



Initiative for Gender Equity  
in the Public Sector

# 2025-2026 ANNUAL REPORT

[www.igeps.org](http://www.igeps.org)



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**This report was prepared by:**

Maria D'Agostino

Nicole Elias

Emily Kwok



## About us:

The Initiative for Gender Equity in the Public Sector (IGEPS) conducts evidence-based research to make public service and public policy more equitable for all gender identities. IGEPS was originally established as Women in the Public Sector (WPS) in the Fall of 2013 at John Jay College when the Founding Co-Directors, Nicole M. Elias and Maria J. D'Agostino recognized a need for students and faculty to focus on gender in public service within and beyond the John Jay community. The move to IGEPS in the Fall 2021 underscores its commitment to equity for all sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions.

Our team includes Student Fellows, Affiliate Practitioners, Affiliate Scholars, and the Founding Co-Directors. To date, IGEPS has worked with over 48 Student Fellows, 4 Affiliate Practitioners, and 5 Affiliate Scholars. These partnerships have resulted in research products and practical tools for bolstering gender equity, including: 61 research articles, 13 reports, and 25 public scholarship works. In addition, IGEPS has hosted 44 events, with over 2,190 participants. Our Blog, "Gender Dialogues: A space for community and conversation," houses 116 blog posts, bringing together diverse voices and points of view from scholars, students, and practitioners. These spaces educate the John Jay community and the broader academic and practitioner audiences about gender issues in public service, while also providing outlets for collaboration on important gender topics. IGEPS remains committed to fostering inclusive conversations, supporting impactful work, and encouraging continued progress toward gender equity in public service and beyond.

Throughout the 2025-2026 academic year, IGEPS continued to advance gender equity through research, dialogue, and community engagement. Team members presented research at conferences, including NECoPA, the Gender Equity Interagency Partnership Conference, and the Social Equity Leadership Conference, examining issues such as gender-sensitive disaster technology, representation, equity, accountability, and data-informed decision-making. IGEPS also convened practitioners, policymakers, and scholars through its panel discussion, "Gender Equity Initiatives in New York City," fostering meaningful conversations on advancing gender equity.



**Making the public sector work for all genders.**

# Our Mission

To make public service and public policy more equitable for all gender identities

By partnering with public sector organizations, we equip administrators with the best tools and resources to make informed decisions for achieving gender equity

## Our Values



### Equity

Advancing equity for all people is our guiding principle. We believe when public policies are thoughtfully designed to be inclusive of diversity and fair to all gender identities—everyone benefits—from individuals and organizations to society at large.



### Scholarship

Innovating through research is at the heart of everything we do. We use science to rigorously tackle pervasive and complex problems that impede gender equity.



### Collaboration

Partnering with public sector professionals and other academic researchers give our work new meaning. We not only gain valuable insights and different perspectives from our partners, they help us apply our research to make a real difference in the world.



### Education

Sharing our findings with a broad audience of researchers, students and public administrators advances our mission even further. We inform current and future decision-makers alike about the latest issues facing gender equity and the tested solutions to overcome those obstacles.

# Co Director



**Nicole M. Elias** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Public Management at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY and Founding Co-Director of the Initiative for Gender Equity in the Public Sector at John Jay College. Her research focuses on equity in public administration and policy, with an emphasis on the ethics of administration, management of human resources in public organizations, and public policy impacts on different populations. Dr. Elias is the author of numerous journal articles, book chapters, government reports, and practitioner training modules on means of fostering greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in public service. Her recent work appears in *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration*, *State and Local Government Review*, and *Voluntas*.

Dr. Elias is the co-editor of symposia appearing in *Administration & Society*, *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, *Public Administration Review*, and *Public Integrity*. Her recent book projects include two co-edited volumes: *Handbook of Gender and Public Administration* (2022) and *Ethics for Contemporary Bureaucrats: Navigating Constitutional Crossroads* (2020). She regularly collaborates with practitioners in government agencies and nonprofit organizations. Dr. Elias was a Research Partner with the New York City Commission on Gender Equity and held a Research Fellowship at the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Office and U.S. Department of Defense's Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI). She served as the Lead Faculty Advisor to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management on the 2016 Government-wide Inclusive Diversity Strategic Plan. In 2022, she was named one of City & State's Higher Education Power 100: Driving diversity on campus, which recognizes college and university officials for making their schools more inclusive. She is also the winner of John Jay College's 2019 Audre Lorde Award for Social Justice.

# Co Director



**Maria J. D'Agostino** is a Professor of public administration in the Department of Public Management at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and Founding Co-Director of the Initiative for Gender Equity in the Public Sector. Dr. D'Agostino's scholarship focuses on gender, leadership, diversity, equity, and inclusion in the public sector. Her research scholarship qualitatively and quantitatively examines gender in leadership positions, inclusive and organizational workplace practices, and gender-equitable pedagogy. Her expertise is applied in practice through various public sector partnerships including the New York City Gender Equity Commission and the United Nations Gender Equity in Public Administration (UN-GEPA) group. She recently collaborated with UN-GEPA as an expert to develop the next steps and new approaches to women's participation and leadership in public administration.

Dr. D'Agostino convenes workshops bridging the academic, practitioner, and student communities to provide resources and tools to create more equitable workplaces, policies, and classrooms. In Spring 2022 she was named in City & State New York's list of Higher Education Power 100: Driving Diversity in Campus. She is actively involved in several public administration groups including the American Society of Public Administration, Scholars Strategy Network, and Academic Women in Public Administration. Dr. D'Agostino is the co-recipient of the 2018-19 Inaugural Presidential Student-Faculty Research Collaboration Award examining gender equity in municipalities. She is also the recipient of the Section for Women in Public Administration Mentorship Award, the Rita Mae Kelly Distinguished Research Award, and the John Jay College Faculty Mid-Career Research Award.

# Graduate Fellows

## IGEPS Fellowship Program

The IGEPS Fellowship Program offers master's, undergraduate, and doctoral students enrolled in public administration and policy programs, or related fields, an immersive experience in helping to advance gender equity in the public sector. IGEPS Fellows contribute to research projects and public forums on gender equity in the public sector. These students will gain knowledge and research skills as well as benefit from mentorship by gender equity scholars and practitioners.



