



THE CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE LAWMAKING

2025 Annual Report

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VISION

We envision American legislatures comprised of effective lawmakers, strong institutional capacity, and the incentive structure needed to address America's greatest public policy challenges.

MISSION

We advance the generation, communication, and use of new knowledge about the effectiveness of individual lawmakers and U.S. legislative institutions.



**Center for
Effective
Lawmaking**



LETTER FROM CO-DIRECTORS

We are once again thankful and humbled to be leading the Center for Effective Lawmaking through a year of terrific successes and new opportunities.

The explosion of research work on topics of effective lawmaking this year has been remarkable. At every major conference and across all top journals in political science, work on effective lawmaking has found a prominent home. And the topics covered in those works have such practical implications and applications to those working in Congress and the state legislatures. We are grateful for the continuing hard work of our research assistants, post-doctoral scholars, faculty affiliates and their outstanding collaborators who have made this field of study so vibrant.

The work of translating those research findings into practical guidance for legislators and their staffs continues. We released a new wave of Legislative Effectiveness Scores for members of Congress, and are likewise making similar scores for every state legislator publicly available. We delivered our fully revised New Member Guide to every newly elected member of Congress, and are working on adapting that guide for use in the state legislatures. And we have dramatically expanded our Office Hours consultations with legislative staff in dozens of congressional offices.

We remain deeply grateful to the individuals and organizations who help advance these initiatives through giving of their expertise, time, and financial support. We believe that effective governing institutions are essential to preserving and advancing American democracy, and appreciate those who share our vision and who work to make it a reality.

All the very best,

Craig Volden and Alan Wiseman,
CEL Co-Directors



New Legislative Effectiveness Scores

We updated our Legislative Effectiveness Scores at the end of the 118th Congress. Once again, these scores capture the advancement of both stand-alone and embedded legislation. Scores were released on the Center website in March of 2025, along with a robust media and distribution strategy. Similar to prior releases, we once again reached out to the offices of high-performing lawmakers to raise their awareness and helped them with quotes and information needed in their own press releases. We also added a media webinar in this cycle, which drew additional attention.

In total, these efforts were highly successful, as captured by various metrics. This includes about 80 news stories, 18 congressional press releases, and over 50 social media posts from official and related congressional accounts that highlighted the scores.

State Legislative Effectiveness Scores

Our State Legislative Effectiveness Scores capture legislators' activities over recent decades in state legislative chambers. Our initial research paper based on these scores won the American Political Science Association SPPQ Award for best paper on state politics and policy. The revised version of this manuscript was published in 2025 in the flagship journal for political science (*American Political Science Review*). We have made these scores available on our website, where they have been widely downloaded for use by scholars across the country. We are working toward regularly updating all scores at the end of each legislative term.

Knowledge Generation: By the Numbers

7
grants
awarded

4
post-doctoral researchers
and graduate affiliates

15
works
published

49
active research
projects

34
faculty affiliates at 26
institutions

10
research
assistants

SMALL GRANT PROGRAM

The Center awarded seven research grants for a total of \$15,000 to scholars across the country. Research from these awards covers a variety of important topics in the legislative effectiveness field such as state lawmaking (“State Legislative Bill Topics”), electoral connections (“Do Voting Rights Matter? Legislative Consequences of Women’s Suffrage” and “Electable Effectiveness: How Voters Interpret Different Measures of Legislator Effectiveness”), collaboration (“Central to Success: Measuring the Effect of Discursive Centrality on Legislative Effectiveness in Congress” and “Predicting Partnerships: Congressional Campaign Positioning and Legislative Collaboration”), and the economics of effective lawmaking (“Economic Inequality and Legislative Effectiveness in the U.S. Senate” and “Spoils of Incumbency: Effective Lawmakers as Lobbyists”).

**The Center for
Effective Lawmaking’s
research team has
developed three
areas of focus for our
research activities:**

identification of the characteristics of those who would likely become effective lawmakers once elected;
cultivation of effective lawmakers and the analysis of institutional structures within Congress and state legislatures that contribute to effective lawmaking;
and **accountability** of legislators for their lawmaking effectiveness.

RESEARCH RELEASED

Amoroso, Joseph G. (CEL graduate student). 2025. "Deployed to the Hill: Military Experience and Legislative Behavior in Congress." *Political Research Quarterly*.

Ban, Pamela, Ju Yeon Park (CEL faculty affiliate), and Hye Young You (CEL faculty affiliate). 2024. *Hearings on the Hill: The Politics of Informing Congress*. Cambridge University Press.

Bucchianeri, Peter (CEL research affiliate), Craig Volden (CEL Co-Director), and Alan E. Wiseman (CEL Co-Director). 2025. "Legislative Effectiveness in the American States." *American Political Science Review*.

Crosson, Jesse (CEL faculty affiliate), Geoff Lorenz (CEL faculty affiliate), and Alexander Furnas. 2025. "Pivots or Partisans? Proposal-Making Strategy and Status Quo Selection in Congress." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*.

Curry, James M., and Jason M. Roberts (CEL faculty affiliate). 2025. "Interpersonal Relationships, Bipartisanship, and January 6th." *American Political Science Review*.

Fong, Christian (CEL faculty affiliate), Kenneth Lowande (CEL grant recipient), and Adam Rauh. 2024. "Expertise Acquisition in Congress." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Hansen, Eric R., and Sarah A. Treul (CEL faculty affiliate). 2025. "Prior Experience and State Legislative Effectiveness." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.

Hunt, Charles R. (CEL grant recipient), and Kristina C. Miler (CEL faculty affiliate). 2025. "How Modern Lawmakers Advertise their Legislative Effectiveness to Constituents." *Journal of Politics*.

Kaslovsky, Jaclyn (CEL faculty affiliate), Tabitha Koch, and Michael P. Olson. 2025. "Gendered Perceptions of Legislative Influence." *Perspectives on Politics*.

