

THE
Impact
Insider

THE BURNES CENTER QUARTERLY REPORT
JUNE 2023

The Burnes Center for Social Change at Northeastern University designs practical solutions to society's hardest problems. The Center is led by a growing team of accomplished and recognized changemakers focusing on strengthening democracy and improving governance, tackling climate change, advancing education outcomes, deepening labor and economic justice, and promoting better health.

Impact Studios

We believe that today's challenges cannot be solved with yesterday's toolkit. That is why we focus on delivering novel participatory approaches to solving public problems with communities using new technology. We call these **Impact Studios**.

This spring we are running new Impact Studios to find and implement solutions to problems in two of our core areas of focus: **strengthening democracy** and **education**.

Education Impact Studio

Equitable Engagement Lab

Supported by a grant from the Walton Foundation, the Equitable Engagement Lab designs and tests processes and platforms to enable organizations to solve problems **with** communities. The Burnes Center is supporting six national education organizations to develop inclusive strategies for engaging communities and advancing their work.

ANTICIPATED IMPACT

Each of the six engagements will have an impact on the communities these organizations seek to serve. In addition, we are looking to change how education funders engage with communities in solving problems.

Learn more about our Education Impact Studios at Appendix 1.

Democracy Impact Studio

Election Subversion Impact Studio

With support from Democracy Fund and collaborating with Northeastern's Department of Political Science and the Institute for Experiential AI, this Impact Studio uses a method we call Smarter Crowdsourcing that leverages artificial intelligence to enable hundreds of people to participate in defining the problem and its root causes and devising practical solutions. Over the course of spring 2023, we are hosting three tech-enabled convenings on: 1) Misuse of the Legal and Administrative System, 2) Overcoming the Negativity Bias in Journalism, and 3) Reducing Election-Related Violence.

ANTICIPATED IMPACT

This Impact Studio will shape how Democracy Fund and other funders invest tens of millions of dollars to combat election subversion and denial.

Interested in the problems we are tackling? Check out the [Problem Catalog](#).

Oakland City Challenge

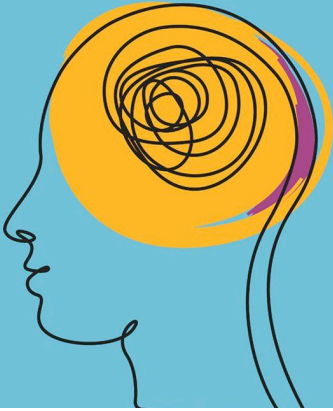
Supported by a grant from the Oakland Fund for Public Innovation and building on our work in a dozen other cities globally, the Burnes Center worked with the City of Oakland and over 50 community groups over the last year to teach the city how to co-design resident-led solutions to issues of gun violence, homelessness, and urban blight.

ANTICIPATED IMPACT

Improving Lives in Oakland/Training Students:

Three of the projects are moving to implementation now: **Oakland Speaks**, which actively teaches evidence-based conflict resolution and non-violent communication skills, will be piloted by the Oakland Community Policing Board, while **Urban Compassion Project**, which partners unhoused residents with dedicated volunteers to provide services to unhoused residents, and **Tiny Homes Oakland**, which provides shelter and community for the formerly incarcerated and unhoused, are receiving support and engagement from students at the Northeastern School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs and NuVu Innovation School.

Upcoming Projects



Education

National education engagements

Through the Equitable Engagement Lab, we are working to dramatically improve equity and engagement in education policy-making, transforming how philanthropy and government engage with students, parents, and educators.

Closing the reading and literacy equity gap

We will launch **Impact Studio: Closing the Literacy Gap** in partnership with the Wayfinder Foundation to address and implement solutions to the reading equity gap.

Strengthening Democracy

AI Assemblies

We are partnering with the Collective Intelligence Project, Citizens Foundation and OpenAI to run online national engagements using AI to ask the US public about their concerns about AI.

InnovateUS

We are expanding our work to create a more effective government by training public servants across 30 states.

All Our Ideas

We are working with the Citizens Foundation in Iceland to rebuild and redesign All Our Ideas, an open-source platform for citizen engagement that has been used in over 20,000 global engagements to enhance our suite of democracy tools.

Reimagining Democracy Lecture Series

We are relaunching a public talks series on ways to reinvent democracy and governance in the digital age in September 2023.

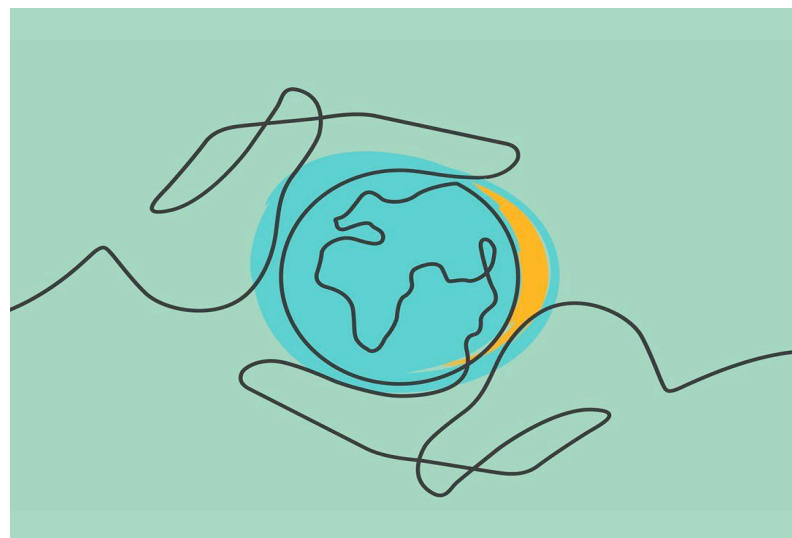
Power Tools

Under the leadership of Seth Harris and in collaboration with the Khoury College of Computer

Science and Northeastern's Civic AI Lab, our Program on Labor and Economic Justice is building tools to support activists and organizers.

The Program on Investigative Solutions Journalism

Under the leadership of Jill Abramson, we are working to improve the ability of journalists to write about what's working in our communities. We teach reporters to delve into what, if anything, is being done effectively--by government, non-profits, activists, and others-- to solve the problems and abuses uncovered by investigative journalists. We are partnering with major national media organizations on this effort.