**Meghan Scarlott** is a graduate student at John Jay College working towards her MA in Forensic Psychology and her Advanced Certificate in Transnational Organized Crime. She earned a Bachelor of Science in International Affairs with a concentration in Security Policy and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from George Washington University. She has experience in economic development from working at the Boston Chamber of Commerce on their Pacesetters program, connecting minority-owned businesses with larger cooperation. Meghan's interests include baking, running, and playing with her puppy!



**Melissa Brock** is a graduate student at John Jay College working towards her Master of Public Administration with a concentration in Criminal Justice Policy Administration. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Saint Peter's University, and her Master of Arts in Forensic Psychology and Counseling from Saint Elizabeth University. Melissa currently works as a counselor in an adult county correctional facility in New Jersey. She is a certified Disaster Response Crisis Counselor and has previously worked with the Mental Health Association of Essex and Morris. She hopes to shift gears after graduation and begin a new career effecting positive change to the criminal justice system at the policy level. When her toddler allows it, Melissa is a voracious reader, and she enjoys attending live music or comedy shows.

# Graduate Fellows



**Emily Kwok** is a graduate student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice currently working towards her MPA-PPA with dual concentrations in Human Resource Management and Management & Operations. She is currently the Program Supervisor for a NYC Non-Profit Organization, where she is pivotal in helping provide community outreach programs for youth development. She serves as a pillar of support in providing leadership and oversight in her community inclusion efforts that target youth members who are chronically absent or have dropped out of school. Emily's interests include traveling, trying new foods, and spending time with her friends and family.



**Erin Sullivan** is a graduate student at John Jay College, working towards her Master of Public Administration and Public Policy, specializing in Criminal Justice Policy and Administration. She previously earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice from John Jay. Erin has several years of experience in the legal field and currently works for the NYS Office of the Attorney General, where she recovers funds for New York State. She also volunteers for the Office of the Attorney General's Election Protection hotline, assisting voters with any issues they may encounter. Passionate about public service, Erin aims to transition into a role within state or city government, where she can contribute to helping local communities. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family, her dog and cat, as well as hiking and biking to the beach.

# Graduate Fellows



**Maria Cedeno** is currently pursuing my Master of Public Administration with a concentration in Operations and Management. She will be graduating in the Fall of 2024. Maria is a finance and research administrator with over two decades of experience, shaping visions and initiatives for educational and non-profit organizations. Currently serving as the Director of Administration and Finance, she had lead strategic development and management for a social work research center. She hopes in the future to work in the field of urban education and policy. Beyond work and studies, Maria finds joy in exploring the outdoors, brewing her own beer, West African Dance, and cherishing moments with her niece, nephew, and beloved dog, Clemente.



**Zion Dacosta** is a graduate student at John Jay College, currently pursuing a Master of Public Administration with a specialization in Inspection and Oversight. She holds a B.A. in Political Science and is deeply interested in public policy, government accountability, and systemic reform. Zion has begun exploring key issues such as fraud, oversight mechanisms, and investigative work, with the goal of advancing equity and transparency in public institutions. She is also particularly interested in substance abuse and mental health services, especially how these systems support men and address the unique challenges they face. Zion plans to pursue a Ph.D. in Political Science with a specialization in public policy, where she hopes to contribute to community-centered research and meaningful policy solutions. Outside of her academic pursuits, Zion enjoys creating content, walking through the city, and grounding herself in her Christian faith.

# Graduate Fellows



**Amillion Roberson** is a research assistant with a background in legal, criminal justice and public administration, with a focused interest in examining gender equity within the criminal justice system. Her academic interests include gender disparities in policing, courts, corrections, and policy outcomes, as well as the intersection of gender, race, and justice reform. She also supports research through literature reviews, data collection, and analysis, and she is committed to contributing to evidence based research that informs equitable criminal justice policies and practices.



**Natasha Alvarez** is an undergraduate student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, working towards her Bachelor of Science in Public Administration, and hoping to continue at John Jay to pursue her MPA. Her academic interests include gender disparities in the public sector, government accountability, and racial and income-based inequality in the justice system. She is also particularly interested in studying environmental policies aimed at combating global warming and environmental racism. She hopes to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to work towards a systematic policy-based change to address the current issues our community is facing. Outside of her academic interests, Natasha enjoys swimming, going to the movie theater, and spending time with her cat.

# IGEPS Affiliate Practitioners

The addition of Affiliate Practitioners to the Initiative for Gender Equity in the Public Sector (IGEPS) strengthens the initiative's connection to real-world policy and practice. These practitioners—who include policymakers, public administrators, civil society leaders, and gender specialists from national and international contexts—bring deep, hands-on experience in designing, implementing, and evaluating gender-responsive policies and programs. Their practical knowledge complements the academic and research expertise within IGEPS, ensuring that the initiative's work is both theoretically robust and practically relevant. Affiliate Practitioners contribute to IGEPS through co-developed research projects, policy roundtables, practitioner-led workshops, public engagement efforts, and mentoring of emerging professionals. They also serve as key thought partners in translating research findings into scalable policy recommendations and institutional reforms. By integrating Affiliate Practitioners into its core activities, IGEPS strengthens its ability to influence real-world change, foster cross-sector collaboration, and promote inclusive governance. This addition not only expands the initiative's reach but also enhances its responsiveness to the complex challenges and opportunities faced by public sector institutions in promoting gender equity around the world.

To learn more about IGEPS Affiliate Practitioners , [click here](#).

# Affiliate Practitioners



**Dora Mendez, MPA (she/her/ella)**, is the Founder and CEO of Coach Dora LLC and a seasoned C-Suite executive with over 12 years in human resources. A passionate advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), she uses coaching, writing, and public speaking to empower individuals to lead with courage and compassion. Dora's leadership experience spans roles as Fractional CHRO, VP of HR & Chief DEI Officer, and Director of HR in mission-driven organizations, alongside public service investigating discrimination complaints. She holds an MPA from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, has taught as an adjunct professor for over 14 years, and is a contributing author to *Latinas Rising Up in HR* (2024) and *Extraordinary Latinas* (2025).