Lauterbach, Erinn (CEL faculty affiliate), and Melinda N. Ritchie. 2025. "Strategies of Control: Members of Congress and Policy Outcomes." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.

Lollis, Jacob M., and Mackenzie R. Dobson (CEL graduate student). 2025. "I'm Coming Out! How Voter Discrimination Produces Effective LGBTQ Lawmakers." *PS: Political Science & Politics*.

Ommundsen, Emily Cottle (CEL faculty affiliate). 2025. "Getting What You Pay For: Resource Allocation and Legislative Success." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.

Porter, Rachel, and Sarah A. Treul (CEL faculty affiliate). 2025. "Evaluating (In)experience in Congressional Elections." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Swers, Michele, and Danielle Thomsen (CEL faculty affiliate). 2025. "Understanding the Policy Priorities of Republican Women in the U.S. House of Representatives." *Politics & Gender*.

Volden, Craig, and Alan E. Wiseman. 2025. "Reconsidering Lawmaking Effectiveness in a Changing Congress," in Dodd, Lawrence C., Bruce I. Oppenheimer, Ruth Bloch Rubin, and C. Lawrence Evans (Eds.). *Congress Reconsidered, 13th Edition*. CQ Press.

RESEARCH AWARD

In coordination with our 7th Annual Research Conference, we announced the 2025 Award for Best Publication on Effective Lawmaking. The award was presented to Fang-Yi Chiou (Academia Sinica) and Max Goplerud (University of Texas-Austin) for their article, “Effective Lawmaking Across Congressional Eras,” published in *The Journal of Politics*. In this article, they examine how the legislative effectiveness of Members of Congress hinges on legislative institutions, and present findings on how certain factors – such as ideology and majority party membership – have dramatically changed over time.



Fang-Yi Chiou
Academia Sinica



Max Goplerud
University of Texas-Austin

The Center for Effective Lawmaking has continued to move significant research forward in the three main areas of identification, cultivation and accountability with a diverse and growing group of scholars. The CEL has expanded our research to also explore each of these three main research areas in regards to lawmaking effectiveness in U.S. state legislatures.

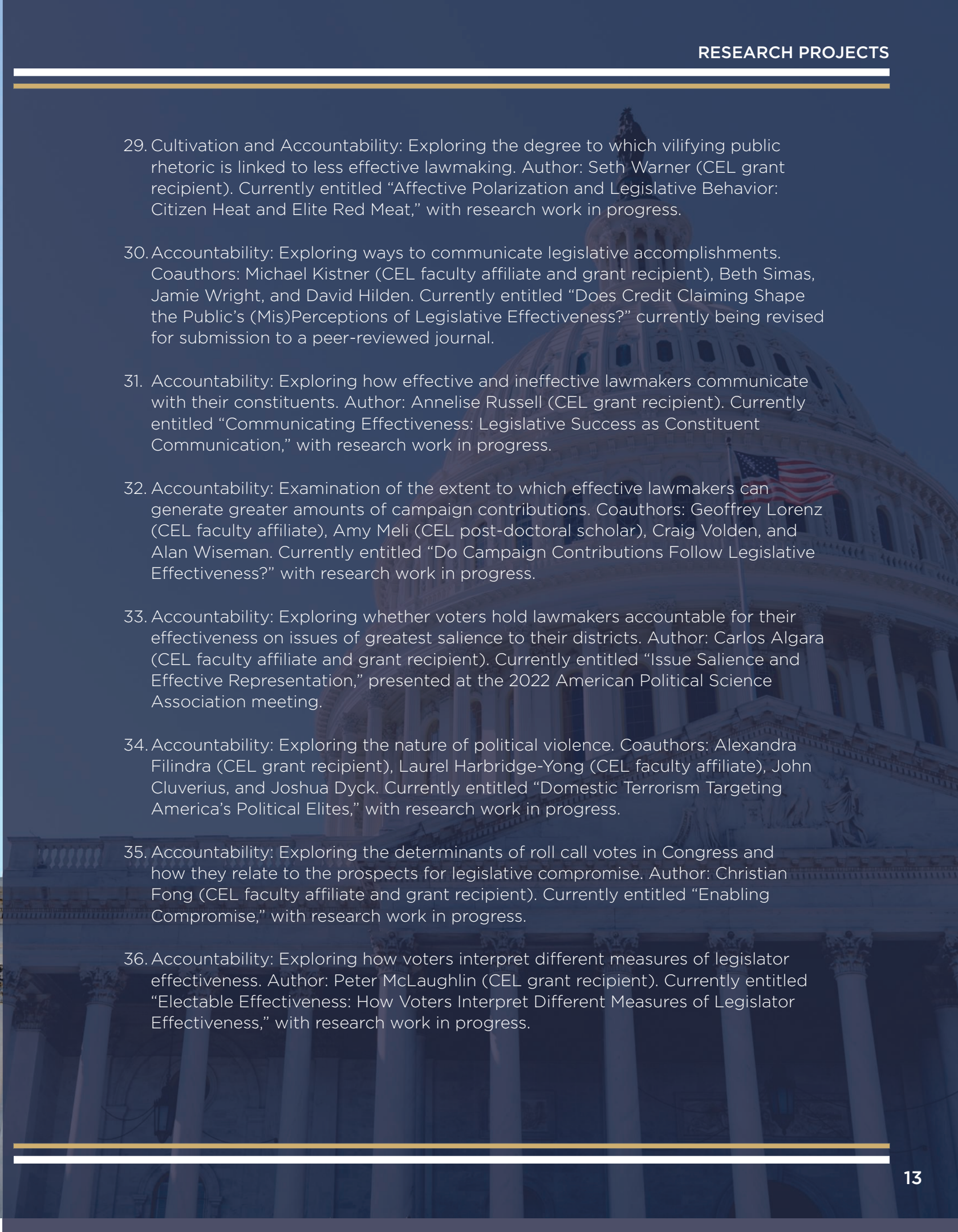
Current works in progress in these areas that are coauthored by Center Co- Directors Craig Volden and Alan Wiseman, CEL affiliates, and/or CEL small grant award winners, include the following:

