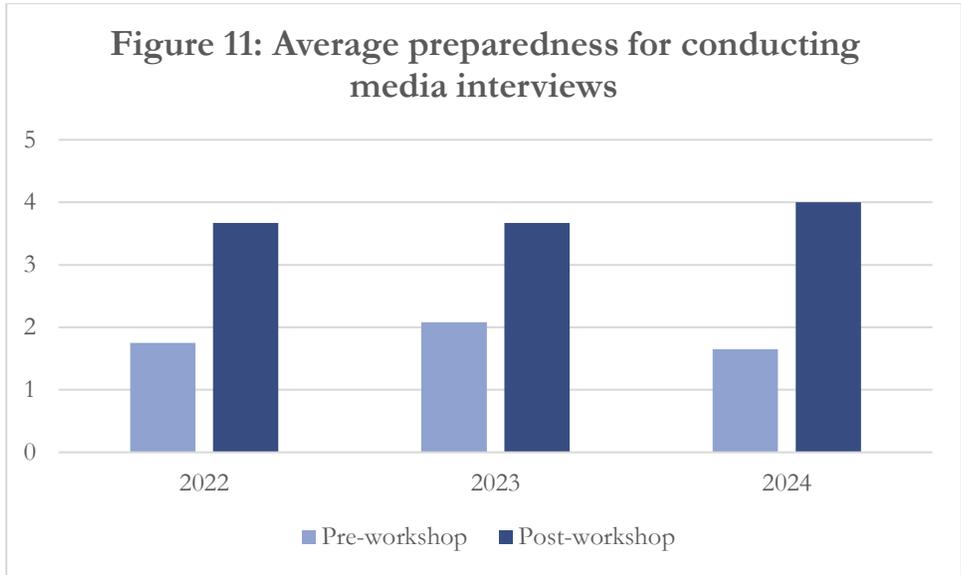
Participants have reported that the core components of IPSI have been very helpful in giving them a better understanding of how to engage effectively with policy institutions and public audiences. Before and after the 2022, 2023, and 2024 iterations of IPSI, the BTG organizers conducted an anonymized survey of the participants that included questions asking them to what extent they felt prepared to conduct different forms of public and policy engagement on a scale of 1-5, with 5 representing very well prepared, 4 representing well prepared, 3 representing somewhat prepared, 2 representing a little prepared, and 1 representing not at all prepared.

In each of the three years, the average responses of participants were much higher after the workshop than before it. With respect to preparedness for engagement with policy officials and

practitioners, the average responses of participants prior to the workshop were 2.33 in 2022, 2.42 in 2023, and 2.2 in 2024. After the workshop, average participant responses on this question for each of those three years were 3.9, 3.75, and 3.57, respectively. Regarding preparedness for writing for non-academic outlets, the average responses prior to the workshop were 2.88 in 2022, 2.96 in 2023, and 2.65 in 2024. After the workshop, the average responses were 4.57, 4.25, and 4.29, respectively. On preparedness for conducting media interviews, the average responses prior to the workshop were 1.75 in 2022, 2.08 in 2023, and 1.65 in 2024. After the workshop, these average scores were 3.67, 3.67, and 4.0. (See Figures 9, 10, and 11).<sup>13</sup>

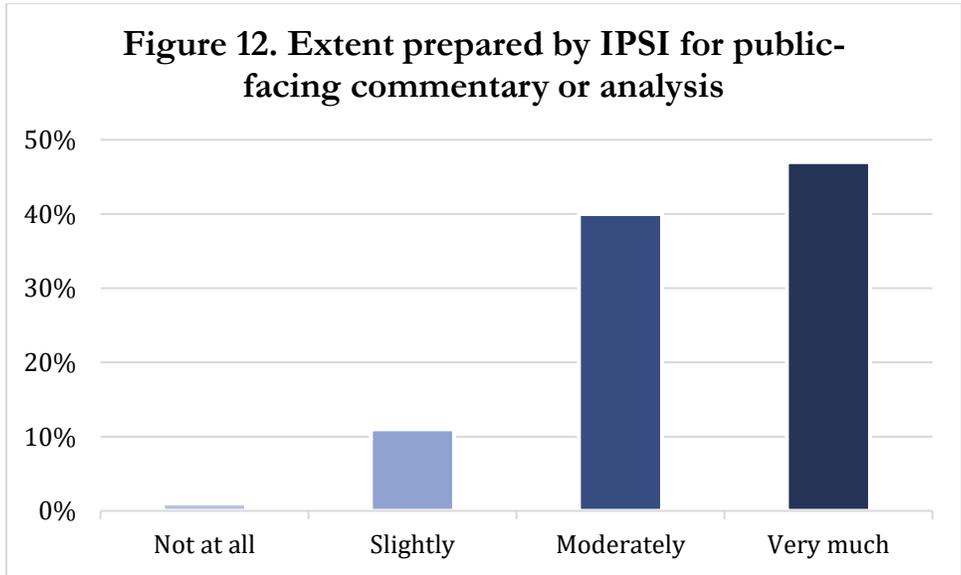


<sup>13</sup> See also Tama, Jordan, Maria Rost Rublee, and Kathryn Urban. 2024. "The Impact of Professional Training in Public and Policy Engagement." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 57, 3: 396-402.