**Vanessa Diaz** is a public sector professional with expertise in program development, evaluation, and oversight within child welfare, immigration, refugee services, and emergency management. Her work emphasizes data-informed decision-making, interagency collaboration, and the creation of equitable service delivery models. In addition to her government service, Vanessa contributes to scholarship at the intersection of public administration, social equity, and inclusive governance. She has co-authored peer-reviewed work on gender equity in public affairs pedagogy and is a contributing author to a forthcoming volume on service delivery and Spanish-speaking communities. Her writing also includes published opinion work on public service and equity. Vanessa holds a BA from CUNY City College and an MPA from CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She is deeply committed to fostering inclusive systems and considers it an honor to serve the future generations of the world.

# Affiliate Practitioners

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**Meg Mikuski** recently graduated with a Master of Public Administration and Public Policy at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She has a Master of Social Work from the University of Illinois at Chicago and a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from Loyola University Chicago. She currently works as a Clinical Social Worker at a county jail in Minnesota. She has various experiences in research, case management, and community corrections. Her research interests are related to reforms in corrections, sentencing, and mental health. When she is not working her interests include traveling, spending time with her dog, being a MN Wild Hockey fan, and getting outdoors! While working as a Graduate Fellow for IGEPs she published Felony Murder Laws and Implications for Youths on PA Times and was further published on Scholar Strategy Network and The Fulcrum.



**Kit Lee-Demery, CEM**, is a certified emergency management professional with extensive experience across public, private, and higher education sectors. She is Senior Manager of Physical Security at Proskauer Rose LLP, overseeing crisis management, security operations, and business continuity for 13 U.S. and international offices. Previously, she served as Assistant Director for Emergency Management and Fire Safety at Pace University, where she developed comprehensive emergency management programs for over 23,000 students, faculty, and staff. Kit's early career includes roles with NYC Emergency Management, coordinating CERT initiatives, and the NYC Office of Chief Medical Examiner, contributing to mass fatality planning, hospital training, and continuity of operations. She is a certified first aid, CPR, AED, and Stop the Bleed instructor, and actively engages with FBI InfraGard, NYPD Shield, veteran mentoring programs, and NYCEM's Public-Private Partnership Legal Forum. Kit holds a B.S. in Criminal Justice, an MPA in Emergency Management, and is a graduate of the FBI Citizens Academy.

# IGEPS Affiliate Scholars

The addition of Affiliate Scholars to the Initiative for Gender Equity in the Public Sector (IGEPS) represents a significant step toward deepening the initiative's academic foundation and broadening its interdisciplinary reach. These scholars, who come from a range of institutions, disciplines, and global contexts, bring valuable expertise in areas such as public administration, gender studies, political science, sociology, and international development.

Their involvement enhances IGEPS's capacity to conduct rigorous, policy-relevant research that informs and supports the advancement of gender equity in public institutions. Affiliate Scholars contribute by co-developing research projects, publishing scholarly work, participating in knowledge-sharing events, and advising on strategic priorities. They also help bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that IGEPS initiatives are grounded in the latest academic findings while remaining responsive to the challenges faced by public sector institutions.

By integrating Affiliate Scholars into the team, IGEPS fosters a vibrant intellectual community dedicated to creating inclusive, gender-responsive governance systems both locally and globally.

To learn more about IGEPS Affiliate Scholars, [click here](#).

# Affiliate Scholars



**Ying Liu**, is a PhD candidate at the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University–Newark. Her research interests include public and nonprofit management, social equity, local governance, digital government, and accountability. Committed to mainstreaming gender issues in public and nonprofit administration, she is currently exploring topics such as women’s representation, gender-responsive budgeting, gender and technology, and women’s nonprofit organizations. Her work has been published in journals including *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, *Policy Studies Journal*, and *The China Quarterly*. She earned her Master of Public Administration from Wuhan University and Bachelor of Public Management from Huazhong University of Science and Technology.



**Heath Brown** is an associate professor of public policy at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, and the CUNY Graduate Center. He has worked at the US Congressional Budget Office as a Research Fellow, at the American Bus Association as a Policy Assistant, and at the Council of Graduate Schools as Research and Policy Director.

In addition to his research, Brown is Reviews Editor for Interest Groups & Advocacy and hosts a podcast called *New Books in Political Science*, <http://www.newbooksinpoliticalscience.com>, where he interviews new authors about their political science publications. He is also an expert contributor to *The Hill* as well as to *The Atlantic* magazine and *American Prospect* magazine.

Brown is currently a co-leader of the New York City Chapter of the Scholar Strategy Network.

# Affiliate Scholars



**Maja Husar Holmes** is the Director of the School of Public Affairs and Administration and Professor of Public Administration. She is dedicated to advancing public service education, engaged scholarship, and fostering inclusivity through research, teaching, and service. Maja's research focuses on public leadership, and diversity and inclusion in public management and higher education. Her work has been published in public administration journals including *State and Local Government Review*, *Administration & Society*, *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory*. She has made significant contributions to advancing diversity and inclusion in higher education through National Science Foundation-funded applied research and the co-authored book, *Engaging Faculty in Group-Level Change for Institutional Transformation* and the public sector with edited volume *Making Sense of Identity and Equity in Public Sector Workplaces*.



**Roddrick Colvin, Ph.D.**, is a professor of public administration and the director of the School of Public Affairs at San Diego State University. The School houses criminal justice, public administration, and city planning. His current research interests include public employment equity, the shared perceptions and decision-making of police officers, and LGBTQ civil rights. His research has been published in several scholarly journals, including the *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, *Police Quarterly*, and *Women and Criminal Justice*. He is also the author of the book *Gay and Lesbian Cops: Diversity and Effective Policing* (Lynne Rienner Publishing). Most recently, he co-edited *Q Policing: LGBTQ+ Experiences, Perspectives, and Passions* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2024) with Drs. Angela Dwyer and Sulaimon Giwa.