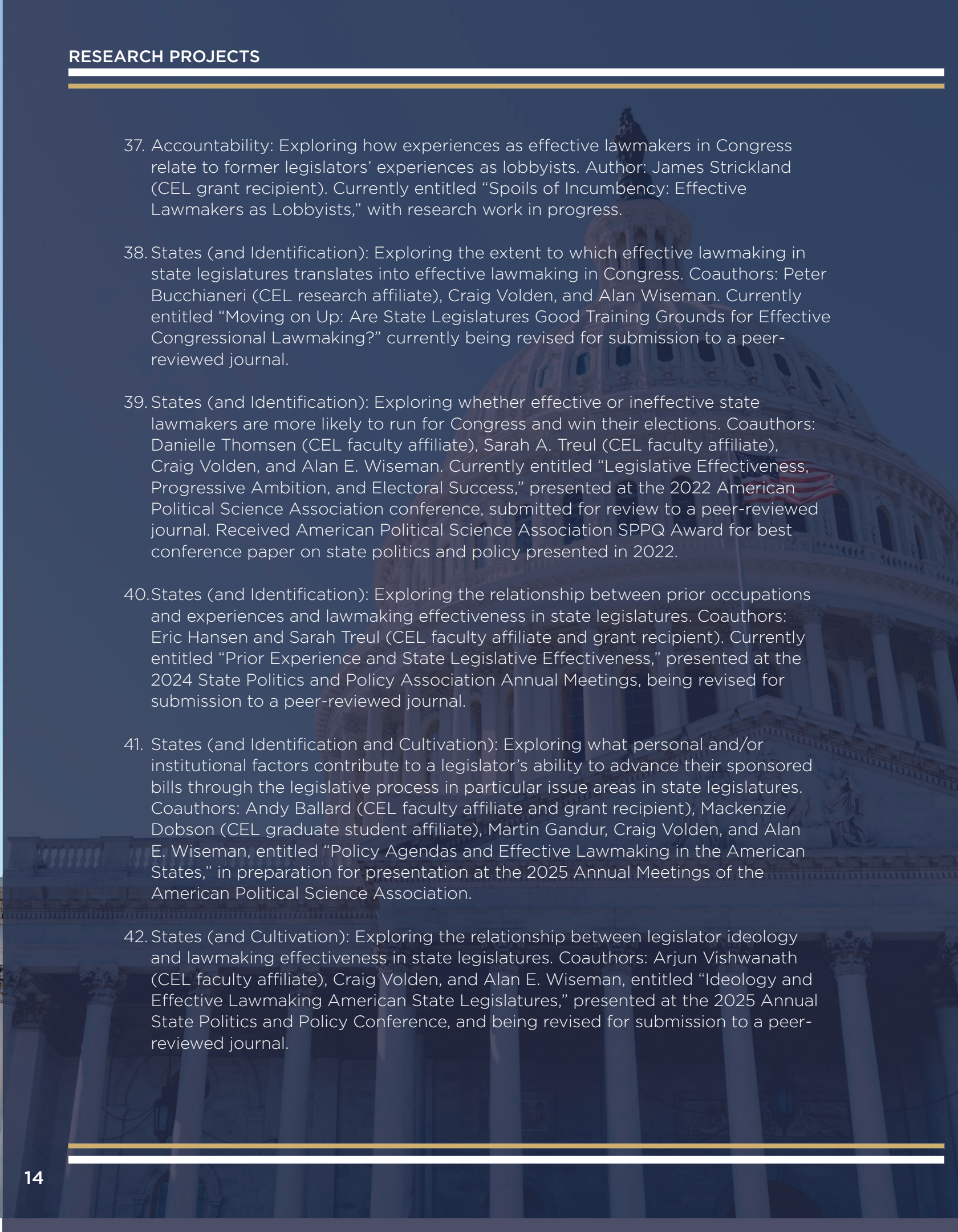
1. Identification: Exploring the degree to which educational backgrounds establish the skills and networks that enhance lawmaking effectiveness, with differences across political parties. Coauthors: Craig Volden, Jonathan Wai, and Alan Wiseman. Working paper entitled, “On the Decline in Elite-Educated Republicans in Congress,” forthcoming in Perspectives on Politics.
2. Identification: Exploring the extent to which candidates reveal characteristics during their early electoral campaigns that can be used to identify them as future effective or ineffective lawmakers once elected. Coauthors: Mackenzie Dobson (CEL graduate student affiliate), Craig Volden, and Alan Wiseman. Currently entitled “Bipartisan Campaigners Become Effective Lawmakers,” being revised following invitation to “revise and resubmit” at Legislative Studies Quarterly.
3. Identification: Study of the relationship between redistricting and effective lawmaking. Author: Geoffrey M. Lorenz (CEL faculty affiliate and CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Drawing Better Lawmakers: Redistricting Institutions and Legislative Entrepreneurship,” presented at the 2025 Center for Effective Lawmaking Annual Research Conference (Vanderbilt University), and currently being revised for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.
4. Identification: Study of the relationship between legislator wealth and lawmaking effectiveness in the United States Congress. Author: Darrian Stacy (CEL faculty affiliate). Currently entitled “Wealth and Policymaking in the U.S. House of Representatives,” forthcoming at Legislative Studies Quarterly, with additional material currently being revised as part of a broader book-length project.
5. Identification: Exploring the relationships between campaign positioning and legislative collaboration in the U.S. Congress. Coauthors: Colin R. Case and Emily Cottle Ommundsen (CEL faculty affiliate and grant recipient). Currently entitled “Predicting Partnerships: Congressional Campaign Positioning and Legislative Collaboration,” with research work in progress.
6. Identification: Exploring the relationship between legislator wealth and lawmaking effectiveness in the United States Senate. Author: Darrian Stacy (CEL faculty affiliate and grant recipient.) Currently entitled “Economic Inequality and Legislative Effectiveness in the U.S. Senate,” with research in progress.