Hiring Updates

The Center is led by Beth Noveck, a renowned scholar and activist focused on how to use technology, especially artificial intelligence, to strengthen democracy and reimagine governance. This year we've continued to grow, adding accomplished and recognized changemakers focused on improving governance, tackling climate change, advancing education outcomes, deepening labor and economic justice, and promoting better and more equitable healthcare. The opportunity to be part of a community of high-impact, mission driven individuals attracts top-flight faculty, who share a joint appointment between the college they are teaching in and the Burnes Center.

Our Fellows include:



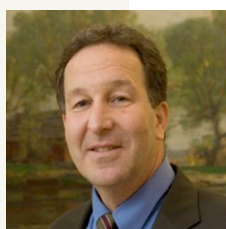
Jill Abramson, the former executive editor of *The New York Times*, is leading the Center's work on Investigative Solutions Journalism, remaking journalism by developing rigorous methods for documenting what works.



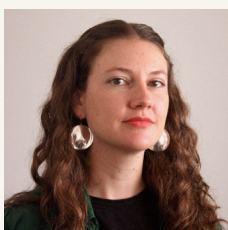
Seth Harris previously led the U.S. Department of Labor, now leads the Center's initiative on Labor and Economic Justice.



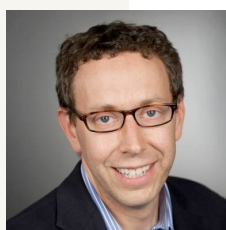
John Battelle, an entrepreneur and journalist who founded The Recount, NewCo, Federated Media, Sovrn Holdings, Web 2 Summit, Wired, and Industry Standard.



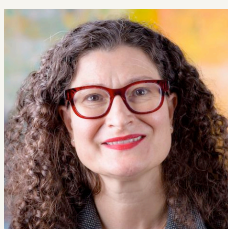
Steve Kadish, former Chief of Staff to the Governor of Massachusetts, is helping to advance our partnerships and collaborations in Boston and Massachusetts.



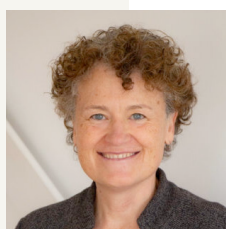
Sofía Bosch Gómez is a designer and researcher who has led transformative digitization projects in Mexico City, and is leading the Equitable Engagement Lab.



Neil Kleiman focuses on the intersection between cities and public problems and recently established the nation's first public health data dashboard to help over 700 cities nationwide improve health outcomes.



Laura Forlano is a social scientist and design researcher with a disability who has used participatory workshops, collaborative games, exhibitions, speculative videos, prototypes, and performances to imagine alternative futures for living with data and computation.



Anita McGahan is the former president of the American Academy of Management, the largest association of business-school professors in the world. McGahan is one of the leading corporate strategists who helps businesses to do well by doing good.



Jonathan Metz, a sociologist and psychiatrist, works on strategies for combating gun violence and improving public health in partisan environments.

Fundraising Update

The Burnes Center has been successful in connecting with foundations and individuals to invest in our work to match the investment by the Burnes Family and Northeastern University. With the new hire of a Director of Major Gifts, we are now also building our base of individual donors.

Since the launch of the Burnes Center in 2022, we have received the following individual and foundation support:

GIFTS TOTAL

\$300,000

\$100,000 to support the launch of the Corporate Accelerator

\$200,000 for general Burnes Center support

GRANTS TOTAL

\$910,000

\$500,000 grant from the Walton Foundation for the Equitable Engagement Lab

\$100,000 in support from Democracy Fund to support the Impact Studio on Election Subversion

\$20,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to support our Solving Public Problems Education Accelerator

\$170,000 from the Henry Luce Foundation (prior gift that was brought over to the Burnes Center)

\$120,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation

NEW GRANTS ANTICIPATED TOTAL

\$2,000,000

\$2M grant from [Google.org](https://www.google.org) for the Burnes Center InnovateUS program that trains public sector workers in the Burnes Curriculum

Education

The Burnes Curriculum

We train learners in over 100 countries in participatory strategies for solving public problems. Our curriculum emphasizes inclusive approaches to cross the chasm from idea to implementation.

InnovateUS

We have trained over 4,000 public servants across the U.S. in equitable engagement, human centered design, and other core competencies. InnovateUS is the only program in the country that delivers free innovation and problem-solving training created for, and by public servants.

United States Government

We've been asked to train 1,000 incoming federal interns in the Burnes Curriculum through our InnovateUS program.

Experiential Entrepreneurship

We are working with the Chancellor's Office and the D'Amore-McKim School of Business to incorporate the Burnes Curriculum into the experiential entrepreneurship program for incoming first years on the Oakland campus.

Northeastern Co-ops

The Burnes Center employs 4 of Northeastern coops from communications, journalism, English, and environmental studies.

Selected Events

The Burnes Center has continued to host important discussions, workshops, and opportunities for members of the university community from different departments to collaborate.

JANUARY 31, 2023

Writing for Social Change Workshop

The Burnes Center organized an in-person faculty writing workshop with Senior Fellow and former New York Times executive editor Jill Abramson. Northeastern faculty were invited to learn more about "How to Turn Topic and Policy Papers into Engaging Narratives" in a two-hour workshop.

FEBRUARY 6, 2023

Burnes Center Labor Meet-Up

The Burnes Center hosted an in-person discussion for faculty and students working on labor and labor-related issues.

MARCH 20 AND MAY 10, 2023

Engagement, Democracy, and Technology Working Group

Over two dozen faculty and leaders within the Northeastern community met in-person at the Burnes Center office to discuss the Center's Equitable Engagement Lab and opportunities for collaboration.

Select Publications, Media, and Speaking Appearances



Boston isn't afraid of Generative AI

Burnes Center Director Beth Noveck discusses the importance of the City of Boston's new Generative AI policy.



Biden to hold debt ceiling talks with top lawmakers

Burnes Center Senior Fellow Seth Harris discussed the debt ceiling negotiations.



Why BuzzFeed and Vice Couldn't Make News Work

by Burnes Center Senior Fellow Jill Abramson



Opinion: Can AI and Democracy Fix Each Other?

