

THE BURNES CENTER FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

# IMPACT INSIDER

FALL 2025

From Demanding Change to Making it



**Burnes Center  
for Social Change**  
Northeastern University

The Burnes Center for Social Change designs and implements practical solutions to society's hardest problems. We develop innovative, participatory, and equitable approaches to solve public problems using new technology.

InnovateUS  
reaches milestone  
of over 100,000  
public sector  
workers trained

*The Burnes Center’s  
InnovateUS program provides  
no-cost, live and at-your-own  
pace learning on data, digital,  
innovation, and AI skills to  
public professionals.*

Today, more than ever, the success of government depends on the skills and knowledge of the people it employs. Through the Burnes Center’s [InnovateUS](#) initiative we aim to boost the effectiveness and equity of government service delivery and policymaking, enhance trust in government, and create new opportunities for individuals, to directly engage government.

Our learners hail from nearly all 50 states and the District of Columbia. As we develop InnovateUS training, we engage directly with our learners and leaders to ensure we deliver impactful training for and by public service professionals.

This summer, InnovateUS marked over **100,000 public service professionals** trained, demonstrating the tremendous need for these critical resources and skills across government.

What are InnovateUS learners and partners saying?

“Honestly, InnovateUS is the only training/webinar I do. You have provided a great library of professional skill-building webinars unparalleled in the quality and insightfulness of the subject matter.”

“I would definitely recommend everyone, especially public service employees, to check out courses from InnovateUS. Artificial intelligence is part of the new norm that everyone must get used to.”

“We’ve been using the ‘Responsible AI for Public Professionals’ course for state employees and it is excellent, providing both an understandable overview of generative artificial intelligence as well as practical suggestions for using AI tools and writing effective prompts. I highly recommend it,” Nik Blosser, Chief Privacy Officer and AI Strategist, State of Oregon.

What’s next?

This fall, InnovateUS launched three new collaborative workshop series aimed at some of the most pressing issues facing the public sector.

[REBOOT DEMOCRACY: DESIGNING  
DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT FOR THE  
AI ERA](#)

Curated by Burnes Center Director [Beth Simone Noveck](#) and Professor [Danielle Allen](#) of the [Allen Lab for Democracy Renovation](#) to design effective AI-enhanced citizen engagement that translates public input.

[AI FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT](#)

Building foundational knowledge and best practices for responsible AI deployment in policing, hosted by the State of New Jersey, the [AI Center of Excellence for Justice, Public Safety, and Security](#), and the [Rutgers Miller Center on Policing and Community Resilience](#).

[AMPLIFY: MASTERING PUBLIC  
COMMUNICATION IN THE AI AGE](#)

Exploring how AI tools can strengthen communication and counter disinformation, hosted by Burnes Center faculty and former New York Times Executive Editor [Jill Abramson](#) and Northeastern University Professor [John Wihbey](#).

INNOVATEUS IN THE NEWS

- [The Cities and States That Are Getting It Right–The New York Times](#)
- The City of San Francisco announced a partnership with InnovateUS: [Mayor Lurie Brings AI Technology to San Francisco Government](#)
- Oregon announced a partnership with InnovateUS: [Oregon state employees to receive AI training](#)





# From Training to Transformation: Scaling Structured Literacy in Boston's Classrooms

Linking Teacher Preparation,  
Research, and Technology to  
Improve Student Outcomes

Through a multi-year partnership among Boston Public Schools, the Carroll School, and Northeastern University, three institutions have come together to test a central hypothesis: that improving educator preparation in structured literacy instruction is the most powerful lever for raising literacy outcomes in Boston's highest-need schools.

Using Carroll's Orton-Gillingham professional-learning model and Northeastern's research design, the project is examining whether a sustained, collaborative, and data-driven professional-development model can strengthen both teacher capacity and student performance across diverse, multilingual classrooms.

Twelve Guild Elementary teachers in East Boston, the city's highest need elementary school, completed Carroll's 80-hour training and participated in year-long coaching. Northeastern conducted interviews, observations, lesson-plan analyses, and surveys, leading the research and assessment of the pilot project.

The study reached 27 Tier II and III students (student supports range from tier I, universal, to tier III, most targeted). While student outcomes are forthcoming, early data tell a consistent story: teachers report stronger knowledge and confidence in the five core areas for reading development—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—as well as a deeper understanding of dyslexia and the science of reading. Interviews and observations highlighted three key enablers of success for teachers, which in turn should translate into improvements for students: protected small-group time between teachers and students supported by paraprofessionals, access to high-quality reusable lesson plans, and strong administrative support allowing for flexible scheduling and sustained coaching for teachers.