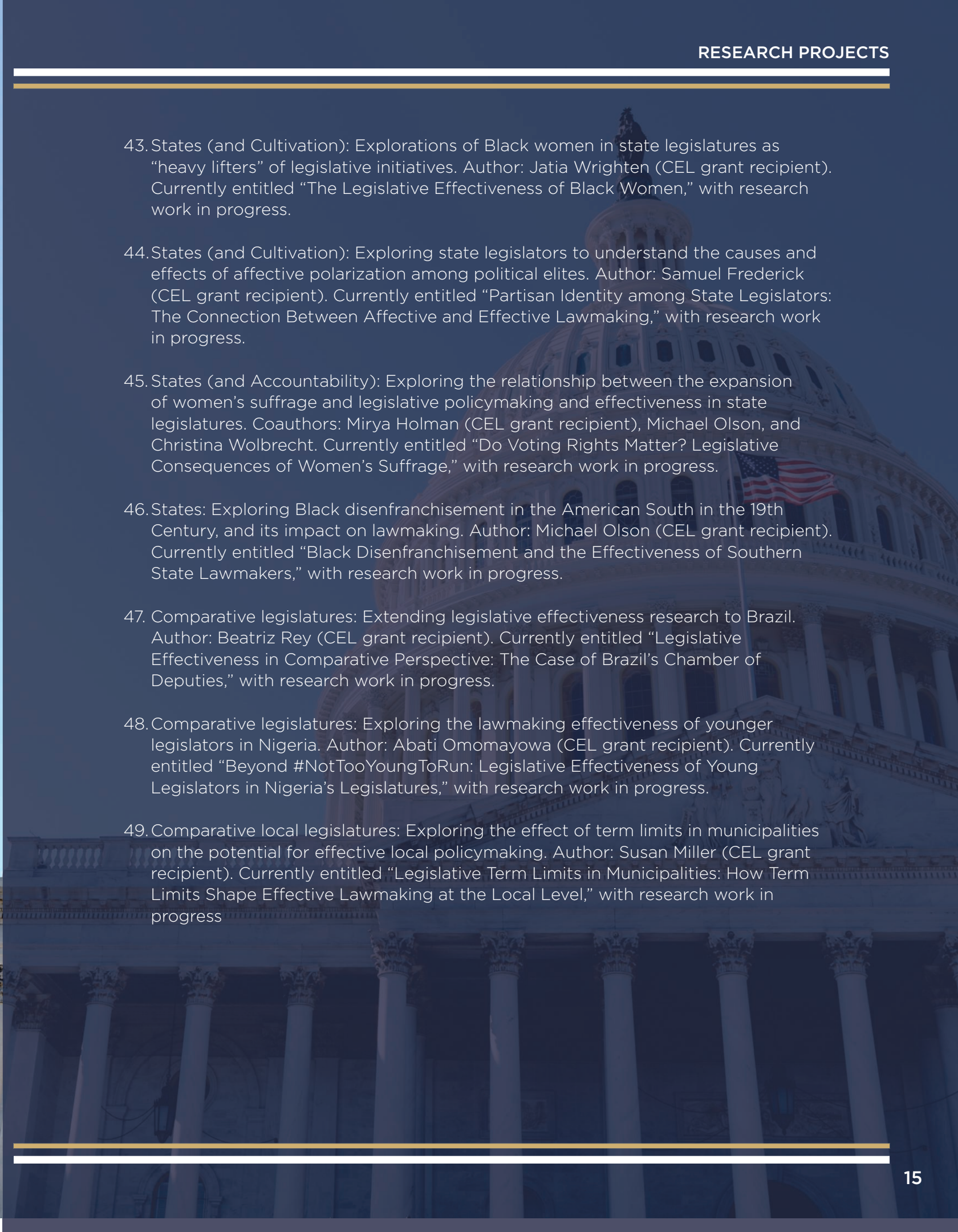
7. Identification and Cultivation: Exploring how prior experiences relevant to lawmaking help cultivate skills of effective lawmakers. Author: Sarah Treul (CEL faculty affiliate and CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “The Effect of Experience on Institutional Influence and Congressional Capacity” with research in progress.
8. Identification and Cultivation: Exploring which policy areas lawmakers focus their attention on, to be responsive to constituents, to take advantage of resources from staff, committees, and interest groups, and to learn from past successes. Coauthors: Geoffrey Lorenz (CEL faculty affiliate), Amy Meli (CEL post-doctoral scholar), Craig Volden, and Alan Wiseman. Currently entitled “Lawmaking Portfolios” with research in progress.
9. Identification and Cultivation: Examination and scoring of the extent to which legislators in Congress value the quality of legislation in solving public policy problems in addition to the ideological positions of such proposals. Coauthors: Craig Volden, Alan Wiseman, and still recruiting others. Currently entitled “Who Cares about Quality Proposals in Congress?” with research in progress.
10. Identification and Cultivation: Exploring what personal and/or institutional factors contribute to a legislator’s ability to advance their sponsored bills through the lawmaking process as standalone measures, and/or by successfully attaching them to other measures that become law. Coauthors: Mary Kroeger (CEL faculty affiliate), Erinn Lauterbach (CEL faculty affiliate), Kelsey Shoub (CEL faculty affiliate), Craig Volden, and Alan E. Wiseman, entitled “Effective Lawmaking Behind the Scenes,” presented at the 2024 Annual Meetings of the Midwest Political Science Association Meetings, and currently under review at a peer-reviewed journal.
11. Identification and Accountability: Exploring how congressional campaign statements relate to subsequent bipartisan tendencies among lawmakers. Author: Emily Ommundsen (CEL faculty affiliate and grant recipient). Currently entitled “Congressional Campaign Strategy and Bipartisan Tendencies,” with research work in progress.
12. Cultivation: Study of the role and capacity of congressional staff in conducting dual oversight and lawmaking activities. Coauthors: Jennifer Selin and Hanna Brant (CEL grant recipients). Currently entitled “Brain Drain? Understanding Congressional Staffers’ Legislative and Oversight Capabilities” with research in progress.
13. Cultivation: Exploring the relationship between ideology and lawmaking effectiveness in the Republican and Democratic parties in the U.S. House and Senate. Coauthors: Patrick W. Buhr, Craig Volden, and Alan E. Wiseman, entitled “Polarization and Lawmaking Effectiveness in the United States Congress,” presented at the 2023 Annual Meetings of the Midwest Political Science Association and being revised for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