Burnes Center Director Beth Noveck discusses how A.I. can support democracy, and how democracy can help us make the best of A.I.



AMERICAN **BAR** ASSOCIATION

ChatGPT: Risks and Opportunity for Public Comments in Rulemaking

Burnes Center Director Beth Noveck participated in a panel discussion about ChatGPT, citizen engagement, and its impact on the future of lawmaking.



Managerialism and our obsession with hierarchy

Burnes Center Director Beth Noveck discusses how we must improve public sector managerialism in order to increase resident engagement.



Justice Department Investigating Silicon Valley Bank Fallout

Burnes Center Senior Fellow Seth Harris discusses the actions taken by the Biden Administration in response to recent bank failures, and the impacts on workers.



Here We Are Again: The Covenant School Shooting

Burnes Center Senior Fellow Jonathan Metzl discusses the way forward for gun reform in America following the tragic shooting in Nashville.

The Equitable Engagement Lab: A Learning Laboratory

The Equitable Engagement Lab aims both to solve problems in education and, at the same time, to advance participatory democracy and civic technology, by addressing:

1. Which platforms and processes are most effective at each stage of a problem-solving process?
2. How can we bring down the cost of practicing participatory democracy for organizations and institutions?
3. How do we translate insights from community engagement into actions?
4. How can we increase equity and create more opportunities for the most vulnerable to participate?
5. How can we best combine the advantages of self-selection and representativeness in engagement processes?

The Equitable Engagement Lab hosts an online community of practice and a Lecture Series on Reimagining Democracy to advance our shared understanding of democratic engagement in the age of new technology.

How we work

Each year, the lab accepts a cohort of organizations to receive assistance.

We provide free training, program design, and technology to engage communities in the design and implementation of new programs or projects.

Our curriculum helps mission-driven organizations develop a shared understanding of participatory approaches, problem definition, and developing solutions with community engagement and collective intelligence.

Following the initial training, grantees are paired with a coach, project manager, and research support to enable the execution of a public engagement project to inform core work and follow-up on insights.

In exchange, we ask that participants 1) commit to being in the design sessions, 2) seriously consider the feedback they receive and communicate back with participants about how they used their

feedback; 3) allow us to write about the experience and share learnings with future participants.

No technical skills, prior experience or knowledge around community engagement are required.

The 2023 Equitable Engagement Lab Cohort and anticipated engagement projects

Educators for Excellence is a teacher-led organization that ensures teachers have a leading voice in the policies that impact their students and profession.

Wayfinder Foundation is an organization that seeks to transform public systems by committing technical support and financial resources to activists with lived experience working at the grassroots of social change.

Our Turn mobilizes, amplifies, and elevates the voices of students in the fight for education equity. Through our organizing campaigns, leadership development, and national voice, young people channel their power to spark a new movement for justice.

The Learning Agency aims to improve education delivery systems so that all learners have the opportunity to succeed. It provides strategic counsel to organizations, foundations, and nonprofits that share its mission.

TNTP works to end the injustice of educational inequality by connecting excellent teachers with the students who need them most, and by advancing policies and practices that ensure effective teaching in every classroom.

Innovate Public Schools is a nonprofit organization working to make sure that all students – especially low-income students and students of color – receive a world-class public education that prepares them for success in college, careers, and beyond. They work to build a movement of families, educators, and businesses and elected leaders who together will make this vision a reality.

N **The Burnes Center
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Northeastern University

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The Burnes Center for Social Change at Northeastern University designs practical solutions to society's hardest problems. The Center is led by a growing team of accomplished and recognized changemakers focusing on strengthening democracy and improving governance, tackling climate change, advancing education outcomes, deepening labor and economic justice, and promoting better health.

SPOTLIGHT ON innovate(us)

Improving Governance Through Public Workforce Training

First year of impact

To advance the Burnes Center’s goal of strengthening democracy and improving governance and problem solving, the Center houses **InnovateUS**, a free training initiative that uses new technology to deliver at-your-own pace and live skills training to public servants in areas such as data, digital, and community engagement.

Supported by grants from Google.org, The Henry Luce Foundation, and The Rockefeller Foundation, InnovateUS is the only problem-solving training

program created for and by public servants. InnovateUS delivers on the Burnes Center’s commitment to strengthening democracy and improving governance through increasing the capacity of the public workforce to tackle real-world problems more effectively and legitimately.

InnovateUS is currently governed by five state partners: California, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Maine, and New Jersey.

4,500+

public sector professionals trained

100+

state agencies participating

50+

innovative workshops

39

faculty

5

state partners

Offerings

Innovation Skills Accelerator

Innovation Skills Accelerator is InnovateUS’ asynchronous course that teaches how to use new technologies responsibly, define actionable problems, use data and human-centered design, design effective and equitable solutions, forge powerful partnerships

Federal government partnership will train 1,500 interns

This summer, **the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM)** has engaged InnovateUS to train 1,500 public service interns using the **Innovation Skills Accelerator Course**. This introduction to digital and innovation training will empower those entering public service and provide them with the tools for a successful career in government.

to implement change, and measure and scale what works. The course is designed to fill the gap among public servants who want to learn how to become more effective problem solvers in the AI age. In a recent survey of 75 participants who took InnovateUS’ online course on innovation skills, only 13.5 percent said they had prior training in topics such as analytical thinking with data or human-centered design.

Open Justice Course

Open Justice Course is InnovateUS’ at-your-own pace program for legal professionals that uses new technologies, including big data, digital platforms, blockchain and more, to make the workings of our legal institutions easier to understand, scrutinize, and improve.

Live Workshops

InnovateUS hosts biweekly workshops designed to upskill public servants in 21st century skills. Recent workshops include “Making the Most of New Technologies While Avoiding the Risks and Pitfalls” with Boston’s Chief Information Officer Santiago Garces; “Expanding Partnerships: Designing Missions

for Impact” with Christian Bason of the Danish Design Center; “What the Heck is ChatGPT? How Generative AI Will Impact Government” with technology expert Alexis Bonnell, and “Human Centered Design for Public Servants” with Virginia Hamilton of the Partnership for Public Service.

\$2 million in social impact funding to expand training

Now, with \$2 million in social impact funding from Google.org, InnovateUS will dramatically expand its offerings and broaden its reach to 15 states and 50,000 learners over the next three years.