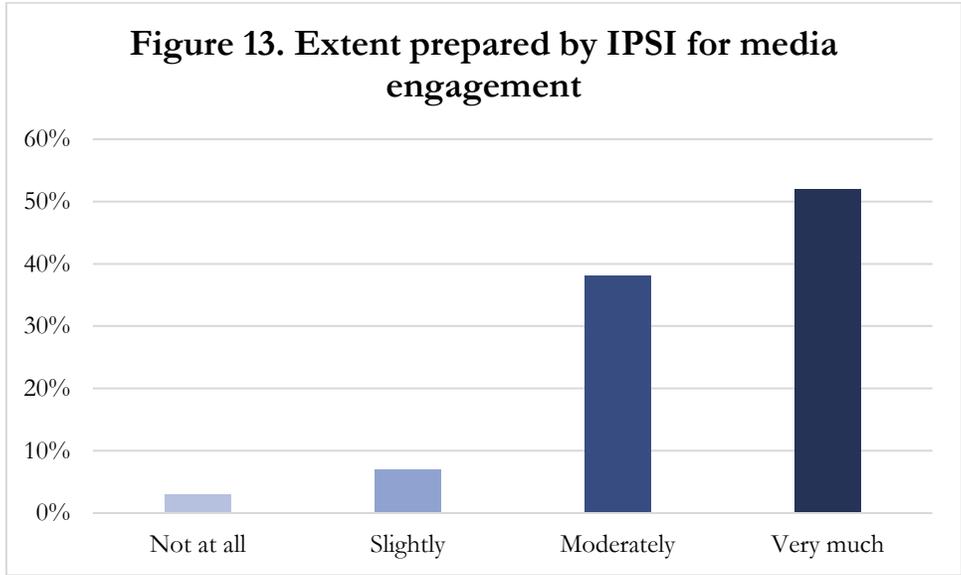


To generate data from a broader set of program alumni, Bridging the Gap conducted an anonymized survey in 2025 of all alumni of its programs, including alumni of IPSI, the New Era Workshop for PhD students, and other workshops that BTG has convened. In all, BTG sent the survey to 553 people, 251 of whom were IPSI alumni. Ninety IPSI alums responded to the survey. These alums spanned every year in which IPSI was convened, from 2011 through 2024. The survey results presented below are based solely on the responses of these 90 IPSI alums.

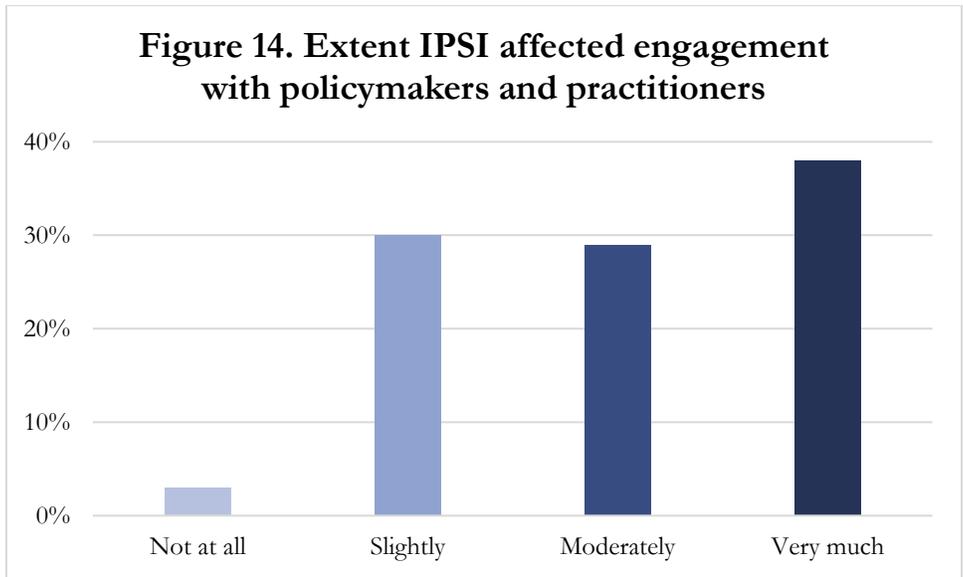
The results of this survey indicate that most BTG alums consider IPSI to have helped prepare them for public and policy engagement. In the survey, BTG asked respondents to rate on a scale of 1 to 4 the extent to which BTG programming had prepared them with skills or knowledge for different types of engagement, with 4 representing very much, 3 representing moderately, 2 representing slightly, and 1 representing not at all. With respect to writing public-facing commentary or analysis, 47 percent of IPSI alums responded very much, 40 percent said moderately, 11 percent said slightly, and 1 percent said not at all. (See Figure 12.)



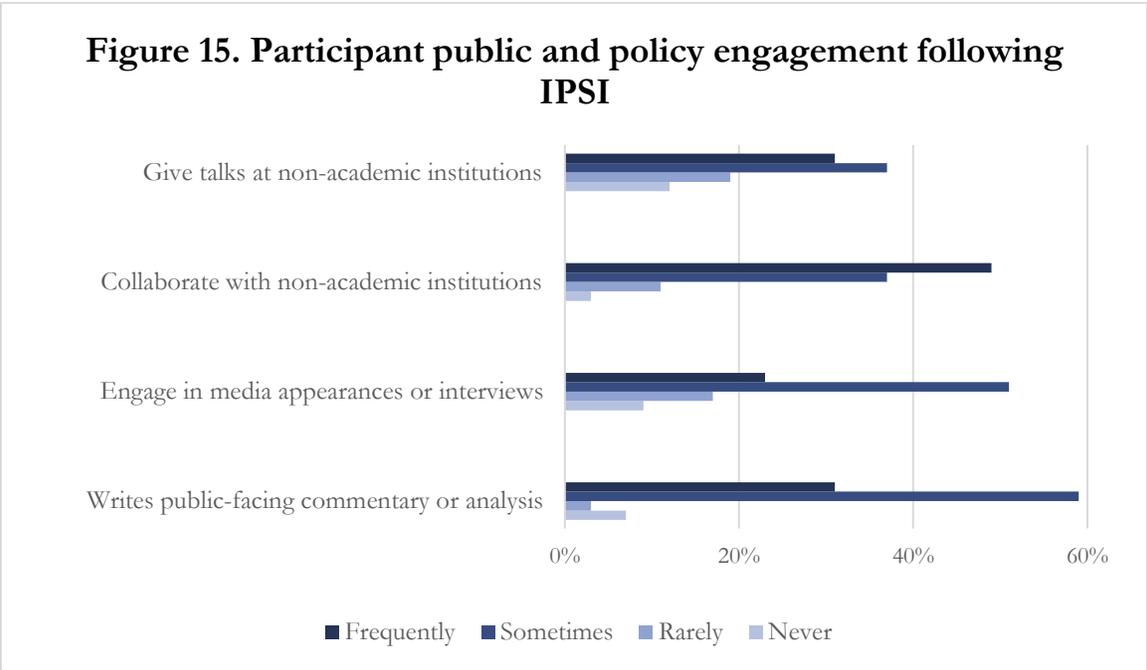
Regarding media engagement, 52 percent of IPSI alums responded very much, 38 percent said moderately, 7 percent said slightly, and 3 percent said not at all. (See Figure 13.)