14. Cultivation: Examination of the extent to which lawmakers who lose their committee positions due to changes in the majority party or number of seats on a particular committee subsequently become less effective. Coauthors: Darrian Stacy (CEL faculty affiliate), Craig Volden, and Alan E. Wiseman. Current working paper, entitled “The Importance of Committee Assignments for Legislative Effectiveness,” being revised for future submission to a peer-reviewed journal.
15. Cultivation: Exploring whether those with more concentrated policy portfolios are more effective than those with more diffuse or diverse policy portfolios. Coauthors: Craig Volden and Alan E. Wiseman. Entitled “Issue Specialization and Effective Lawmaking in the U.S. Congress,” resubmitted, following invitation to “revise and resubmit” at the Journal of Politics.
16. Cultivation: Exploring the relationship between congressional oversight and lawmaking effectiveness in Congress. Author: Kenneth Lowande (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Measuring the Quality of Legislative Oversight,” with research in progress.
17. Cultivation: Exploring the degree to which Congress and the President work together to advance policy proposals. Coauthors: Samuel Kernell, Roger Larocca, Craig Volden, and Alan E. Wiseman. Currently entitled “Unification of Powers: When Effective Lawmakers Sponsor Presidential Proposals in Congress,” presented at the 2022 European Political Science Association conference, being revised for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.
18. Cultivation: Exploring the conditions under which specifically worded legislation or vaguer ideas lead to coalition formation and legislative advancement in Congress. Coauthors: Erinn Lauterbach (CEL faculty affiliate), Craig Volden, and Alan E. Wiseman. Currently entitled “Policy Specificity and Effective Lawmaking,” presented at the 2022 European Political Science Association conference, being revised for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.
19. Cultivation: Exploring the changing nature of political pluralism. Coauthors: Geoff Lorenz (CEL grant recipient and faculty affiliate), Jesse Crosson (CEL faculty affiliate), and Zander Furnas. Currently entitled “Polarizing Pluralism: Party Competition, Interest Group Strategy, and the Resurgent Mischiefs of Faction,” with research work in progress.
20. Cultivation: Exploring the role of amendments within committees as part of effective lawmaking. Coauthors: Nicholas Howard and Mark Owens (CEL grant recipients). Currently entitled “Committees as a Venue for Effectiveness,” with research in progress.

21. Cultivation: Exploring how cities represented by effective lawmakers can rely on them instead of their own lobbying efforts. Author: Fred Gui (CEL grant recipient and post-doctoral researcher). Currently entitled “City Lobbying and Member’s Legislative Performance,” with research work in progress.
22. Cultivation: Exploring how intraparty groups are formed and sustained in Congress. Author: Gabe Foy-Sutherland (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “‘I Vote My District’: The Electoral and Legislative Value of Intraparty Organization in the U.S. House,” with research work in progress.
23. Cultivation: Exploring the lawmaking successes of progressive women of color in Congress. Author: Cathy Wineinger (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Activists in the House: Insights on Legislative Effectiveness from Progressive Women of Color,” with research in progress.
24. Cultivation: Exploring the resolution of policy dissent within congressional committees. Author: Jonathan Lewallen (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Effective Legislators and Dissent in Congressional Committees,” with research work in progress.
25. Cultivation: Exploring the causes and consequences of earmark requests in the U.S. Congress. Coauthors: Jaclyn Kaslovsky (CEL faculty affiliate and grant recipient) and Andrew Stone. Currently entitled “Ask and You May Receive: Earmark Requests and Allocations in the 117th and 118th Congresses,” with research work in progress.
26. Cultivation: Exploring how personal relationships among Members of Congress, as cultivated during CODELs, contribute to and/or detract from their lawmaking effectiveness. Coauthors: James Curry and Jason Roberts (CEL faculty affiliate and grant recipient). Currently entitled “Personal Relationships and Legislative Effectiveness in the U.S. Congress,” with research work in progress.
27. Cultivation: Exploring the relationship between floor speech similarity among members of Congress and their lawmaking effectiveness. Coauthors: Sahar Abi-Hassan, Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier (CEL grant recipient), Dino P. Christenson, Chandler L’Hommedieu, and Grace Orians. Currently entitled “Central to Success: Measuring the Effect of Discourse Centrality on Legislative Effectiveness in Congress,” with research work in progress.
28. Cultivation and Accountability: Exploring the complementary nature of lawmaking and constituency service. Author: Nicole Kalaf-Hughes (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Collaboration as a Means to Effective Representation in Congress,” with research work in progress.