Teaching 21st century skills to tens of thousands of public sector workers across the country will help state and local governments serve residents more effectively and efficiently using new and emerging technologies.

86%

of participants would recommend the workshops

83%

of participants are likely to use what they learned in their work

In addition to the work funded by Google.org, InnovateUS will launch three new courses over the next 12 months:

- Responsible AI for Public Professionals
- Fast Field Scanning: Finding What Works
- Human-Centered Design (in partnership with [Gov21](#) and the Federation for American Scientists)

Additional Announcements

In May, InnovateUS released “[Unlocking the Power of Generative AI](#),” a free tutorial in both English and Spanish to help public professionals responsibly use Generative AI tools like ChatGPT, Bing, and Bard, to work more efficiently and better engage with their constituents. The 13-minute hands-on tutorial provides an introduction on how to use Generative AI to help write memos, translate government-jargon into plain English, and summarize meetings. With interactive examples, the video encourages viewers to experiment with these emerging tools. The video has been viewed over 1,300 times.

In June, the InnovateUS team released “[A Snapshot of Artificial Intelligence Procurement Challenges](#),” a new report offering recommendations

for government in procuring artificial intelligence (AI) tools. As the largest purchaser of technology, it is critical for the federal government to adapt its procurement practices to ensure that beneficial AI tools can be responsibly and rapidly acquired and that safeguards are in place to ensure that technology improves people’s lives while minimizing risks.





Better Government Tech Is Possible

Beth Simone Noveck | Jun 20, 2023 8:00 AM

There's so much potential for the government to use technology to improve the lives of citizens. It starts with acknowledging the importance of training.

In the first four months of the Covid-19 pandemic, government leaders paid \$100 million for management consultants at McKinsey to model the spread of the coronavirus and build online dashboards to project hospital capacity.

It's unsurprising that leaders turned to McKinsey for help, given the notorious backwardness of government technology. Our everyday experience with online shopping and search only highlights the stark contrast between user-friendly interfaces and the frustrating inefficiencies of government websites—or worse yet, the ongoing need to visit a government office to submit forms in person. The 2016 animated movie *Zootopia* depicts literal sloths running the DMV, a scene that was guaranteed to get laughs given our low expectations of government responsiveness.

More seriously, these doubts are reflected in the plummeting levels of public trust in government. From early Healthcare.gov failures to the more recent implosions of state unemployment websites, policymaking without attention to the technology that puts the policy into practice has led to disastrous consequences.

The root of the problem is that the government, the largest employer in the US, does not keep its employees up-to-date on the latest tools and technologies. When I served in the Obama White House as the nation's first deputy chief technology officer, I had to learn constitutional basics and watch annual training videos on sexual harassment and cybersecurity. But I was never required to take a course on how to use technology to serve citizens and solve problems. In fact, the last significant legislation



about what public professionals need to know was the Government Employee Training Act, from 1958, well before the internet was invented.

In the United States, public sector awareness of how to use data or human-centered design is very low. Out of 400-plus public servants surveyed in 2020, less than 25 percent received training in these more tech-enabled ways of working, though 70 percent said they wanted such training.

But knowing how to use new technology does not have to be an afterthought, and in some places it no longer is. In Singapore, the Civil Service Training College requires technology and digital-skills training for its 145,000 civilian public servants. Canada's "Busrides" training platform gives its quarter-million public servants short podcasts on topics like data science, AI, and machine learning to listen to during their commutes. In Argentina, career advancement and salary raises are tied to the completion of training in human-centered design and data-analytical thinking. When public professionals possess these skills—learning how to use technology to work in more agile ways, getting smarter from both data and community engagement—we all benefit.

Today I serve as chief innovation officer for the state of New Jersey, working to improve state websites that deliver crucial information and services. When New Jersey's aging mainframe strained under the load of Covid jobless claims, for example, we wrote forms in plain language, simplified and eliminated questions, revamped the design, and made the site mobile-friendly. Small fixes that came from sitting down and listening to claimants translated into 48 minutes saved per person per application. New Jersey also created a Covid-19 website in three days so that the public had the information they wanted in one place. We made more than 134,000 updates as the pandemic

wore on, so that residents benefited from frequent improvements.

Now with the explosion of interest in artificial intelligence, Congress is turning its attention to ensuring that those who work in government learn more about the technology. US senators Gary Peters (D-Michigan) and Mike Braun (R-Indiana) are calling for universal leadership training in AI with the AI Leadership Training Act, which is moving forward to the full Senate for consideration. The bill directs the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the federal government's human resources department, to train federal leadership in AI basics and risks. However, it does not yet mandate the teaching of how to use AI to improve how the government works.

The AI Leadership Training Act is an important step in the right direction, but it needs to go beyond mandating basic AI training. It should require that the OPM teach public servants how to use AI technologies to enhance public service by making government services more accessible, providing constant access to city services, helping analyze data to understand citizen needs, and creating new opportunities for the public to participate in democratic decisionmaking.

For instance, cities are already experimenting with AI-based image generation for participatory urban planning, while San Francisco's PAIGE AI chatbot is helping to answer business owners' questions about how to sell to the city. Helsinki, Finland, uses an AI-powered decisionmaking tool to analyze data and provide recommendations on city policies. In Dubai, leaders are not just learning AI in general, but learning how to use ChatGPT specifically. The legislation, too, should mandate that the OPM not just teach what AI is, but how to use it to serve citizens.

In keeping with the practice in every other country, the legislation should require that training to be free. This is already the case for the military. On the civilian side, however, the OPM is required to charge a fee for its training programs. A course titled Enabling 21st-Century Leaders, for example, costs \$2,200 per person. Even if the individual applies to their organization for reimbursement, too often programs do not have budgets set aside for up-skilling.

If we want public servants to understand AI, we cannot charge them for it. There is no need to do so, either. Building on a program created in New Jersey, six states are now collaborating with each other in a project

called InnovateUS to develop free live and self-paced learning in digital, data, and innovation skills. Because the content is all openly licensed and designed specifically for public servants, it can easily be shared across states and with the federal government as well.