# Affiliate Scholars



**Simone Martin-Howard** is an Associate Professor and Director of the Master of Public Administration in the Department of Public Management at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Before her role as Director, Simone served as John Jay's Criminal Justice Management Program Coordinator. A native of Trinidad and Tobago, she holds a Ph.D. in Global Affairs from Rutgers University-Newark, a Master of Public Administration and a Master of Arts in International Relations from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, and a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice, with a minor in Spanish from St. John's University, magna cum laude. Simone's research interests primarily focus on crime and safety; the intersection of public health and criminal justice; health and social equity; public administration and nonprofit service delivery; and correctional health. She has published in *Public Administration Review*, *Women & Criminal Justice*, *Crime & Delinquency*, the *Journal of Health and Human Services*, the *Journal of Public Management & Social Policy*, and the *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*. Her forthcoming book, *Forgotten Law Enforcement: Behind the Gates with Correctional Staff at Rikers Island Jail*, discusses the lived experiences of Black and Caribbean correctional officers and captains at the jail complex. Before joining academia, Dr. Martin-Howard worked for various health organizations on the federal, state, and local levels.

# Gender Equity in U.S. Public Sector Workplaces: A Descriptive Analysis Across Historical Eras

Meghan Scarlott, Nicole Elias and Maria D'Agostino



Meghan Scarlott, IGEPS Fellow, IGEPS Co-Founders Maria D'Agostino and Nicole Elias' published their research article examining gender equity in U.S. public sector workplaces through a systematic document analysis spanning from the Revolutionary War to 2023. Using inductive coding, the analysis identifies eight themes that reflect how shifting social, political, and institutional contexts have shaped gender equity over time. The findings highlight two central needs for advancing gender equity in the public sector. At the organizational level, structural changes are necessary to achieve gender-equitable outcomes. At the individual level, public sector employees must act as resilient agents in advancing equity. Understanding

gender equity-focused events helps equip public sector leaders to design and implement more equitable workplace policies.

To read their research, [click here](#).

# Social Equity Leadership Conference (SELC) 2026



In May, IGEPS Fellows Erin Sullivan, Melissa Brock, Meghan Scarlott, and Zion DaCosta joined IGEPS Practitioner Meg Mikulski at the 2026 Social Equity Leadership Conference (SELC) at Rutgers University–Newark to present their panel, *Defining Equity in Practice: Gender Data, and Due Process Across Public Systems*. Moderated by IGEPS Co-Founder Maria J. D’Agostino, the session brought together research and practical perspectives to examine how public institutions can better understand, measure, and advance equity across diverse systems and communities.

The panel explored the critical role of gender data in informing public policy and decision-making, while also addressing the importance of due process and accountability within public sector organizations. Presenters highlighted how data collection, analysis, and implementation can shape equitable outcomes and discussed the challenges public administrators face when balancing fairness, transparency, and inclusion in practice.

Drawing on their research and professional experiences, the panelists engaged attendees in a thoughtful discussion on translating equity from theory into action. The session reflected SELC’s commitment to fostering innovative conversations around social equity and demonstrated the important contributions of emerging scholars and practitioners working to create more inclusive and responsive public systems.

The panel also showcased the strength of the IGEPS fellowship program, highlighting how emerging scholars and practitioners are contributing to critical conversations on equity in public service. By sharing their work with conference attendees from across academia, government, and nonprofit organizations, the presenters fostered meaningful dialogue on the future of equitable governance and the role of evidence-based approaches in advancing social equity.



# Gender Equity Interagency Partnership Conference



In April, IGEPS was proud to join the 3rd Annual Gender Equity Interagency Partnership Conference hosted by the NYC Commission on Gender Equity on April 28, a powerful day centered on advancing equity, inclusion, and resilient leadership across public systems. At a time when the rights of immigrants, women, and gender-expansive communities continue to face challenges, this conference reinforced the importance of collaboration, learning from past movements, and building stronger, more equitable futures together. We were especially honored to have IGEPS Co-Founder, Maria D'Agostino, participate in the panel Our Histories Hold the Blueprint: Learning from Past Movements to Build Resilient Equity & Inclusion Strategies Today alongside an incredible group of leaders and advocates working to drive meaningful change.



# Panel and Conversation: Gender Equity Initiatives in New York City



In March, IGEPS hosted the Panel and Conversation: Gender Equity Initiatives in New York City, bringing together representatives from the NYC Commission on Gender Equity, and IGEPS Affiliate Practitioner Dora Mendez to reflect on a decade of progress in advancing gender equity across the city. Held in recognition of the Commission's 10th anniversary, the event highlighted key achievements, ongoing challenges, and priorities for future action.

Moderated by Professor Maria J. D'Agostino, the panel featured Priya Nair, Steven Chambers, and Dora Mendez, who explored both the successes and the hurdles in the city's journey toward gender equity. The executive director for the Commission on Gender Equity shared their perspective on the new pay data reporting laws, emphasizing that these measures will help increase transparency and accountability, and anticipating important changes once the laws come into effect. Child care was another major topic of discussion, with the panel highlighting NYC's ongoing efforts to expand access to universal child care, acknowledging that affordable and high-quality care is a critical factor in achieving true gender equity in the workplace and at home.

The conversation also underscored the importance of men's engagement in gender equity efforts, recognizing that sustainable progress requires allies across all sectors of society. Panelists reflected on the role of collaboration between academic institutions, practitioners, policymakers, and community members in driving meaningful, systemic change. By sharing their experiences and insights, they offered actionable strategies for addressing persistent inequities, including closing wage gaps, improving access to leadership opportunities, and fostering inclusive organizational cultures.

With over 100 participants attending, the event encouraged active engagement through live polls and interactive Q&A sessions, allowing students, professionals, and community members to contribute their perspectives and share personal experiences. Their input sparked dynamic discussions and will help shape and strengthen future gender equity initiatives across New York City. Overall, the panel not only celebrated the progress made over the past decade but also provided a clear roadmap for continued efforts, emphasizing the shared responsibility of all stakeholders in creating a more equitable and inclusive city.