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29. Cultivation and Accountability: Exploring the degree to which vilifying public rhetoric is linked to less effective lawmaking. Author: Seth Warner (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Affective Polarization and Legislative Behavior: Citizen Heat and Elite Red Meat,” with research work in progress.
30. Accountability: Exploring ways to communicate legislative accomplishments. Coauthors: Michael Kistner (CEL faculty affiliate and grant recipient), Beth Simas, Jamie Wright, and David Hilden. Currently entitled “Does Credit Claiming Shape the Public’s (Mis)Perceptions of Legislative Effectiveness?” currently being revised for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.
31. Accountability: Exploring how effective and ineffective lawmakers communicate with their constituents. Author: Annelise Russell (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Communicating Effectiveness: Legislative Success as Constituent Communication,” with research work in progress.
32. Accountability: Examination of the extent to which effective lawmakers can generate greater amounts of campaign contributions. Coauthors: Geoffrey Lorenz (CEL faculty affiliate), Amy Meli (CEL post-doctoral scholar), Craig Volden, and Alan Wiseman. Currently entitled “Do Campaign Contributions Follow Legislative Effectiveness?” with research work in progress.
33. Accountability: Exploring whether voters hold lawmakers accountable for their effectiveness on issues of greatest salience to their districts. Author: Carlos Algara (CEL faculty affiliate and grant recipient). Currently entitled “Issue Salience and Effective Representation,” presented at the 2022 American Political Science Association meeting.
34. Accountability: Exploring the nature of political violence. Coauthors: Alexandra Filindra (CEL grant recipient), Laurel Harbridge-Yong (CEL faculty affiliate), John Cluverius, and Joshua Dyck. Currently entitled “Domestic Terrorism Targeting America’s Political Elites,” with research work in progress.
35. Accountability: Exploring the determinants of roll call votes in Congress and how they relate to the prospects for legislative compromise. Author: Christian Fong (CEL faculty affiliate and grant recipient). Currently entitled “Enabling Compromise,” with research work in progress.
36. Accountability: Exploring how voters interpret different measures of legislator effectiveness. Author: Peter McLaughlin (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Electable Effectiveness: How Voters Interpret Different Measures of Legislator Effectiveness,” with research work in progress.

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37. Accountability: Exploring how experiences as effective lawmakers in Congress relate to former legislators' experiences as lobbyists. Author: James Strickland (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled "Spoils of Incumbency: Effective Lawmakers as Lobbyists," with research work in progress.
38. States (and Identification): Exploring the extent to which effective lawmaking in state legislatures translates into effective lawmaking in Congress. Coauthors: Peter Bucchianeri (CEL research affiliate), Craig Volden, and Alan Wiseman. Currently entitled "Moving on Up: Are State Legislatures Good Training Grounds for Effective Congressional Lawmaking?" currently being revised for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.
39. States (and Identification): Exploring whether effective or ineffective state lawmakers are more likely to run for Congress and win their elections. Coauthors: Danielle Thomsen (CEL faculty affiliate), Sarah A. Treul (CEL faculty affiliate), Craig Volden, and Alan E. Wiseman. Currently entitled "Legislative Effectiveness, Progressive Ambition, and Electoral Success," presented at the 2022 American Political Science Association conference, submitted for review to a peer-reviewed journal. Received American Political Science Association SPPQ Award for best conference paper on state politics and policy presented in 2022.
40. States (and Identification): Exploring the relationship between prior occupations and experiences and lawmaking effectiveness in state legislatures. Coauthors: Eric Hansen and Sarah Treul (CEL faculty affiliate and grant recipient). Currently entitled "Prior Experience and State Legislative Effectiveness," presented at the 2024 State Politics and Policy Association Annual Meetings, being revised for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.
41. States (and Identification and Cultivation): Exploring what personal and/or institutional factors contribute to a legislator's ability to advance their sponsored bills through the legislative process in particular issue areas in state legislatures. Coauthors: Andy Ballard (CEL faculty affiliate and grant recipient), Mackenzie Dobson (CEL graduate student affiliate), Martin Gandur, Craig Volden, and Alan E. Wiseman, entitled "Policy Agendas and Effective Lawmaking in the American States," in preparation for presentation at the 2025 Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association.
42. States (and Cultivation): Exploring the relationship between legislator ideology and lawmaking effectiveness in state legislatures. Coauthors: Arjun Vishwanath (CEL faculty affiliate), Craig Volden, and Alan E. Wiseman, entitled "Ideology and Effective Lawmaking American State Legislatures," presented at the 2025 Annual State Politics and Policy Conference, and being revised for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

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43. States (and Cultivation): Explorations of Black women in state legislatures as “heavy lifters” of legislative initiatives. Author: Jatia Wrighten (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “The Legislative Effectiveness of Black Women,” with research work in progress.
44. States (and Cultivation): Exploring state legislators to understand the causes and effects of affective polarization among political elites. Author: Samuel Frederick (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Partisan Identity among State Legislators: The Connection Between Affective and Effective Lawmaking,” with research work in progress.
45. States (and Accountability): Exploring the relationship between the expansion of women’s suffrage and legislative policymaking and effectiveness in state legislatures. Coauthors: Mirya Holman (CEL grant recipient), Michael Olson, and Christina Wolbrecht. Currently entitled “Do Voting Rights Matter? Legislative Consequences of Women’s Suffrage,” with research work in progress.
46. States: Exploring Black disenfranchisement in the American South in the 19th Century, and its impact on lawmaking. Author: Michael Olson (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Black Disenfranchisement and the Effectiveness of Southern State Lawmakers,” with research work in progress.
47. Comparative legislatures: Extending legislative effectiveness research to Brazil. Author: Beatriz Rey (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Legislative Effectiveness in Comparative Perspective: The Case of Brazil’s Chamber of Deputies,” with research work in progress.
48. Comparative legislatures: Exploring the lawmaking effectiveness of younger legislators in Nigeria. Author: Abati Omomayowa (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Beyond #NotTooYoungToRun: Legislative Effectiveness of Young Legislators in Nigeria’s Legislatures,” with research work in progress.
49. Comparative local legislatures: Exploring the effect of term limits in municipalities on the potential for effective local policymaking. Author: Susan Miller (CEL grant recipient). Currently entitled “Legislative Term Limits in Municipalities: How Term Limits Shape Effective Lawmaking at the Local Level,” with research work in progress.