The key challenge in this pilot is scalability: current ratios of coaches to teachers—and teachers to students—are too low to extend across all 80 Boston elementary schools. Yet with more than 300 Boston teachers already trained in Orton-Gillingham strategies, the pilot suggests that knowledge alone isn't enough; teachers need clear pathways and



sustained support to put that knowledge into practice. Leveraging tools such as AI-powered literacy supports and the Burnes Center's capacity to train and implement at scale could help translate this model from a successful pilot to a citywide strategy.

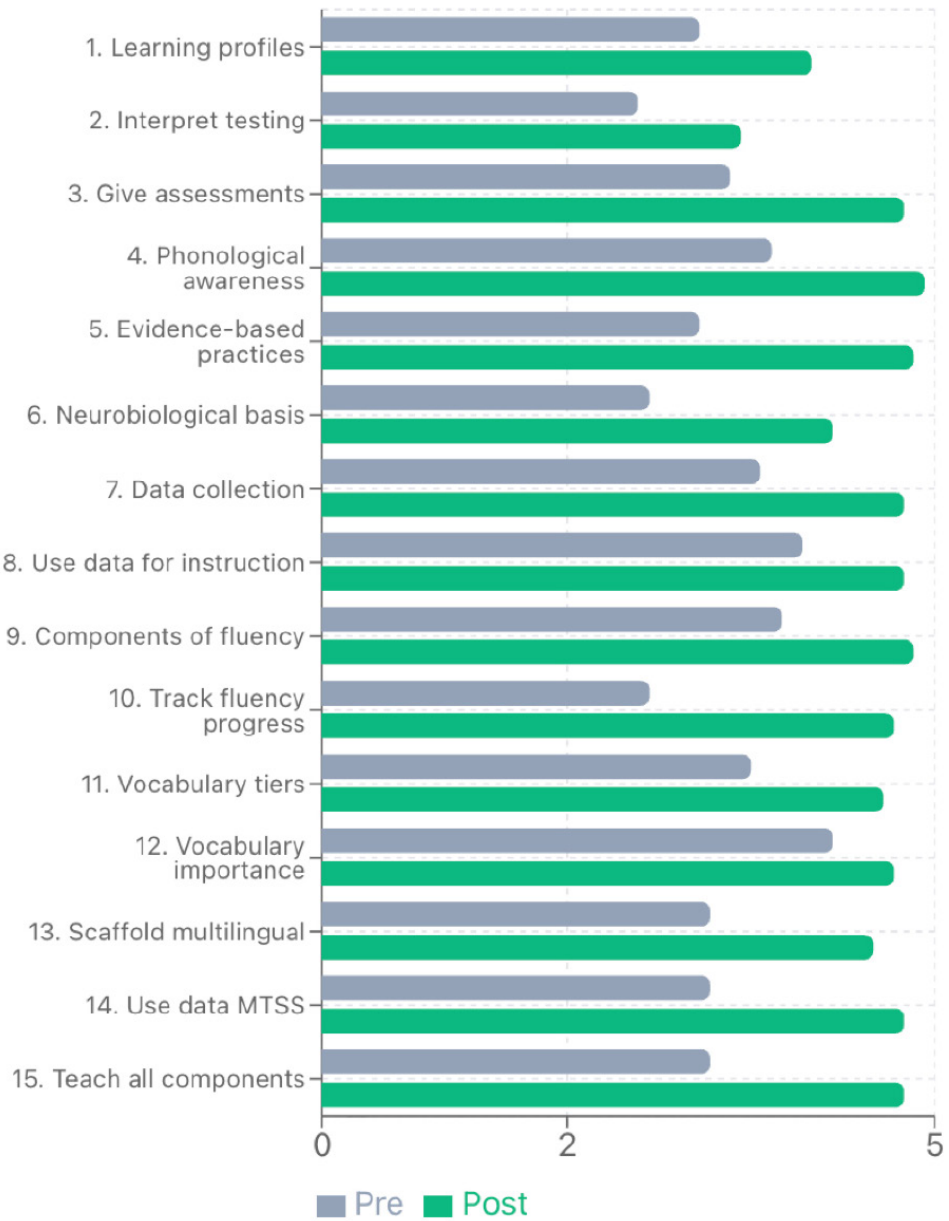
Currently, eight teachers are in cohort 2 and will be interviewed and observed this November, as they continue through the training and implementation through the end of the academic school year. With data in hand showing positive impact, Northeastern will work both to award credit for participating teachers for their own professional advancement, and lean into our capacity to harness technology to scale to bring this model out to a wider swath of schools, teachers, and students.