The Act should also demand that the training be easy to find. Even if Congress mandates the training, public professionals will have a hard time finding it without the physical infrastructure to ensure that public servants can take and track their learning about tech and data. In Germany, the federal government's Digital Academy offers a single site for digital up-skilling to ensure widespread participation. By contrast, in the United States, every federal agency has its own (and sometimes more than one) website where employees can look for training opportunities, and the OPM does not advertise its training across the federal government. While the Department of Defense has started building USALearning.gov so that all employees could eventually have access to the same content, this project needs to be accelerated.

The Act should also require that data on the outcomes of AI training be collected and published. The current absence of data on federal employee training prevents managers, researchers, and taxpayers from properly evaluating these training initiatives. More comprehensive information about our public workforce, beyond just demographics and job titles, could be used to measure the impact of AI training on cost savings, innovation, and performance improvements in serving the American public.

Unlike other political reforms that could take generations to achieve in our highly partisan and divisive political climate, investing in people—teaching public professionals how to use AI and the latest technology to work in more agile, evidence-based, and participatory ways to solve problems—is something we can do right now to create institutions that are more responsive, reliable, and deserving of our trust.

I understand the hesitance to talk about training people in government. When I worked for the Obama White House, the communications team was reluctant to make any public pronouncements about investing in government lest we be labeled “Big Government” advocates. Since the Reagan years, Republicans have promoted a “small government” narrative. But what matters to most Americans is not big or small but that we have a better government. ■



Boston Isn't Afraid of Generative AI

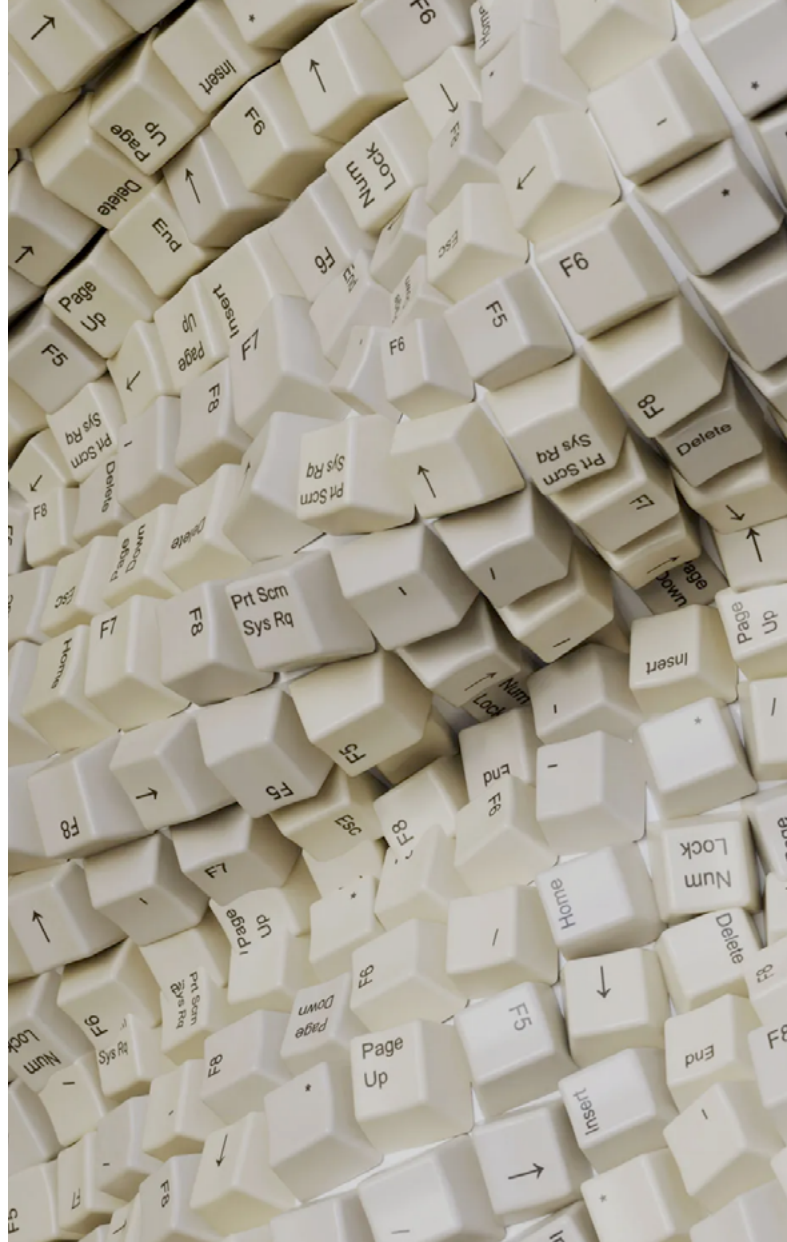
Beth Simone Noveck | May 19, 2023 12:07 PM

The city's first-of-its-kind policy encourages its public servants to use the technology—and could serve as a blueprint for other governments.

After ChatGPT burst on the scene last November, some government officials raced to prohibit its use. Italy banned the chatbot. New York City, Los Angeles Unified, Seattle, and Baltimore School Districts either banned or blocked access to generative AI tools, fearing that ChatGPT, Bard, and other content generation sites could tempt students to cheat on assignments, induce rampant plagiarism, and impede critical thinking. This week, US Congress heard testimony from Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, and AI researcher Gary Marcus as it weighed whether and how to regulate the technology.

In a rapid about-face, however, a few governments are now embracing a less fearful and more hands-on approach to AI. New York City Schools chancellor David Banks announced yesterday that NYC is reversing its ban because “the knee jerk fear and risk overlooked the potential of generative AI to support students and teachers, as well as the reality that our students are participating in and will work in a world where understanding generative AI is crucial.” And yesterday, City of Boston chief information officer Santiago Garces sent guidelines to every city official encouraging them to start using generative AI “to understand their potential.” The city also turned on use of Google Bard as part of the City of Boston’s enterprise-wide use of Google Workspace so that all public servants have access.

The “responsible experimentation approach” adopted in Boston—the first policy of its kind in the US—could, if used as a blueprint, revolutionize the public sector’s use of AI across the country and cause a sea change in how governments at every level



approach AI. By promoting greater exploration of how AI can be used to improve government effectiveness and efficiency, and by focusing on how to use AI for governance instead of only how to govern AI, the Boston approach might help to reduce alarmism and focus attention on how to use AI for social good.