Using the same 1 to 4 scale, the survey also asked respondents to rate the extent to which BTG programming had affected their engagement with policymakers and practitioners. In response to this question, 38 percent of IPSI alums said very much, 29 percent responded moderately, 30 percent said slightly, and 3 percent said not at all. (See Figure 14).



The survey also revealed that many IPSI alums regularly conduct different types of public and policy engagement. Several survey questions asked respondents how often they have engaged in a particular type of public or policy engagement since participating in Bridging the Gap on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing "never," 2 representing "rarely," 3 representing "sometimes," and 4 representing "frequently." For writing public-facing analysis or commentary, 31 percent of IPSI alums said frequently, 59 percent said sometimes, 3 percent said rarely, and 7 percent said never. (See Figure 15.)



With respect to media appearances or interviews, 23 percent of IPSI alums said frequently, 51 percent said sometimes, 17 percent said rarely, and 9 percent said never. Regarding collaboration with non-academic institutions, 49 percent of IPSI alums said frequently, 37 percent said sometimes,

11 percent said rarely, and 3 percent said never. For giving talks at non-academic institutions, 31 percent of IPSI alums said frequently, 37 percent said sometimes, 19 percent said rarely, and 12 percent said never.

Results from BTG's 2025 survey further suggested that IPSI serves a valuable networking function. One survey question asked whether respondents attribute any valuable professional opportunities (excluding job offers) at least in part to their experience in Bridging the Gap. Sixty-six percent of IPSI alums responded yes, while just 34 percent said no.

The anonymized survey also included open-ended questions inviting respondents to give examples of opportunities that they attribute at least in part to BTG or to describe in their own words how BTG has influenced their work or career. Answers to these questions from IPSI alums provide further evidence that IPSI has helped to make participants more confident and better positioned for public and policy engagement, while generating valuable new relationships and collaborations. Included here are some quotes from the open-ended responses of IPSI alums.

#### **QUOTES FROM IPSI ALUMS:**

"Bridging the Gap helped me to think about how I could engage beyond academia, whether by writing for popular audiences or engaging with practitioners. And after completing the program I did more of those things, which has been good for my career."

"I felt that BTG was important in building confidence. I had regularly done external engagements but never been trained on it. BTG was important in building confidence behind these engagements by giving me a deeper insight into what organizations expect and by seeing how others were navigating the space."

"BTG definitely gave me training and support to do public-facing writing and media engagement more effectively based on my work, and I have had more successes on those fronts since the program."

"BTG gave me technical guidance, and more confidence, in translating research findings into actionable and policy-relevant output targeted to the needs of decision-makers, or to appealing to broad public audiences. I think this has and will continue to increase the impact of my research on real-world problems and solutions."

"Bridging the Gap served to connect me with a set of scholars with whom I might otherwise not have had contact. Seeing what these scholars are doing and how they are interacting with the policy community has inspired me to pursue more contact with the policy world and has helped me to advise students who are interested in doing so."

"Bridging the Gap helped me to develop a toolkit for evaluating when, where, how, and on what terms I wish to pursue public engagement and how it can connect to my research."

"The material from IPSI was super helpful in general for reorganizing my professional research to be more policy-conscious."

#### QUOTES FROM IPSI ALUMS (CONT'D):

“It was, by far, one of the most impactful and memorable programs that I have participated in that prepare academics to engage with policy circles. I think it gave me more practical insight, specific skills, and confidence to feel like I can indeed engage with these circles.”

“I’m much better at considering broader impact for my research projects and have made more connections with policymakers to the advantage of my research.”

“It has helped shift my whole orientation toward public-facing scholarship.”

“Training in media helped launch me to the next level.”

## 2.2. Evolution of content over time

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In response to changes in the broader landscape for policy and public engagement as well as ideas and feedback from colleagues and participants, IPSI’s organizers have made a variety of changes in the program over time. These areas of innovation have included the addition of discussions about responsible public engagement and common challenges that some scholars face when engaging in the public sphere. Influenced by the pathbreaking work on [responsible public engagement](#) conducted by scholars based at the Sié Chéou Kang Center for International Security at the University of Denver’s Josef Korbel School of Global and Public Affairs, the BTG organizers came to appreciate the necessity for scholars to be cognizant of ethical dilemmas that can arise with public engagement, including ways in which research can be used by practitioners or referenced in public discourse irresponsibly. Accordingly, since 2021, each iteration of IPSI has included a session on responsible public engagement featuring speakers who have been leaders in thinking through these complex realities.