RESEARCH TEAM

Post-Doctoral Fellows and Graduate Affiliates

This year, we hosted two post-doctoral scholars: Connor Phillips (PhD from Harvard University) at Vanderbilt University, and Amy Meli (PhD from the University of Maryland) at the University of Virginia. Both are now placed in faculty positions (Phillips at Carnegie Mellon University and Meli at Hollins University). Patrick Buhr (Vanderbilt University PhD student) and Mackenzie Dobson (University of Virginia PhD student) served as CEL Graduate Affiliates.



Connor Halloran Phillips



Amy Meli



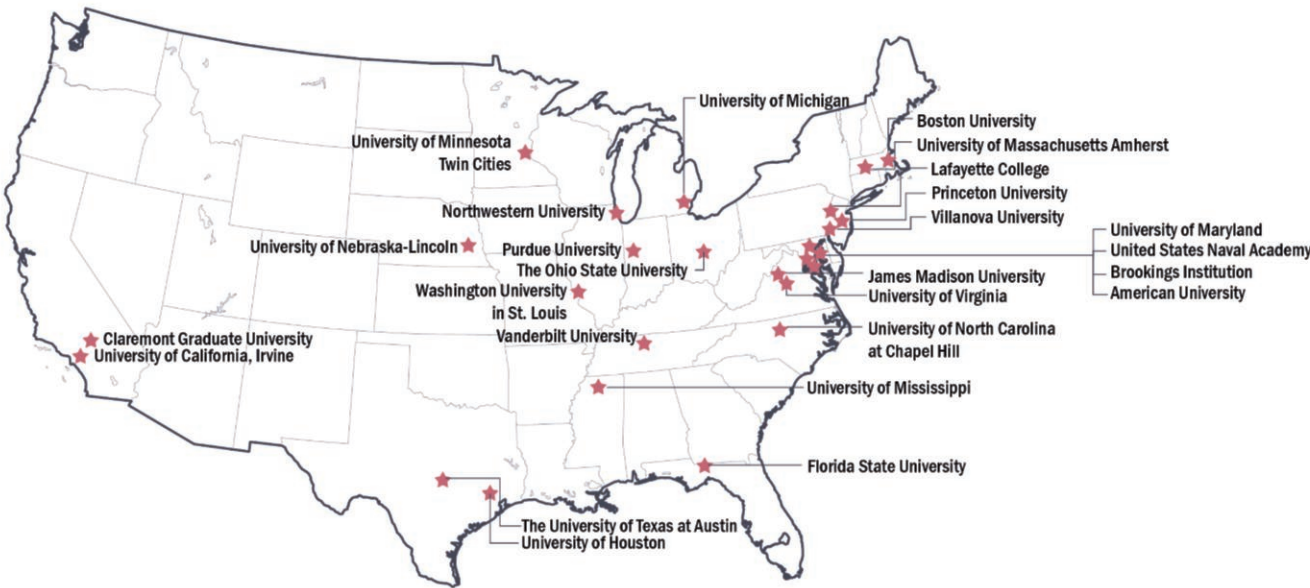
Patrick Buhr



Mackenzie Dobson

FACULTY AFFILIATES

We began our faculty affiliate program in the Summer 2018. Since then, our network has grown to thirty-four faculty affiliates, located at twenty-six colleges, universities, and think tanks across the United States. More than half are actively working on CEL research projects at present. Others are working to advance the CEL mission in other ways, including building connections and communicating relevant research findings.



BOARD OF ADVISORS

Ten enthusiastic supporters of the Center have agreed to serve on our Board, with the most recent additions being Shuwanza Goff, former Director of the White House Office of Legislative Affairs, and journalist and author Brody Mullins. Our Advisors offered excellent guidance on how best to implement different aspects of our strategic plan. Our board has a diverse range of experiences and professional perspectives, having collectively worked in academia, the for-profit consulting industry, and government (including the White House and the U.S. Congress). We are also aiming to expand our board to include a member with extensive connections to the media to enhance our communications strategies, and to expand connections to the Senate and the state legislatures. Our Board of Advisors is co-chaired by Congressman Jason Altmire and Professor Kathryn Pearson of the University of Minnesota.

As the CEL continues to grow, we look forward to expanding our Board of Advisors to help us engage with new goals and activities.



**Congressman
Jason Altmire**
United States House
of Representatives
(2007-2013)



Sarah Binder
Professor of
Political Science,
George Washington
University



**Congressman
Tom Davis**
United States House
of Representatives
(1995-2008)



Kyle Nevins
Co-founder,
Harbinger
Strategies



Shuwanza Goff
Former Director of
the White House
Office of Legislative
Affairs



Kathryn Pearson
Professor of
Political Science,
University of Minnesota



**Dean Ian
Solomon**
Dean of the
Frank Batten School
of Leadership and
Public Policy



**Thomas
Wickham**
Former
Parliamentarian of the
U.S. House of
Representatives



**Chancellor Emeritus
Nicholas S. Zeppos**
Chancellor of
Vanderbilt University
(2008-2019)



Brody Mullins
Journalist and
author

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

We continued our internship program, with both in-person and remote opportunities to allow for work flexibility. Two interns were brought on during the academic year and three for the summer of 2025, the latter of whom were chosen from a record number of applicants. Students were helpful in writing blogs, reviewing and editing reports and videos, and supporting CEL events and outreach efforts, which included research, generating lists, and utilizing their networks for CEL promotional purposes. This has been beneficial to the interns and the CEL as a whole since it enhances their professional experience while also allowing CEL staff to focus their attention on other important work. We are working to involve interns more actively in other areas, such as brainstorming communications strategy and technical assistance with major projects. In addition to the internships, we also employed ten research assistants at Vanderbilt University and the University of Virginia who assisted the Co-Directors with various assignments that have enhanced the work of the CEL and provided students with even more opportunities to learn about the field.