What Moved: Pre/Post Survey Directional Data



Self-ratings (1–5 Likert) before vs. after the OG course across 15 competencies N=12



Self-Reflection of One's Own Teaching Before vs. After the Orton Gillingham course across 15 Competencies



# AI for Impact Welcomes Fifth Cohort of Students Building AI for Good

*How can we leverage AI to solve our most challenging public problems? Over 50 Northeastern students have contributed to making government services work better for residents through the Burnes Center's AI for Impact Co-op Program.*

The AI for Impact Co-op Program is a pioneering product-based learning program where student teams wield AI as a tool for transformative innovation, turning ideas into measurable impacts in collaboration with the communities they are serving and under the expert guidance of seasoned professionals.

AI for Impact's mission is to deliver innovative projects that will improve people's lives and create a pipeline of AI-trained and mission-driven talent. AI for Impact co-ops have built over 18 products in use by governments.



Spring 2025 co-ops presented to Commonwealth of Massachusetts leadership including the Secretary of Technology Services and Security Jason Snyder.

Spring 2025 AI for Impact co-op students presented their final products for state leadership in Massachusetts and New Jersey in June.

## What are people saying about AI for Impact?

We are truly amazed by what you've accomplished with the AI agents ... Your efforts will be an immense help in negotiating one of the agency's most complicated solicitations/contracts to date: infrastructure-as-a-service. We are genuinely sad to see you go, but also so grateful for the time, energy, and creativity you brought to this project."

— **Jennifer Lyons**, Deputy General Counsel, Commonwealth of Massachusetts Operational Services Division.



Fall 2025 Northeastern AI for Impact co-op students visited Boston City Hall to meet with Boston's CIO and Burnes Center faculty Santiago Garces and visit City Council Chambers.

The Fall 2025 co-ops are building AI products alongside the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the City of Boston, and the State of New Jersey.

## AI for Impact in the News:

[Saving you money, and helping MassDOT build faster- NBC Boston](#)

[The Download: Mass. leans into artificial intelligence- Commonwealth Beacon](#)

[AI Assistant Built by Grad Helps MassDOT Engineers Work Faster- Northeastern Global News](#)



First-ever National Gathering of State AI Leaders

In June, the Burnes Center team organized the first-ever gathering of state AI leaders at Princeton University, convening 35 states, three of the country’s largest cities, and the Cherokee Nation at a standing-room-only event. Individuals from across the country, along with guests from Sweden and India, came together to explore how to design, build and use AI that enables governments to work better and more democratically.

Participants walked away with positive commitments to ensure that new and evolving AI tools are designed in the public interest. New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy kicked-off the event, watch his panel discussion [here](#).



Selected Faculty Happenings



Professor Beth Noveck offered the keynote address, “Living, Learning, and Rebuilding Trust” at the European Public Communications Conference ([EuroPCom 2025](#)) in Brussels about how AI can help rebuild trust in democracy.



Professor Beth Noveck [offered the honors convocation address](#) to Kean University Honors Graduates.





City of Boston's announcement to support health equity

Dr. Alister Martin participated in the City of Boston's announcement to support health equity across Dorchester, Mattapan, and Roxbury, highlighting [LinkHealth](#). Covered in the [Boston Globe](#) and [the Dorchester Reporter](#).



Northeastern Graduate School of Education

Professor David Fields discussed the Burnes Center's literacy work at the Northeastern Graduate School of Education's event "[Generative AI Across Education: PK-12 Education, Higher Ed, and the Workplace](#)"



OpenAI's headquarters in San Francisco

Professor Seth Harris presented the Center's GitLab Foundation-funded skills-based hiring project at OpenAI's headquarters in San Francisco.

The project is leveraging AI to analyze job descriptions and relevant state laws, focusing on identifying and reforming stringent college degree requirements that disproportionately exclude workers without degrees, particularly people of color and those from low-income backgrounds.

By making job descriptions more accessible and aligned with skills-based hiring, the project aims to improve equity, inclusivity, and the effectiveness of public-sector hiring practices.



# Reboot Democracy.AI

Rebooting Democracy in the Age of AI aims to shift the narrative around AI from one of fear to one of opportunity, empowering democratic institutions and the public to leverage AI for improved governance, transparency, and public engagement.