In addition, as it became increasingly evident that scholars can experience an array of personal challenges when pursuing public engagement, including threats, harassment, and other forms of backlash, the BTG organizers began including in IPSI conversations about personal and professional risks associated with public engagement.<sup>14</sup> Importantly, these risks can be most pronounced for members of underrepresented groups. A focused session on personal challenges associated with public engagement was added to the IPSI agenda in 2023 and 2024.

IPSI’s content has also been updated to reflect changes in the media landscape, such as the emergence during the 2010s of the *Monkey Cage* and *The Conversation* as major publishing venues for scholars, the more recent transition of the *Monkey Cage* to *Good Authority*, the rise and fall of Twitter,

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<sup>14</sup> Tama, Jordan, Naazneen H. Barma, Brent Durbin, James Goldgeier, and Bruce W. Jentleson. 2023. "Bridging the Gap in a Changing World: New Opportunities and Challenges for Engaging Practitioners and the Public." *International Studies Perspectives* 24, 3: 285-307.

and the increased importance of podcasts. We have included hosts from prominent international affairs podcasts at each IPSI since 2022.

The BTG organizers have modified aspects of IPSI's format too. In the institute's initial years, the guest speakers on panels were each asked to deliver opening comments of about 10 minutes each, before the session was opened up to Q&A with the participants. While the speakers provided very helpful insights in this setting, the format felt a bit stiff to some of the participants. Beginning in the late 2010s, the organizers began making the sessions more fluid by treating each session entirely as a discussion, beginning with the moderator asking some questions to the panelists, followed by an open conversation with the full group.

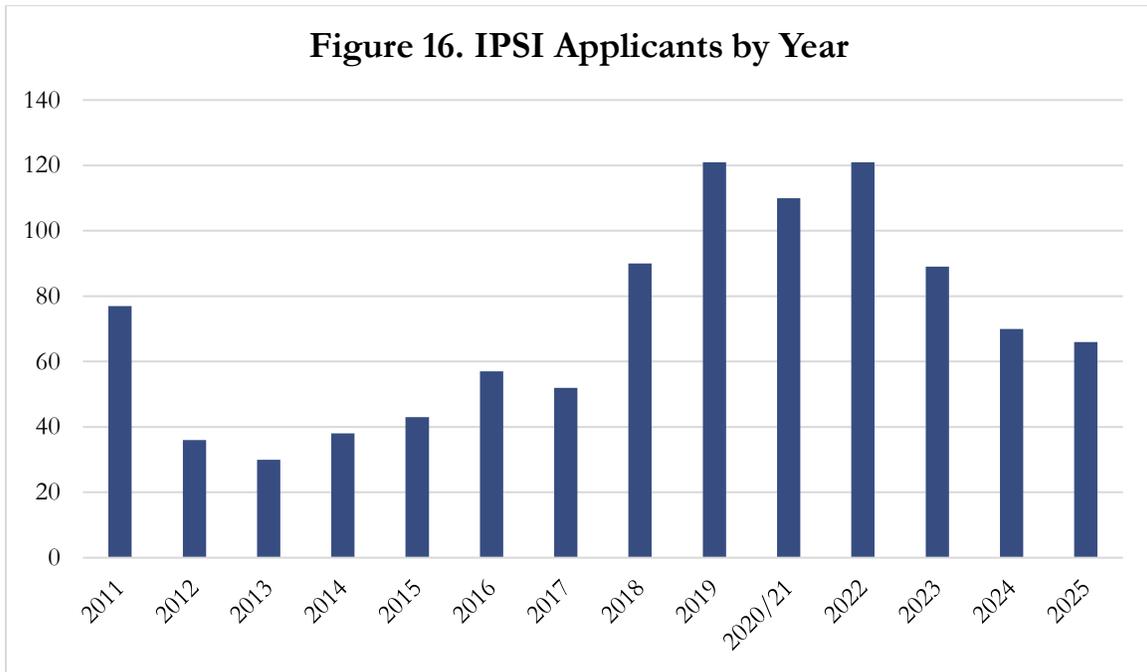
One continuing challenge with respect to IPSI concerns the scope of the policy areas and institutions covered directly by the program, as the organizers have sometimes found it challenging to provide meaningful coverage of the full gamut of international affairs issues and institutions in five days. Given the impossibility of covering all relevant topics in depth in a five-day institute, the BTG organizers have had to decide what to prioritize. In terms of policy areas, IPSI has usually included two sessions centered on engagement in certain policy domains. One of these sessions has consistently been focused on U.S. national security, featuring individuals who have served at the White House, State Department, and Department of Defense. The substantive focus of the second session has varied, in part based on the research interests of the participants. Whereas the first IPSI included a session on policy engagement in political economy, trade, and international development, this focus has shifted to peace building and development in many more recent iterations of IPSI, with speakers who have served at institutions such as the U.S. Agency for International Development, the United Nations, and NGOs.

### 2.3. IPSI's participants

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IPSI was created to provide training to scholars who wish to share their expertise and research findings with policy and public audiences beyond the academy. Since there are more such scholars than BTG can accommodate, the organizers of IPSI have had to develop an application and screening process for the workshop. From the outset, the organizers have asked for only two elements in the application: an updated CV and a one-page essay explaining why the candidate would like to attend. This approach has worked well in helping the organizers develop workshop cohorts that advance IPSI's participation goals, which we describe in additional detail below.

The number of applications the organizers have received for IPSI has varied over the years. Figure 16 shows total applications for each year of the program. In our first year, the organizers received 77 applications for 12 spots. Applications went down for a few years, averaging 43 applications from 2012-2017. This dropoff from 2011 might be explained by the release in 2011 of pent-up demand for this type of programming among scholars. While we cannot know for sure what accounts for these early numbers, one lesson from this experience might be that the first year of a program can be anomalous in terms of the number of applications received.