# 2025 Northeast Conference on Public Administration (NECoPA)



In November, IGEPS Affiliate Scholar Ying Liu and IGEPS Fellow Zion DaCosta made an incredible impact at the 2025 Northeast Conference on Public Administration. Ying Liu presented her research “(Mis)Representation in Miss Representation: An Information Experiment on the Symbolic Effects of Representative Claims.” Zion Dacosta presented her research, “Are Disaster Mobile Applications Gender Sensitive?”, exploring how technology and gender intersect in disaster management. Zion’s research highlights the importance of designing inclusive tools that address diverse community needs during crises.

# CGE Visits Undergraduate Public Administration Classes



The Commission on Gender Equity (CGE) visited various undergraduate Public Administration classes. The purpose was to conduct workshops introducing students to the work of CGE. The sessions focused on topics related to gender and global engagement. The workshops were designed to give students a deeper understanding of these important issues. They also provided a space for discussion and reflection. The presenters highlighted real world applications of the concepts they shared. Students were encouraged to think critically about gender in a global context. The workshops were led by Carlos Manzano, Brittany Bye, and Ashley Singh.

# Women in County Jails Don't Benefit From Incarceration Reform

Melissa Brock and Margaret Mikulski

**SCHOLARS**  
STRATEGY NETWORK

In this Scholar Strategy Network policy brief, Melissa Brock, IGEPS Fellow, and Margaret Mikulski, IGEPS Affiliate Practitioner, examine the overlooked impact of short-term jail detention on women in the United States. Their work highlights how even brief jail stays can disrupt employment, housing, healthcare, and family stability, while limiting access to critical support services. They argue that many carceral reforms focus primarily on prisons and fail to address the unique challenges faced by women in county jails, where nearly half of incarcerated women are held. The research emphasizes the disproportionate burden placed on women as caregivers and the lasting consequences that detention can have on children and families. To address these inequities, Brock and Mikulski advocate for jail-centered reforms, including expanded diversion programs, caregiver-focused pretrial policies, integrated court models, and strengthened support services that reduce harm, promote stability, and decrease women's involvement in the criminal justice system.

To read this policy brief, [click here](#).

# Understanding Gender in the Workplace Through a Historical Lens

Meghan Scarlott, Maria D'Agostino and Nicole Elias



In their PA Times op-ed, Meghan Scarlott, IGEPS Fellow, and IGEPS Co-Founders Maria D'Agostino and Nicole Elias explore how evolving policies and historical patterns can guide the development of more inclusive and equitable public sector workplaces. This piece highlights how recent policy shifts and legal challenges continue to shape gender equity, including a January 21, 2025 executive order scaling back certain DEI practices and creating uncertainty around protections for minority employees. Historically, progress toward gender equity has been uneven, with some policies expanding protections for women and LGBTQ+ individuals while others have limited them. The article also underscores the critical role of supportive measures, such as childcare policies, in sustaining workforce participation. Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic further revealed how gaps in these supports disproportionately impact women and contribute to workforce instability. Together, these insights emphasize the importance of intentional, inclusive policymaking that centers both equity and long-term workforce resilience.

To read their op-ed, [click here](#).

# Considering Gender Sensitivity in Disaster Mobile Application Design

## Zion Dacosta, Maria D'Agostino and Luci Velotti



Disasters, whether natural or human-made, cause widespread devastation but affect vulnerable populations—including those defined by location, social status, economic conditions, and gender—most severely. In a piece for PA Times, Zion Dacosta, IGEPS Fellow, highlights that women, in particular, face higher risks and are disproportionately represented in disaster fatalities, yet gender is often overlooked in disaster management planning. Mobile technology offers a way to empower communities across all phases of disaster response, including early warnings, damage reporting, and two-way communication with emergency services. However, many disaster apps are built on “gender-neutral” frameworks that treat all users the same, which can unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities. A gender-sensitive approach is needed, one that considers gender roles, social norms, and intersecting identities to ensure equitable access to information and resources. Data-oriented and communication-oriented applications must account for differences in digital access, literacy, and safety to effectively serve all users. Nonbinary and LGBTQIA+ individuals, as well as women with limited access to technology, are often overlooked in traditional disaster planning. By adopting gender-sensitive design principles, technology developers and public administrators can create more inclusive, effective, and equitable disaster management systems.

Read the full op-ed, [click here](#).

# How History Should Inform the Future of Gender in the Workplace

Maria D'Agostino, Nicole Elias  
and Meghan Scarlott

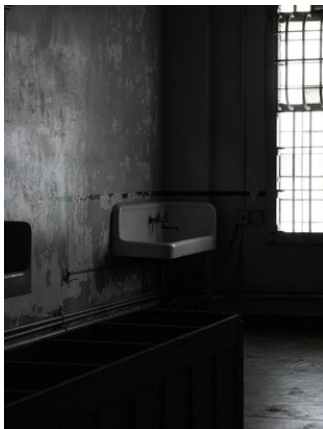
**SCHOLARS**  
STRATEGY NETWORK

In this Scholar Strategy Network policy brief, Founding Co-Directors Maria D'Agostino and Nicole Elias, and Meghan Scarlott, IGEPS Fellow, examine how gender representation and DEI policies impact workplace culture, employee well-being, and accountability, with women often seen as temporary workers and LGBTQ+ individuals targeted through policies like the Lavender Scare. Workforce participation has also been conditional, with limited protections for caregiving and SOGIE-specific needs. Laws like the Family and Medical Leave Act and Title VII improved protections, but gaps remain, and recent political shifts have challenged DEI initiatives. Women still bear disproportionate caregiving responsibilities, and LGBTQ+ employees often face discrimination or lack of accommodations. Recognizing historical trends can inform more inclusive policies. Public sector workplaces need formal, intersectional strategies to promote gender equity. Advocacy, employee resilience, and collective action remain key to sustaining progress.

To read this policy brief, [click here](#).