Boston’s policy outlines several scenarios in which public servants might want to use AI to improve how they work, and even includes specific how-tos for effective prompt writing.

Generative AI, city officials were told in an email that went out from the CIO to all city officials on May 18, is a great way to get started on memos, letters, and job descriptions, and might help to alleviate the work of overburdened public officials.



City officials were also encouraged to use generative AI to summarize lengthy pieces of text or audio into concise summaries, which could make it easier for government officials to engage in conversations with residents.

The Boston policy even explains how AI can help produce code snippets and assist less technical individuals. As a result, even interns and student workers could start to engage in technical projects, such as creating web pages that help to communicate much needed government information.

Still, the policy advocates for a critical approach to the technology and for taking personal responsibility for use of the tools. Thus, public servants are encouraged to proof any work developed using generative AI to ensure that hallucinations and mistakes do not creep into what they publish. The guidelines emphasize that privacy, security, and the public purpose should be prioritized in the use of technology, weighing impact on the environment and constituents' digital rights.

These principles represent a shift from fear-mongering about the dangers of AI to a more proactive and responsible approach that provides guidance on how to use AI in the public workforce. Instead of the usual narrative about AI killing jobs or talking only about AI bias, the city's letter explains that, by enabling better communication and conversation with residents of all kinds, AI could help repair historical harm to marginalized communities and foster inclusivity.

Boston's generative AI policy sets a new precedent in how governments approach AI. By supporting responsible experimentation, transparency, and collective learning, it opens the door to realizing the potential of AI to do good in governance. If more public servants and politicians embrace these technologies, practical experience can inform sensible regulations. Furthermore, generative AI's ability to simplify communication, summarize conversations, and create appealing visuals can radically enhance government inclusivity and accessibility. Boston's vision serves as an inspiration for other governments to break free from fear and embrace the opportunities presented by generative AI. ■

The tools can also help public servants “translate” government-speak and legalese into plain English, which can make important information about public services more accessible to residents. The policy explains that public servants can indicate the reading level or audience in the prompt, allowing the AI model to generate text suitable for elementary school students or specific target audiences.

Generative AI can also help with translation into other languages so that a city's non-English speaking populations can enjoy equal and easier access to information about policies and services affecting them.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Chike Aguh



IN JUNE, Chike Aguh joined the Burnes Center as a Senior Fellow. He is focused on efforts to connect workers from underserved communities to jobs in economically important sectors and map the skills needed for workers to work alongside AI and other emerging technologies. He will support the work of InnovateUS and the center’s mission to modernize the public sector.

“The first and most basic way to build trust in these communities – and all communities – is for government to deliver. When residents know that they can trust their local government to deliver programming effectively, be responsive to their needs and concerns, and represent their interests, trust grows.”

Most recently, Chike was appointed by President Biden to serve as Chief Innovation Officer at the US Department of Labor. Chike was the Department’s first Black CIO. Reporting to Deputy Secretary Julie Su, he led efforts to use data, emerging technologies, and innovative practice to advance and protect American workers. These efforts included creating the department’s first enterprise data strategy, serving a pivotal role in the \$2B modernization of the nation’s unemployment insurance system, piloting the nation’s first workforce scorecard, and serving as the DOL’s designee to the National Space Council.

Previously, Chike was founding leader of the Community College Growth Engine Fund, a national multimillion dollar effort supporting 41 community colleges training thousands for good jobs. Chike has also worked as an education policy official and teacher in America’s largest school system; Fulbright Scholar in Asia; director of corporate strategy and performance technologies at technology company Education Advisory Board (EAB); CEO of a national nonprofit which helped connect 500,000 low-income Americans in 48 states to affordable internet and digital skills; Harvard Carr Center Human Rights and Technology Fellow; member of the Council on Foreign Relations Taskforce on the Future of Work; and Director of Strategy and Future of Work Lead at the McChrystal Group, a business advisory firm founded by Gen. (ret.) Stanley McChrystal.

Q&A with Chike

What work can be done to prepare workers who come from underserved communities for the changing workforce due to AI and other emerging technologies? Is there a potential for emerging tech like AI to improve job training and lift up communities that have long been underrepresented?

First, we must improve access to free training programs with the fewest possible barriers to entry. This education must be provided to all levels of learners and workers – from training young people first entering the workforce, to providing lifelong learning programs for older workers.

We also must ensure that reliable digital infrastructure is available across all communities, and that we are collaborating with government at all levels to advocate for policies and regulations that support equitable workforce training programs proven to work.

Emerging technologies like AI have significant potential to improve job training and uplift underrepresented communities. AI can offer personalized learning experiences, make training more accessible and affordable, provide data-driven insights for targeted programs, and facilitate remote and flexible learning. However, addressing challenges such as equitable access, biases, and inclusivity is crucial to fully harnessing the benefits of AI in empowering underrepresented communities. We have to ensure that the most cutting edge technologies are used to train the most vulnerable people in our society for the most in-demand jobs.

What do you see as the potential for InnovateUS to use digital problem solving training to improve how government serves underrepresented and vulnerable communities?

InnovateUS' courses and workshops enhance problem-solving skills and data-driven decision-making, helping government workers become better equipped to be both responsive and better engaged with residents.

We have the incredible opportunity now to expand InnovateUS' opportunities to more states and reach more workers. This creates the potential for more

targeted, inclusive, and effective policies, programs, and services that prioritize equity and yield positive outcomes for underrepresented and vulnerable populations. My belief is that we can take the same ethos that our most innovative companies use to serve customers to help our governments serve their citizens, by designing around their needs and aspirations.

There is a lot of distrust in government in communities that have historically been left behind. How can programs like InnovateUS support stronger connections between communities and the public sector?

The first and most basic way to build trust in these communities – and all communities – is for government to deliver. When residents know that they can trust their local government to deliver programming effectively, be responsive to their needs and concerns, and represent their interests, trust grows. Without that, trust can never be built.

These are the skills that InnovateUS is building in our public workforce through equipping government workers with the tech and digital skills to leverage new platforms that foster open and transparent dialogue and input. Ultimately, when government is consistently listening to the people it serves and delivering on what it hears, this country is much better off. ■

Impact Studios

We believe that today's challenges cannot be solved with yesterday's toolkit. That is why we focus on delivering novel participatory approaches using new technology with the goal of solving public problems in partnership with communities. We call these **Impact Studios**.