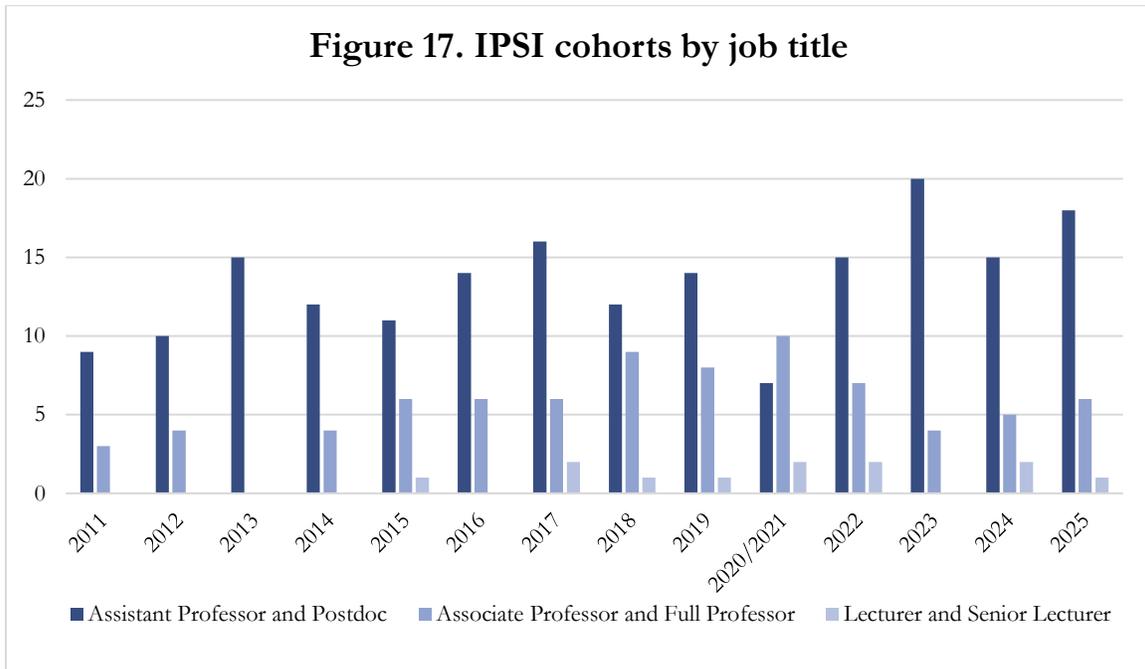


It is easier to explain the significant increase in applications that BTG saw from 2018-2023, when the organizers of IPSI received an average of 106 applications for 24 spots.<sup>15</sup> These years correlate with the heyday of Academic Twitter, which was instrumental in the growth of IPSI’s profile and that of BTG in general. The Twitter accounts of BTG and the individual IPSI organizers provided new opportunities to solicit applications, answer questions, and expand the network of scholars who knew about the workshop. With the decline of Academic Twitter following its purchase by Elon Musk and rebranding as X in 2023, this avenue has been much less available.<sup>16</sup> Like many scholars and academic organizations, BTG ended its Twitter presence in 2023 due to changes in the platform’s policies.

In most years, the majority of IPSI participants have been assistant professors and post-docs, but in some years the number of tenured faculty participating in IPSI has been roughly equivalent to the number of junior scholars. (See Figure 17.)

<sup>15</sup> After 2011, we gradually increased the size of our cohorts from 12 to 24, which we feel is the maximum number of participants for a successful workshop.

<sup>16</sup> Schermele, Zachary. 2023. “Is #AcademicTwitter Over?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 28. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/is-academictwitter-over?sra=true>.



When drafting the first call for applications in 2011, the BTG organizers considered limiting the workshop to post-doctoral fellows and junior faculty. They made the decision, however, that it would be best to open up the opportunity to any professors who might want to attend, no matter their level or tenure-track status. One of the biggest (delightful) surprises to the organizers has been how many tenured associate and full professors have seen value in how IPSI can help them at those stages of their careers better achieve their goals of reaching policy and public audiences.

## 2.4. Evolution of participant selection over time

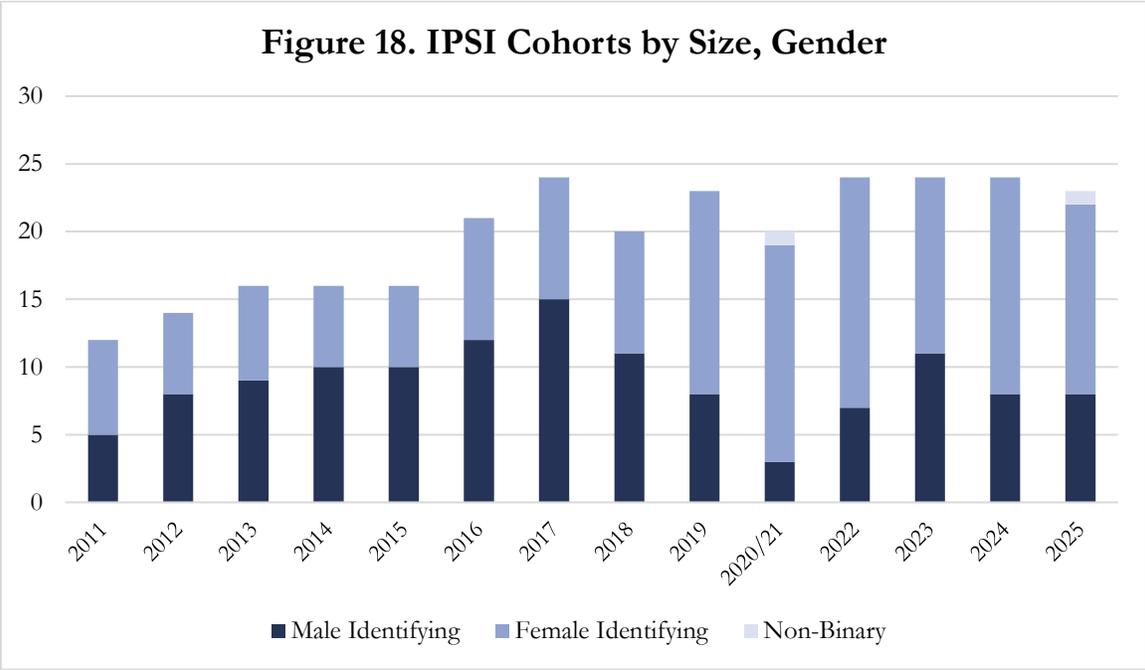
The organizers' process for selecting participants for IPSI has evolved over the years, reflecting changes in both BTG's organizational goals and the policy and academic environments. The following core principles have come to inform the choice of IPSI participants:

*Prioritizing scholars with a demonstrated interest in policy engagement.* The organizers have found that the most successful IPSI participants have already made some efforts to share their work with public and policy audiences before applying, such as through writing op-eds or blog posts, or doing public speaking in their area of expertise. Such participants are more likely to pursue policy engagement after IPSI, and also enrich the workshop experience by sharing their own successes and failures throughout the week.

*Recognizing the unique benefits of a workshop located in Washington, D.C.* Most topics in academic international relations have some relevance to the practice of global politics and policymaking. Not all of these topics, however, are well suited to learning policy engagement among the institutions and policy communities of Washington, D.C. The organizers have found that researchers working in areas that have some connection to the U.S. government and other Washington-based institutions, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, are most likely to benefit from IPSI.

While scholars who research sub-national or regional politics in other contexts might also appreciate our training, the organizers have focused on identifying those participants who will benefit the most from access to the policymakers, think tanks, and media outlets included in our programming.

*Fostering diverse cohorts.* The organizers have found that interest in policy and public engagement is broadly dispersed among scholars coming from many backgrounds, research interests, and institutional contexts. While the majority of participants in most early IPSI cohorts identified as men, the majority of participants in more recent cohorts – and in the program overall – have identified as women. (See Figure 18.) The number of institutions represented in each cohort has also grown over time, with over 20 institutions represented among the participants in most recent years.



## 2.5. Related programs

There are a number of other universities offering programs for graduate students and faculty that complement the work BTG has done over the years to support PhD students and faculty. Inspired after speaking at IPSI, Carleton University professor Stephen Saideman created a [summer institute](#) for The Canadian Defence and Security Network, geared toward senior members of the Canadian Armed Forces, the Public Service, academia (junior scholars), and the media to provide cross-sector professional development and networking opportunities. A member of the BTG team typically speaks at this summer institute. At Monash University, Professor Maria Rost Rublee received funding from the Australia Department of Defence for a [project](#) to “expand and diversify the pool of policy-relevant scholars within Australia.” To get the project started, the BTG team facilitated the first workshop held under the grant.

Other Carnegie-corporation funded projects include the International Policy Scholars Consortium and Network ([IPSCON](#)), which supports graduate students from Duke University, Johns Hopkins University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, Syracuse University, and the University of Virginia, as well as the [Summer Seminar in History and Statecraft](#), convened by the University of Texas, Austin's Clements Center for National Security. The latter brings together a group of PhD students (in history and political science) from a wide variety of programs to discuss creating policy-relevant research and to build networks. The Summer Workshop on the Analysis of Military Operations and Strategy ([SWAMOS](#)) is perhaps the longest running program supporting PhD students interested in policy, having operated for nearly thirty years to foster a new generation of scholars who can contribute to defense policy debates. In addition, the [Responsible Public Engagement](#) initiative hosted by the Sié Center at the University of Denver has sought to create conversations about the ethical issues that arise when seeking to influence policymakers and policy processes with academic work. The [Scholars Strategy Network \(SSN\)](#) is more American politics and domestic policy focused, similar in also being a bridging effort but structured very differently than BTG and the projects noted above.

The International Studies Association (ISA) also regularly convenes panels on public engagement at ISA conferences, and the new [ISA Research and Policy Section](#) – whose establishment was spearheaded by BTG – will provide an institutional home in ISA for programming on the links between scholarship and practice.

## 2.6. Lessons learned and considerations for future programming

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In this closing section, we offer lessons learned from BTG's experience running IPSI for 14 years. As part of this discussion, we outline considerations that we consider important for the development or conduct of any professional development program centered on public or policy engagement, including key trade-offs.

### *Program design*

With respect to program design, BTG's experience with IPSI has generated a number of lessons learned as well as insights about key issues to consider when developing professional development programming.

*The value of in-person programming:* BTG has convened IPSI in person in 14 out of 15 years, only conducting the workshop online, via zoom, during 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. (BTG postponed IPSI in 2020 because of the pandemic.) The workshop experience was considerably diminished when it was conducted on zoom, as the online format diminished the level of engagement among the participants and detracted from their ability to form meaningful interpersonal connections. By contrast, participants in the in-person iterations of IPSI have consistently engaged deeply in workshop discussions as well as informal interactions, and many of them have become close friends and collaborators. While online modalities can be very valuable in facilitating greater participation and as supplements to face-to-face engagement, a professional

development program is more likely to have a large impact on participants if it is conducted in person.