# The Rise of Incarcerated Mothers Suggests a Need for Family-Centered Criminal Justice Reforms

Melissa Brock and Margaret Mikulski



In this PA Times op-ed Melissa Brock, IGEPs Fellow, and Margaret Mikulski, IGEPs Affiliate Practitioner, examines how the United States' high incarceration rate has led to a sharp increase in incarcerated mothers and severe consequences for their children. Incarcerated mothers are far more likely than fathers to have their children placed in foster care, face termination of parental rights, and experience long-term family separation. Policies such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act's 15/22 provision and limited visitation options make it difficult for mothers to maintain parental

bonds while incarcerated. These disruptions are linked to adverse childhood experiences and higher risks of intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system, as noted by the National Institute of Justice. The article critiques rising communication costs approved by the Federal Communications Commission and the lack of family-centered prison policies. It concludes by highlighting promising state reforms and recommending family-centered, diversion-based policies that help justice-involved mothers remain connected to their children and reduce long-term harm.

For the complete op-ed, [click here.](#)

# The Challenges Facing Incarcerated Women and Paths Toward Reform

## Melissa Brock and Margaret Mikulski

**SCHOLARS**  
STRATEGY NETWORK

In a Scholar Strategy Network policy brief, Melissa Brock, IGEPS Fellow, and Meg Mikuski, Affiliate Practitioner, examine the United States' disproportionate role in driving women's incarceration globally, confining nearly 25% of the world's incarcerated women despite representing only 4% of the female population. Since the 1980s, women's incarceration has increased by 585%, often for low-level offenses rooted in poverty, trauma, substance use, and unmet social needs. Jail and prison systems are poorly designed for women, who experience higher rates of physical and mental health conditions, pregnancy, trauma, and sexual victimization. Nearly 80% of incarcerated women are mothers, and incarceration severely disrupts family bonds and access to reproductive and maternal health care. Women face heightened risks of sexual violence while incarcerated, compounded by gaps in oversight and limited support for prevention efforts. Upon reentry, women encounter significant barriers related to housing, employment, child welfare involvement, and healthcare access. These challenges are further reinforced by systemic inequities such as background-check restrictions, limited access to public benefits, and the gender pay gap. The piece argues that trauma-informed, gender-responsive policies and diversion programs are critical to preventing women's incarceration and breaking cycles of poverty and justice involvement.

To read this policy brief, [click here](#).

# Family-Centered Reforms to Address the Rise of Incarcerated Mothers

Melissa Brock and Margaret Mikulski

**SCHOLARS**  
STRATEGY NETWORK

In their Scholar Strategy Network policy brief, Melissa Brock, IGEPS Fellow, and Meg Mikuski, Affiliate Practitioner, expose how the United States' reliance on mass incarceration disproportionately harms mothers and their children. The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with the number of incarcerated mothers nearly doubling between 1991 and 2016. Maternal incarceration is an adverse childhood experience linked to trauma, poor mental health outcomes, and an increased risk of intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system. Children of incarcerated mothers are far more likely to enter foster care, face termination of parental rights, and lose any legal pathway to reunification. Restrictive policies, costly communication systems, and limited access to parenting and reunification programs further weaken parent-child relationships during incarceration. The authors highlight how family-centered state policies—such as prison nurseries, bonding programs, and exceptions to termination timelines—can help preserve these relationships. They also point to diversion programs and community-based alternatives that reduce foster care involvement and recidivism. Ultimately, the piece argues that centering families in justice policy is essential to disrupting cycles of trauma and incarceration.

To read this policy brief, [click here](#).

# Tackling Childcare Affordability to Address Latina Wage Disparities

## Maria Cedeno

**SCHOLARS**  
STRATEGY NETWORK

Through a Scholar Strategy Network policy brief, Maria Cendo, IGEPS Fellow, exposes the reality: Latinas earn 57¢ for every dollar a white man earns, largely due to childcare deserts and limited workplace flexibility. Systemic bias and occupational segregation further limit Latina earnings, with many concentrated in low-paying sectors and underrepresented in STEM and executive positions. Nearly 60% of Hispanic families live in childcare deserts, forcing many Latinas to choose between professional growth and caring for their children. Childcare costs also consume a disproportionate share of household income, creating additional economic strain. Culturally competent care is critical, as most Latine families rely on providers who reflect their language and cultural values. Addressing the wage gap requires targeted development of childcare facilities, workplace flexibility, and support for family, friend, and neighbor caregivers. Policies like pay transparency, tax credits, and bilingual childcare programs can help Latinas maintain employment and pursue higher-paying jobs. Integrated solutions that combine accessible childcare, responsive care systems, and workplace innovations can empower Latinas economically and reduce the persistent wage gap.

To read this policy brief, [click here](#).

# Ending Cash Bail to Advance Pretrial Justice

## Margaret Mikulski

**SCHOLARS**  
STRATEGY NETWORK

In this Scholars Strategy Network policy brief, Meg Mikuski, Affiliate Practitioner, exposes how the tragic case of Kalief Browder reveals the deep injustices embedded in the cash bail system. Browder was arrested at 16 for an alleged backpack theft, detained at Rikers Island for nearly three years—much of it in solitary confinement—despite never being convicted, and later died by suicide after his case was dismissed. His experience demonstrates how cash bail undermines the principle of “innocent until proven guilty” by incarcerating people solely because they cannot afford release. Cash bail criminalizes poverty, fuels mass incarceration, and fails to significantly improve public safety or court appearance rates. Prolonged pretrial detention inflicts serious physical, psychological, and social harm, including violence exposure, mental health deterioration, and the loss of housing, employment, and family stability. These consequences disproportionately burden marginalized communities, particularly people of color and women facing economic and systemic inequities. States such as Washington, DC, New Jersey, and Illinois show that eliminating cash bail can dramatically reduce jail populations while maintaining high rates of court appearances. Despite mounting evidence supporting reform, political resistance continues to threaten progress, underscoring the urgency of equitable, holistic alternatives to cash bail.

To read this policy brief, [click here](#).

# ***Fall 2025 Blog: Concluding Thoughts on Gender Equity in Uncertain Times: Challenges and Opportunities***

Ying Liu



The Fall 2025 blog series explored the challenges and opportunities for gender equity in a polarized and volatile policy environment. Contributors examined how federal policies—from abortion restrictions and tax cuts to digital access and agricultural programs—disproportionately affect women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and marginalized communities, highlighting the importance of intersectional approaches. Scholars emphasized the ongoing effects of structural inequities while also identifying pathways for progress, including expanding women’s leadership, promoting adaptive local governance, and creating spaces for visibility and authenticity. Public administration education emerged as a critical tool, with street-level pedagogy suggested to prepare future leaders for complex, human-centered challenges. While recent policy shifts pose setbacks, the series underscores that strategic local action, resilient leadership, and sustained dialogue can advance gender equity despite adversity.