Countering Election Subversion

Funded by Democracy Fund Voice, our latest impact studio on Countering Election Subversion is hosting three convenings:

Misuse of administrative and legal systems

The first convening (April 19) sought practical solutions to abuses of the courts, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, and other administrative processes.

Media and authoritarianism

The second convening (June 6) surfaced initiatives that philanthropy could fund to support election coverage that strengthens democracy.

A third convening (August 7, 2023) will address election-related violence.

In total, we expect over 100 experts from political science, election administration, election law, machine learning, journalism, and community engagement to contribute. This project is in collaboration with Northeastern's Department of Political Science and the Institute for Experiential AI.

Interested in the problems we are tackling? Check out the [Problem Catalog](#).

Equitable Engagement Lab

The Burnes Center Equitable Engagement Lab helps mission-driven organizations design and execute community engagement using new technology.

This work is supported by a grant from the Walton Foundation. In total, the Burnes Center is helping six national education organizations develop inclusive strategies for engaging communities and advancing their work.

In June, the Burnes Center launched an [AI and technology-driven engagement](#) with [Our Turn](#), a youth-led advocacy organization committed to elevating student voices to eliminate educational inequity.

The Burnes team is helping [Our Turn](#) collect ideas from a wide range of young people across the country to update its [Student Agenda](#).

AI Assemblies: Shaping AI Policy and Regulations

The Center has partnered with [Collective Intelligence Project](#) to use AI-enabled technology to [gather input](#) from the public on Artificial Intelligence (AI). The results will be used to guide generative AI companies, including [OpenAI](#) and [Anthropic](#), in designing more

responsible AI policies. The outcomes will also be shared with government partners and policy makers, with the goal of influencing future AI policy and regulations.

Teaching

Social Change Course Program at Northeastern

Working across disciplines and colleges, the Burnes Center has curated a selection of graduate level courses focused on social change and designed to address some of the most pressing issues of our time. The courses provide Northeastern students with an incredible opportunity to make a real-world impact while expanding their knowledge and skills in social change, interdisciplinary collaboration, and problem-solving. The courses include:

Climate Science, Engineering Adaptation, and Policy

Civil & Environmental Engineering | Auroop Ganguly

This course offers an evidence-based glimpse of what has been called a clear and present danger to mankind, through analyses of case studies from the magic of the butterfly effect in chaos theory to the deep challenges in physics, biogeochemistry, and data sciences.

Nonprofit Organizations and Social Change

Public Policy and Urban Affairs | Rebecca Riccio

This course provides an overview of fundamental principles and practices in the nonprofit sector as they relate to social change. Topics include systems change and stakeholder identification, design thinking and human-centered design, theory of change and logic models, program design and evaluation, strategic and business planning, organizational structure and capacity building, governance, and communications and social media.

Food Systems and Public Policy

Public Policy and Urban Affairs | Christopher Bosso

This course explores the public policy dimensions of the contemporary food system, and assesses the role of governing institutions and political actors in shaping the food supply; the effects of energy, transportation, and urban policies on food access; the ecological dimensions of food production; impacts of international trade regimes on global food trade; and the potential impacts of climate change on food security.

Design for Dignity

Art - Design | Donald Robinaugh

This studio course addresses design problems with a focus on the concept of dignity as a central principle of human-centered design. It offers students an opportunity to practice applying these perspectives, models, and theories to create compelling design projects as well as to develop competencies in collective participation in community.

Social Determinants of Health

Health Sciences - Interdisciplinary

This course introduces social and structural conditions as key contributors to people's physical and mental health. It will provide an opportunity to develop awareness of the role of social determinants of health in population health; knowledge of the pathways through which they impact health; awareness of the specific ways the health of different populations and demographic groups is impacted; and enhanced evaluation, diagnosis, and communication with patients and clients.

The Biotechnology Enterprise

Biotechnology | Elizabeth Frey, Eduardo Sanchez, Robert Schultz, Youngbin Tak

This course exposes students to the business of biotech from scientific discovery startup through its product launch and subsequent organizational and scientific pipeline growth. Topics include scientific discovery, biotech-related funding and organizational structures, regulatory and clinical trial considerations, biotech alliances, patient access, ethics and compliance, and commercialization and growth while meeting unmet patient or consumer needs in this highly regulated industry.

Hiring Updates

The Burnes Center is continuing to grow, adding accomplished and recognized changemakers focused on improving governance, advancing education outcomes, deepening labor and economic justice.



Chike Aguh has joined the Burnes Center as a Senior Fellow to support the growth of InnovateUS and efforts to connect workers from underserved communities to jobs in economically important sectors. Most recently, Chike served as Chief

Innovation Officer for the U.S. Department of Labor.



David Fields, Professor of the Practice within the Graduate School of Education at Northeastern University, has joined the Burnes Center to lead our efforts to advance social change across the university. He brings over 20 years of higher education experience building, launching, and scaling industry aligned programs. He served as interim Dean for the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University where he inspired and sustained the College's academic vision and direction for 11,000 students and 1,000+ faculty across twelve campuses and three continents.

Co-Ops

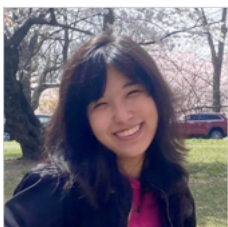
The Burnes Center has also recruited Northeastern co-ops across a variety of disciplines and fields of study to support our work, while building on the Center's commitment to provide students with real world, hands-on experience.



Raiyah Ahmid is an undergraduate student in Northeastern's College of Arts, Media, and Design pursuing a degree in Journalism with minors in Arabic and Psychology. In her role at the Burnes Center, she manages communications for InnovateUS.



Olivia Leon is a third-year undergraduate student at Northeastern's College of Humanities and Social Sciences pursuing a B.A. in English and Communications. She supports the Burnes Center's digital media and communications.



Bela Omoeva is a fourth-year undergraduate majoring in Journalism. She is a Solutions Journalism Reporter at the Burnes Center. With the guidance of Jill Abramson, she works on investigative feature stories that aim to cover potential solutions to public problems through a rigorous lens.