*The value of “high touch” engagement:* The leaders of BTG have found that their own deep involvement in IPSI and a low participant-facilitator ratio have contributed to the program’s success. IPSI’s sessions are facilitated by members of the BTG leadership team, each of whom is a faculty member at their university with an established scholarly reputation and relevant policy experience. These BTG faculty leaders also select the workshop participants and plan the workshop content. With respect to workshop participant numbers, BTG has maintained a cap of 24 on the number of IPSI participants since 2012. With four-to-six BTG leaders serving as workshop facilitators each year, this number of participants has enabled a low participant-facilitator ratio and fostered a “high-touch” level of interaction between the facilitators and participants. This high-touch also helps to ensure a consistently high-quality level of programming. In addition, a low participant-facilitator ratio makes it much easier to facilitate impactful breakout or small-group discussions.

*The value of interactive components:* While many of IPSI’s sessions feature panels with guest experts, BTG has learned that these sessions are most stimulating when they are conducted as moderated conversations with extensive opportunities for questions from both the facilitators and the participants, rather than centering on extended remarks by the speakers. By the same token, BTG has found that participants benefit greatly from discussing issues in a more individualized manner in breakout groups. In recent years, IPSI has included breakout group conversations in which each participant is given an opportunity to discuss and receive feedback on the specific challenges and opportunities they see for conducting public or policy engagement in their own work. Such conversations can help ensure that the workshop content is speaking directly to the goals and needs of individual participants.

*The value of hands-on skill building:* BTG has also found that participants benefit greatly from opportunities to engage in hands-on, skill-building activities. The portions of IPSI in which participants receive media training, conduct and receive feedback on mock media interviews, and write and receive feedback on draft op-ed articles or blog posts have consistently been among the most popular components of IPSI. These kinds of exercises provide participants with concrete know-how and experience that enhance their feeling of confidence and preparedness for engaging in specific kinds of public and policy engagement – and provide them with a skill set that they can then put into practice in the real world.

*The importance of not over-scheduling:* With any program, it can be tempting for organizers to try to cram in as much content as possible. While the BTG team has sometimes fallen victim to this temptation, we have found that there are limits to how much content participants can usefully digest in a given day and that it is important to ensure that sufficient time is made available for informal interactions. To that end, we have built into the IPSI program some meals, receptions, and breaks designed to provide the participants and organizers an opportunity to get to know each other and build relationships. In many cases, these relationships have developed into valuable professional collaborations.

*The importance of adapting to evolving conditions:* Given the reality that the landscape for public and policy engagement is constantly evolving,<sup>17</sup> professional development programs need themselves to evolve in order to remain useful. One key area of such evolution involves the constantly changing publishing and media landscape. For instance, the 2010s represented something of a golden age for public writing by political scientists, with the launching of numerous credible venues for such writing. The most notable among these was the Monkey Cage, a *Washington Post* outlet that published thousands of policy-oriented articles by political scientists and attracted a large following.<sup>18</sup> The elimination of the Monkey Cage in 2022 meant that political scientists lost their leading outlet for public engagement.

More broadly, Twitter at its peak provided a powerful mechanism for scholars in all fields and disciplines, and at all levels in the profession including graduate students, to engage in public dialogues about policy questions and further expand the audience for their work. The purchase of Twitter by Elon Musk in 2022 and its rebranding as X disrupted this mechanism for scholars of all kinds. At the same time, new opportunities have opened up involving other outlets and types of media, including podcasts, online newsletters, and other digital technologies. In this evolving context, it is essential for designers of professional development programs to keep the content of their media engagement and public communication training fresh.

Professional development programs also need to take into account the evolving political context. IPSI has focused its policy engagement training heavily on engagement with U.S. policy makers in Washington, DC. (Other BTG programs such as NEW and New Voices in National Security have encompassed a broader international policy scope.) When we have had participants in IPSI more interested in engaging with other policy communities – such as those at the state or local level, in the private sector, or outside the United States – we have adapted to support these efforts. In fact, in a political context where U.S. leaders are denigrating academic institutions and expertise, it may be more fruitful for scholars of a variety of stripes to engage with audiences and practitioners outside of DC.

Indeed, in response to an open-ended question asking for suggestions for how BTG could improve or enhance its work, some of the IPSI alumni who responded to BTG’s 2025 survey called for more emphasis on engagement beyond Washington, DC. For instance, one respondent commented, “Given changes in the policy environment in the United States, I hope Bridging the Gap will continue to broaden the scope of the policy outreach that it encourages. The ‘value proposition’ associated with research in, for example, private-sector contexts might differ from foreign policy spaces, and it’s important for scholars to figure out how to navigate in those worlds, too.” More

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<sup>17</sup> Tama, Jordan, Naazneen H. Barma, Brent Durbin, James Goldgeier, and Bruce W. Jentleson. 2023. "Bridging the Gap in a Changing World: New Opportunities and Challenges for Engaging Practitioners and the Public." *International Studies Perspectives* 24, 3: 285-307.

<sup>18</sup> Dionne, Kim Yi, Henry Farrell, and John Sides. 2022. "It’s Been a Great Nine Years for TMC Political Science Analysis." *Washington Post*, December 31.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/12/31/tmc-political-science-politics-explainer/>.

generally, any public or policy engagement training program will be enhanced if the organizers consider how the program can best serve its participants given changes in the political context.

### ***Participation***

While IPSI has consistently attracted applications from a sizable number of qualified scholars (see Figure 16 above), the organizers have found that constant attention to recruitment is important for reaching a broad pool of applicants. The following lessons have become clear through 14 years of seeking ideal IPSI participants.