To read this blog, [click here](#).

# ***Fall 2025 Blog: Adapting Curriculum for a Changing World***

Michelle D. Evans, Nancy Lewis, and José Luis Irizarry

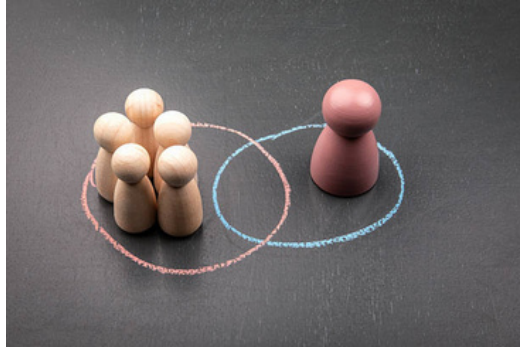


Evans, Lewis, and Irizarry emphasize that public administration and nonprofit education must adapt to prepare future leaders for a changing, polarized policy environment. Using “street-level pedagogy,” educators train students in critical reflection, social skills, and engagement with diverse perspectives to navigate complex, real-world public service challenges. With women comprising the majority of students and nonprofit workers, curricula must address gendered workforce shifts, DEI constraints, and the impacts of technology like AI on equity and engagement. Adapting what and how students are taught—including learning modalities, skill development, and critical thinking—is essential to equip leaders to serve vulnerable populations effectively. By aligning curricula with workforce realities and core public service values, programs can foster competent, equitable, and resilient leaders ready to address the evolving demands of state, local, and nonprofit sectors.

To read this blog, [click here](#).

# ***Fall 2025 Blog: Unsettled Inside: Gendered Realities in a Divided Society***

## **Karen D. Sweeting**



Karen D. Sweeting examines how current political and legal shifts are erasing and constraining gender identities, framing identity itself as a site of power and control. Laws and executive actions that collapse gender into biological sex are not neutral—they dictate whose lives and identities are recognized, limiting possibilities for how people engage with the world. These developments intersect with longstanding gender inequities, including wage gaps, reproductive rights limitations, and the disproportionate burden of invisible labor on women, reinforcing systemic barriers to leadership and advancement. Sweeting emphasizes that gender, race, and identity are central lenses through which the effects of governance are experienced. True equity does not threaten others; it challenges rigid systems of power that rely on binary thinking and exclusion. In this polarized climate, creating space for authentic expression and critical dialogue requires bravery, vulnerability, and persistent advocacy, particularly in academic and public spheres where these conversations are increasingly under threat.

To read this blog, [click here](#).

# ***Fall 2025 Blog: Recent Federal Policy Changes: The Gendered Impacts on State and Local Government Taxes***

Marilyn Marks Rubin and John R. Bartle



Recent federal policy changes have shifted responsibility for health and social services to state and local governments, forcing them to raise revenue through mostly regressive taxes that disproportionately impact women and low-income households. Women face higher burdens due to unpaid care work and economic inequalities, while sales and property taxes further exacerbate these effects. The gendered impacts of these fiscal shifts must be addressed, but reduced federal data collection makes it harder to fully assess and respond to these inequities. Without deliberate policy interventions, these tax structures risk deepening existing gender and economic disparities. Ensuring equitable fiscal policies at the state and local level is critical to protecting vulnerable populations and promoting gender justice.

To read this blog, [click here](#).

# ***Fall 2025 Blog: Land, Power, and Representation: Closing the Gender Gap in Agriculture***

Dr. Aritree Samanta and Cevacien Adee



U.S. agriculture has long been shaped by gender and racial inequities, leaving women underrepresented despite farming 43% of the land. Federal policies and programs have advanced equity, but gaps remain, as women face limited access to USDA resources and decision-making. Local governance bodies, like conservation district boards, are often overwhelmingly white and male, with barriers such as land ownership requirements and long-serving members blocking women's participation. Some states, like California, are introducing measures like associate members and term limits to increase representation. Achieving gender equity in farming requires both federal and local efforts, with expanded pathways for women to influence decisions and access resources critical to dismantling historical and structural barriers.

To read this blog, [click here](#).

# ***Fall 2025 Blog: Overcoming the shadows of adversity***

## Heather Getha-Taylor



Heather Getha-Taylor highlights how efforts to expand education and employment opportunities for women and minorities advanced equity in the U.S., but recent federal actions—such as targeted job cuts and rescinded affirmative action—threaten this progress. She emphasizes the enduring importance of local action and individual initiative, drawing on Septima Poinsette Clark’s work creating literacy and citizenship schools that empowered marginalized communities and sparked broader civil rights change. Clark’s example shows that adversity can inspire innovation, and even small, local efforts can drive lasting social transformation.

To read this blog, [click here](#).

# ***Fall 2025 Blog: Intersectional Challenges: Gender, Race, and Immigration amid Federal Policy Shifts***

Ming Xie



Federal policy shifts disproportionately impact women of color, particularly immigrants, by restricting access to healthcare, reproductive services, and social support. Rollbacks of programs like DACA, abortion access, and Medicaid exacerbate inequalities and create fear that deters people from seeking essential care. In response, cities and states such as New York, San Francisco, and Oregon have implemented policies to ensure reproductive healthcare access regardless of immigration status. Community organizations provide support through legal aid, job training, mental health services, and advocacy against discrimination. These efforts highlight the importance of intersectional approaches that address the overlapping effects of gender, race, and immigration status. By prioritizing the most vulnerable, local and state actors play a critical role in advancing gender equity amid federal policy instability.

To read this blog, [click here](#).