Through widespread dissemination of insights, tools, and practical guidance, including a chatbot that advises people on using AI to enable public engagement, the initiative seeks to influence policymakers, technologists, and civil society to adopt AI practices that enhance democratic processes.

Over time, the goal is to generate stronger, more participatory governance models, a reduction in the spread of misinformation, and more inclusive decision-making at various levels of government.

## Selected Reboot Democracy Publications:

Work with what you have: how Vietnam is using AI as a way to encourage a learning culture among public servants

AI Can Revolutionize Policy Research – But Only If Implemented Responsibly

New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Utah Lead States in AI Readiness, Report Finds

House Republicans Include AI Regulation Preemption in Budget Reconciliation Bill

Global AI Watch: Listening to Public Servants– What Dubai and New Jersey Teach Us About AI Readiness

Research Radar: Co-Designing AI Systems

## Selected Burnes Faculty Publications

“The debate over state-AI level bans misses the point”

Fast Company, Professor Beth Noveck

DOGE Is Using AI To Centralize Government Power. It’s Time to Flip the Script,

Tech Policy Press, Professor Neil Kleiman

Relational design for democracy and governance,

The Loop, Professor Sofia Bosch Gomez

Electronic medical records save lives,

VoxDev, Professor Anita McGahan

Beyond the Exam Room: Impacting Health Outcomes Through Civic Engagement,

Grant Makers in Health, Professor Alister Martin

5 AI Tools Revolutionizing How I Work as a Physician and Nonprofit Exec,

MedPage Today, Professor Alister Martin

The chilling effect of crackdowns on leaks to the press,

Boston Globe, Professor Jill Abramson

Who is behind the conservative Washington Free Beacon?

Boston Globe, Professor Jill Abramson

Do we really need two public radio stations in Boston?,

Boston Globe, Professor Jill Abramson

Removing Barriers to Government Benefits: Link Health’s Role in Advancing Health Equity Through Expanded Enrollment,

Conduct Science Journal, Professor Alister Martin

A Rotary scholar uses technology as a force for good,

Rotary Magazine, Professor Beth Noveck

The Trump-Musk feud,

Prospect Magazine podcast, Professor Jill Abramson

Summer Heat is a Test of Trump-Era Union Power,

Bloomberg Law, Professor Seth Harris

## Selected Burnes Faculty Media Mentions



**N.J. named national leader in AI Innovation.**

BINJE –Business in New Jersey Everyday, Professor Beth Noveck

**Trump’s Bid To Fire BLS Commissioner ‘Preposterously Stupid And Deeply Dangerous’.**

Huffington Post, Professor Seth Harris

**DOGE results murky amid Elon Musk’s exit.**

UPI, Professor Beth Noveck

**Judge and lawmakers question the Trump administration’s plan to gut Job Corps centers.**

AP, Professor Seth Harris

**Pathways to Impact: Dr. Alister Martin.**

data.org, Professor Alister Martin

**US Labor Department Ending Mental Health, Child Care Benefits for Own Staff.**

Bloomberg News, Professor Seth Harris

**EPA’s new AI tool disagrees with Zeldin on climate change.**

E&E News/Politico, Professor Beth Noveck

**Labor unions mobilize to challenge advance of algorithms in workplaces.**

The Washington Post, Professor Seth Harris

Awards

Professor Beth Noveck and Professor Santi Garces (Khoury and Burnes Center), alongside the GovLab, were named to the inaugural **AI 50–Public Sector AI Innovators** award.



**Beth Simone Noveck**  
**Chief AI Strategist, New Jersey**  
With a special focus on training state employees to responsibly and effectively use AI, Noveck was the first AI chief appointed in New Jersey, itself a leader in public-sector AI policy and use. Noveck also furthers this work as director of the GovLab.

The AI 50: Honoring Public Sector AI Innovators

Professor and AI for Impact Technical Lead Santi Garces was awarded the **2025 Boston ORBIE award for Large Enterprise CIO** and by **GovTech as a “Top 25 Doers, Dreamers and Drivers.”**



Shreya Thalvayapat, (Data Science, Economics, ‘25) was awarded Khoury’s Undergraduate Co-op award for her work as an **AI for Impact co-op at the Burnes Center**. She was recently hired by the Commonwealth’s Executive Office of Technology Services and Security.

Beth Noveck was recognized as a **ROI-NJ Influencer: Women in Business.**

The National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO) awarded the AI for Impact Program the 2025 Cronin Award for Procurement Excellence and its inaugural Academic Collaboration Award for our work with the State of Massachusetts at a national ceremony in Texas.







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