*The importance of including both junior and senior faculty:* Professional development programs such as IPSI can become less attractive over the course of a scholar's career, as accomplished faculty members may feel either that their experience is (or should be) sufficient to allow them to reach policy and public audiences, or, contrariwise, that their window for such engagement has passed them by. But senior faculty can still benefit a great deal from professional development programming. We have found that senior faculty have attended IPSI because of frustrations with their ability to translate their scholarship for broader audiences since they had not engaged beyond academia earlier in their careers. In some cases, senior faculty have seen IPSI as a valuable means of pivoting to a professional profile that includes more public or policy engagement. At the same time, senior faculty can enrich a professional development program by sharing with junior faculty insights from their own more extensive experience in the profession.

*The need to publicize programming in a variety of ways:* Particularly since the demise of academic Twitter, it is important to find multiple ways to publicize professional development programming. We typically send the IPSI application announcement to multiple sections within the American Political Science Association and the International Studies Association (ISA) and post it on social media channels such as Bluesky and LinkedIn. Alumni and others familiar with the program play a role in encouraging potential applicants from their home departments and elsewhere from their professional networks. We also host a large reception at ISA that is open to all conference attendees, and a number of applicants learn about the program at that time.

*The importance of relationship building and continuing engagement:* In addition to providing participants with valuable skills, a successful professional development program fosters the development of lasting relationships that can enhance participant careers for years to come. With IPSI, we have facilitated relationship-building by incorporating breakout discussions and opportunities for social interaction into the program as well as encouraging participants to connect directly with program speakers. More broadly, we have sought to build and maintain community among program alumni and others in our network by hosting a reception at the International Studies Association annual meeting and sharing alumni news and opportunities via a newsletter and social media.

Providing program alumni with opportunities for further professional development can be particularly valuable in ensuring that a program is not just a “one-off” experience. BTG has sought to do this in part through its [New Voices in National Security initiative](#), which brings scholars and policy practitioners together to share knowledge and ideas on important international issues. BTG

has invited some IPSI alumni to participate in New Voices events, offering them an opportunity to build on the skills they developed at IPSI. But IPSI's impact would be even greater if BTG was able to host additional opportunities for skill building or policy engagement targeted to program alumni.

In their responses to BTG's 2025 survey, many IPSI alumni highlighted the importance of relationship-building and continuing engagement. For instance, in response to a question about how BTG could enhance its work, one respondent wrote, "I think just programming isn't sufficient; ... there have to be broader networks and ways to connect even after BTG programming has ended." In a similar vein, another respondent suggested creating "specific, time-limited and bounded programming that could function as a form of continuing education to keep skills fresh and continue connecting the network of BTG alumni."

### ***Replicability to other contexts***

While we have developed IPSI geared to our discipline and subfields, the core goal of fostering greater academic-policy world bridging has broad relevance and value. Program elements delineated earlier in this report – e.g., in-person programming, panels with policy practitioners, high-touch engagement, interactive components, hands-on skills development, media training --- can be tailored and adapted as well as supplemented as fits different constituencies. We see three main applications for replicability:

*Other countries:* IPSI's foreign policy/international relations focus can be adapted to other countries, with program adjustments that reflect the particular political and policy contexts of those countries. We noted earlier such efforts undertaken by BTG with Canadian and Australian colleagues. Similar programs could be carried out in other democratic countries or with supranational organizations such as the European Union.

*Other political science-public policy subfields:* To our knowledge there are not any IPSI-like programs on American domestic policy. While the [Scholars Strategy Network](#) (SSN) mentioned earlier does excellent bridging work, it is more focused on research dissemination than professional development and training. Whether by SSN or others with an American politics/domestic policy focus, the IPSI model could be quite readily adapted to provide public and policy engagement training for scholars whose work focuses on domestic affairs.

*Other disciplines and fields:* Members of the BTG team have been working with the Pew Charitable Trusts on its Transforming Evidence Funders Network and Impact Funders Forum bringing together a wide range of universities and higher education associations as well as public and private funders (including NSF representatives) committed to enhancing policy-academic world bridging. In 2024 as part of this effort a Presidents and Chancellors Council on Public Impact Research was established and a [conference](#) held under the auspices of the National Academies of Sciences. These efforts have included initial discussions of IPSI-like programs focused on economic policy, public health, education policy, environmental policy, and other areas. Much of IPSI's content – in areas such as media training and op-ed writing – would be easily transferable to such other fields. But

aspects of professional development programming focused on engagement with practitioners would need to be heavily modified to reflect the varying policy and practice contexts of different fields.

For any of these adaptation efforts to be successful, leadership from scholars who combine strong academic reputations and policy-related experience is crucial.

## 2.7. Conclusion

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Over the course of 15 years, the International Policy Summer Institute has provided faculty and post-doctoral scholars with valuable training in public and policy engagement. In this report, we have sought to use our experience leading IPSI to provide insights and lessons learned that can help inform the development of future professional development programs in the areas of public and policy engagement. Some of these lessons learned concern program design, such as the importance of in-person, high touch, and interactive engagement, as well as the need to adapt program content to changes in the political, societal, and media landscapes. Other lessons learned concern program participation, such as the importance of wide-ranging publicity to build an application pool, the value of including both junior and senior scholars in a program, and the importance of relationship building and continuing engagement after a program ends.

The continuing high levels of demand for IPSI, as evidenced by the sizable number of applications to the program each year, suggest that scholars see considerable value in a well-curated program designed to bolster their public and policy engagement skills. But IPSI, with its focus on international affairs and its cap of 24 participants per year, is only able to reach a very small portion of the scholarly community. Even so, much of IPSI's structure and content is readily adaptable to other contexts, including policy making in countries other than the United States and issue areas other than international affairs. As universities aim to demonstrate to society the value of their faculty's work, the time is ripe for the creation of new professional development programs centered on public impact. We hope our lessons learned can contribute to the success of such efforts.

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