# ***Fall 2025 Blog: Mixed Messages: Exploring Women's Reproductive Rights and Framing of Criminalization***

Beth M. Rauhaus, PhD, Deborah Sibila, PhD,  
and Cameron Robin



Since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, states have increasingly controlled women's reproductive healthcare, often sending mixed messages about abortion rights. Abortion restrictions now frame women's medical decisions as criminal acts, with laws targeting not only patients but also friends, family, and healthcare providers who assist them. These measures disproportionately affect poor women and women of color, worsening health disparities and economic inequities. Historical patterns of criminalizing women's reproductive choices are resurfacing, echoing past arrests for providing contraception. Current laws, like Texas's S.B. 8 and similar measures in Idaho and Tennessee, expand state power and civil liability over reproductive decisions. The bans threaten medical privacy, deter providers, and strain courts and law enforcement. Overall, these policies embed reproductive healthcare within the criminal justice system, reinforcing systemic inequalities and undermining women's autonomy.

To read this blog, [click here](#).

# ***Fall 2025 Blog: From 'Safety Net' to No 'Net': What Ending the Digital Equity Act Means for the Gender Digital Divide***

## **Kayla Schwoerer**



Kayla Schroeder examines the end of the Digital Equity Act and its impact on the gender digital divide. Passed in 2021, the Act aimed to connect millions of Americans to digital services, jobs, healthcare, and education. In May 2025, the Trump Administration abruptly terminated the \$2.5 billion program, forcing states to cancel broadband expansion and digital literacy initiatives. The Act supported state planning, capacity-building, and grants to improve internet access, digital skills, and device availability. Its elimination disproportionately affects women and girls, who relied on targeted training and online safety programs. Rural and underserved communities are hit hardest, leaving vulnerable populations without reliable broadband or technology. Research shows broadband access boosts women's employment, entrepreneurship, and earnings. The program also helped mitigate gender and racial biases in the labor market. Without federal support, communities risk losing progress in women's digital participation. Ending the Act threatens to deepen digital and economic inequalities nationwide.

To read this blog, [click here](#).

# ***Fall 2025 Blog: True Gender Equity Requires More than a Binary Approach***

## **Kathryn Hickey**



State-level anti-LGBTQ+ laws have surged in recent years, disproportionately targeting transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals by restricting healthcare, limiting identity expression, and enforcing harmful school and public policies. Many rely on outdated, binary definitions of sex, erasing nonbinary and intersex people. Policies like restroom restrictions, bans on gender-affirming care, and school sports limitations harm gender-diverse individuals and destabilize equity for women outside rigid norms. These laws increase stigma, mental health risks, and criminalize families seeking affirming care. True gender equity requires protecting the rights, identities, and wellbeing of all gender-diverse people, not just those who fit traditional norms.

To read this blog, [click here](#).

## ***Fall 2025 Blog: Coaching Through Crisis: Building Resilient Leadership for Gender Equity in Local Government***

Dora Mendez, Founder & CEO of Coach Dora  
LLC

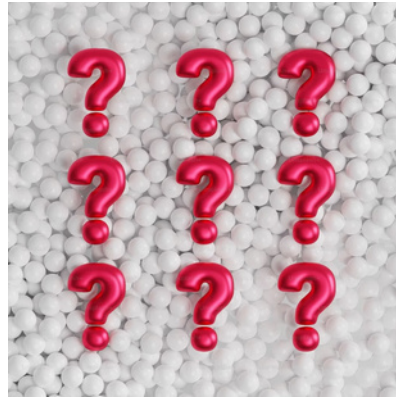


Dora Mendez examines how shifting federal policies place local government leaders at the forefront of advancing gender equity amid uncertainty. Drawing on her coaching experience, Dora Mendez highlights the human and moral dimensions of policy implementation at the local level. She argues that effective leaders develop “adaptive equity intelligence” to navigate political constraints while remaining anchored in their values. The piece describes how leaders use creative strategies, coalition-building, and diversified funding to sustain equity efforts despite federal headwinds. Mendez emphasizes that gender equity should be a guiding lens for all decisions, not a separate initiative. She also underscores the importance of coaching and leadership development to prevent burnout and sustain long-term equity work. Ultimately, she concludes that investing in resilient, equity-centered leadership enables communities to respond to policy upheaval with innovation and emerge stronger and more equitable.

To read this blog, [click here](#).

# *Fall 2025 Blog: Introduction to Gender Equity in Uncertain Time*

Ying Liu



This blog series examines how shifting federal policies shape gender equity at the state and local levels, focusing on the political, administrative, and normative challenges faced by subnational governments. It explores how federal advances and reversals in areas such as reproductive rights, immigrant protections, gender-affirming care, and DEI initiatives affect women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalized populations.

Contributors analyze how state and local governments, nonprofits, and frontline public servants interpret, adapt, and implement federal mandates to mitigate harm and advance equity. The series highlights policy areas including public sector employment, budgeting, environmental sustainability, refugee and immigrant protections, and women's leadership. As federal policymaking becomes more volatile, state and local governments increasingly serve as the frontline where gendered impacts are most visible and contested. Through scholarly and practitioner perspectives, the series aims to foster dialogue and share innovative strategies for promoting gender equity in public service.

To read this blog, [click here](#).

# We Should Think About Child Care As A Crisis, Not Just During A Crisis



In December, IGEPS Co-Founders Maria D’Agostino and Nicole Elias were interviewed about their research examining the challenges facing the U.S. child-care system and the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussion highlighted how the pandemic brought long-standing inequities in child-care access to the forefront, particularly for working families and essential workers. Drawing on their scholarship and expertise in gender equity and public service, they emphasized the need for sustainable, equitable solutions that support caregivers and strengthen workforce participation. Their insights reinforced the importance of viewing child care as a public concern that affects families, communities, and the economy as a whole. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep flaws in the U.S. child-care system and its disproportionate impact on women in the workforce, particularly women of color. Maria D’Agostino and Nicole Elias, IGEPS Co-Founders and John Jay College professors, examined these inequities in their 2020 study, *Care in Crisis: COVID-19 as a Catalyst for Universal Child Care in the United States*. Their research shows that inconsistent and unaffordable child care forced many women—especially essential workers—to leave or reduce participation in the workforce, revealing long-standing gender equity issues embedded in public and economic systems.

To learn more about thier interview, [click here.](#)

## **Contact us**

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# Initiative for Gender Equity in the Public Sector