Asia Simms is an undergraduate student in Northeastern's College of Social Sciences and Humanities pursuing a B.A. in Environmental Studies and Sociology. In her role at the Burnes Center, she supports Power at Work— the blog promoting labor and economic empowerment.

The Rebooting Democracy Lecture Series brings together innovative designers, thinkers, and changemakers to imagine how to “do democracy” differently in the age of AI. Details and RSVP information for each lecture will be posted on reboodemocracy.ai.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2023

The Civic Bargain: How Democracy Survives

Brook Manville and Josh Ober, authors of the upcoming book *The Civic Bargain: How Democracy Survives*.

OCTOBER 26, 2023

Algorithms for Engagement

Róbert Bjarnason, co-founder of the Citizens Foundation, a non-profit, improving democracy through open-source technology and methods.

Colin Megill, CEO and founder of Polis, a real-time system for gathering, analyzing and understanding what large groups of people think in their own words, enabled by advanced statistics and machine learning.

Ariel Procaccia, Gordon McKay Professor of Computer Science at Harvard University, and an expert in algorithms and artificial intelligence, and questions of societal importance.

JANUARY 18, 2024

From Cyberdemocracy to AI Democracy: How the History of the Internet Could Shape our AI Future

Vint Cerf, Vice President and Chief Internet Evangelist for Google. He is the co-designer of the TCP/IP protocols and the architecture of the Internet.

JANUARY 25, 2024


AI and the Media

Jill Abramson, former Executive Editor of The New York Times, and leads the Burnes Center’s Initiative on Solutions Journalism
Additional guests to be announced soon

FEBRUARY 15, 2024

AI and Democracy’s First Principles

Sir Anthony Grayling, Founder and Principal of the New College of the Humanities at Northeastern University, London, and Professor of Philosophy. Among his many books are *The God Argument*, *Democracy and Its Crisis*, *The History of Philosophy*, *The Good State* and *The Frontiers of Knowledge*.



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2023

Northeastern School of Law Reunion reception honoring Nonnie Burnes

Celebrating the Life and Legacy of the Hon. Nonnie S. Burnes, '77-'78

5:30 – 8 PM, Northeastern’s Campus

Past Events

Faculty-led City Strategy

On May 9, Burnes Senior Fellow Neil Kleiman brought together twenty Northeastern faculty and staff to discuss the creation of a faculty-led city strategy for Northeastern. The project is exploring how Northeastern can

have greater impact in each city where the University has a campus. The conversation was kicked-off by Kate Burns, Executive Director of the MetroLab Network. The work is continuing over the summer with smaller breakout groups.

Engagement, Democracy, and Technology Working Group

On May 10, Burnes Senior Fellow Sofía Bosch Gómez convened nearly 40 faculty and staff members from across Northeastern and neighboring universities for the second in-person Engagement, Democracy, and Technology Working Group.

Burnes in the News



AI Is Great for Government. Public Professionals Need to Learn How to Make the Most of It.

June 21, 2023 – by Burnes Center Director Beth Noveck



Biden makes re-election pitch in key swing state Pennsylvania

June 17, 2023 – Burnes Center Senior Fellow Seth Harris discusses President Biden's reelection strategy.



Biden 2024 Kickoff Counters Trump With Focus on Economy, Wealthy

June 17, 2023 – Burnes Center Senior Fellow Seth Harris discusses President Biden's reelection strategy.



UPS workers vote to authorize strike while cheering unexpected progress on heat safety

June 16, 2023 – Burnes Center Senior Fellow Seth Harris discusses the impact of the UPS workers vote to authorize a strike.



Opinion: Better government tech starts with people. New Jersey shows how.

June 13, 2023 – Jennifer Pahlka discusses the success of improving access to unemployment benefits in New Jersey, led by Burnes Center Director Beth Noveck.



Why any debt deal could be just the beginning of the treacherous road to avoiding default

May 26, 2023

Burnes Center Senior Fellow Seth Harris discusses the debt ceiling negotiations.



Biden to hold debt ceiling talks with top lawmakers

May 25, 2023

Burnes Center Senior Fellow Seth Harris discusses the debt ceiling negotiations.



Boston creates staff guidelines on the use of generative AI

May 22, 2023 – Burnes Center Director Beth Noveck discusses Boston's new Generative AI policy.



New AI Video Tutorial Focuses on Public-Sector Needs

May 10, 2023 – Highlighting the new InnovateUS tutorial, "Unlocking the Power of Generative AI," that teaches public sector professionals how to responsibly use Generative AI.



Clarence and Ginni Thomas: Politics, Power and the Supreme Court

May 9, 2023 – Featuring interviews with Burnes Center Senior Fellow Jill Abramson



'It's completely undemocratic': Contract negotiations at unionized Mass. employers are dragging on – and on

May 7, 2023 – Burnes Center Senior Fellow Seth Harris discusses the importance of the first contract negotiations after organizing success.



Why BuzzFeed and Vice Couldn't Make News Work

May 5, 2023 – by Burnes Center Senior Fellow Jill Abramson

Fundraising



\$2 million

from Google.org to dramatically expand its offerings of digital problem solving, including AI training. The funding will allow InnovateUS to expand its reach to 15 states, 50,000 learners, and offer 2,000 participants Google Career Certificates over the next three years.



\$250,000

from the Henry Luce Foundation to build a scalable, at-your-own pace course on “What Works” designed to improve government effectiveness and deepen democracy. We will combine at-your-own pace coursework with a live program focused on one domain, such as education or climate, to explore more ways to deepen the connections around finding what works between journalists and public servants.

Awards

Congratulations to Burnes Center Senior Fellow **Anita McGahan**, who received two recent honors:



The William D. Guth Distinguished Service Award recognizes dedication to all aspects of the field of strategy, and her outstanding service to the field of strategy management.



Anita is also the 2023 recipient of the Sumantra Ghoshal Award for Rigour and Relevance in the Study of Management. The Ghoshal Award recognizes scholars who have distinguished themselves by demonstrating both rigorous and impactful scholarship, and by engaging with the world of practice. The award was presented at The Sumantra Ghoshal Strategy Conference in June, held in memory of Professor Ghoshal, who was a professor at London Business School (LBS) and whose research focused on leadership and change management.

N **The Burnes Center
for Social Change**
Northeastern University

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