“Working at the Center for Effective Lawmaking gave me unique insight into what makes a member of Congress legislatively successful. I have applied that knowledge professionally to become an effective congressional staffer.

- Callahan Burton, Fall and Spring 2024-2025 Intern

Interning with the Center for Effective Lawmaking was a transformative and eye-opening experience. At a time when responsibility and accountability among our elected representatives are more important than ever, gaining firsthand insight into the research and analysis produced by leading scholars was both timely and inspiring. This opportunity has already opened many doors for me—and will continue to do so—as I pursue a career in policy and law.”

- Jolina Dong, Fall and Spring 2024-2025 Intern



SIGNATURE EVENTS

We held our **7th Annual Research Conference** at Vanderbilt in June. The main sessions featured six one-hour-length presentations and discussions. Topics ranged from the link between redistricting and effective lawmaking, to the backgrounds of effective lawmakers, to the role of congressional staff in promoting effective lawmaking, to electoral effects from successful lawmaking, to coalitions between effective lawmakers and nonpartisan interest groups.



The conference was well-attended, drawing around 40 scholars from colleges, universities, and think tanks across the United States, as well as engaging students and faculty at the university. Additional highlights included a roundtable discussion of “Legislative Effectiveness in the Second Trump Administration,” moderated by Alan Wiseman, with panelists including Shuwanza Goff (CEL Advisory Board Member), Brody Mullins (CEL Advisory Board Member), and Molly Reynolds (CEL faculty affiliate). We also announced the award winners for the fifth annual CEL Research Award.



In addition to this conference, Vanderbilt University hosted a small conference on effective lawmaking in the state legislatures, discussed in more detail below. The University of Virginia hosted Darrian Stacy (US Naval Academy and CEL faculty affiliate) to speak on “The Electoral Effects of Incumbent Wealth,” and to meet with students and faculty members.

ACADEMIC EVENTS

The CEL organized a panel on effective lawmaking at the 2024 American Political Science Association Conference in Philadelphia, and hosted a dinner for panel participants and CEL affiliates. Research panels on effective lawmaking emerged organically at three other national research conferences this year – the Southern Political Science Association conference in Puerto Rico, the Midwest Political Science Association conference in Chicago, and the State Politics and Policy Conference in Boston. These panels and events are extremely important to spread awareness of research on effective lawmaking to the broader academic community and to build further connections among CEL affiliates.



In addition to these conferences, CEL advisory board member Thomas Wickham visited Vanderbilt University to meet with students in CEL Co-Director Alan Wiseman's undergraduate course on "The Legislative Process." While on campus, Mr. Wickham also met with several members of the Vanderbilt faculty and Administration, as well as Vanderbilt graduate students and post-doctoral fellows. Throughout the year, we also hosted speeches and class visits, featuring current and former state legislators and members of Congress, including Congresswoman Jen Kiggans (R-VA) and Delegate Sally Hudson (D-VA) at the University of Virginia.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Additionally, we held our First Annual Research Conference on Effective Lawmaking in American State Legislatures at Vanderbilt University in February. The main sessions featured seven one-hour-length presentations and discussions. Topics ranged from bipartisanship and effective lawmaking across parties in state legislatures, to geographic and ideological patterns of legislative collaboration and effectiveness, to gender differences in approaches to lawmaking, to progressive ambition of effective lawmakers, to the role of interest groups in setting state policy agendas. Additional highlights included a dinner discussion between Alan Wiseman and Bill Purcell (former Majority Leader in the Tennessee House).



CONVERSATIONS WITH LAWMAKERS SERIES

We added four videos to our “Conversations with Effective Lawmakers” interview series. Specifically, we interviewed West Virginia House Speaker Roger Hanshaw (R-WV, Dec. 2024), U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL, April 2025), New Mexico State Senator Mimi Stewart (D-NM, May 2025), and New York Assembly Member Amy Paulin (D-NY, July 2025). In addition, we have compiled organized short clips drawn from our Conversations series highlighting various habits of highly effective lawmakers on the CEL website that are available for faculty around the world to use in their classrooms.



**Roger
Hanshaw**



**Gus
Bilirakis**



**Mimi
Stewart**



**Amy
Paulin**

We have continued to build relationships with journalists focused on lawmaking on Capitol Hill. In addition, we have begun more concrete conversations with potential partners to help promote the dissemination and use of our Legislative Effectiveness Scores and related research findings.

Partnerships

The Center continued its many relationships with partner organizations on a number of fronts, all in alignment with the CEL mission. We continue to work toward systematizing these partnerships to build upon past successes.

We maintained existing partnerships for congressional staff training with the Brookings LEGIS Fellows and APSA Congressional Fellows Program. We provided New Member Guides to enhance the orientation programming, through the House and Senate party leadership offices, the House and Senate Democratic and Republican Policy Committees, the House Chiefs of Staff Association, the Congressional Research Service, the Congressional Management Foundation, the Congressional Institute, Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows, and various congressional caucuses. Our guides were also included in the materials distributed during the orientation programs at Harvard's Kennedy School.





With respect to institutional reforms and support within Congress, we've continued to take part in meetings and initiatives with the Fix Congress cohort of good governance organizations and to work with the Committee on House Administration and its Subcommittee on Modernization and Innovation. We also offered the lead commentary "Five Lessons for Lawmakers from Trump I" as part of a discussion series in the Niskanen Center's Hypertext forum in January 2025.

We're expanding connections at the state legislative level as well, including in collaborations with Lyceum Labs and the Leading to Govern Network (including Future Caucus, New Deal Forum, New Politics Leadership Academy, and the Rainey Center). The network has been supportive in opportunities to advance the missions of one another's organizations and in collaborative projects.

Based on the findings from our research on lawmaking effectiveness in the states, we were invited to present our insights to lawmakers in Michigan and in Nevada. In Michigan, we partnered with the Legislative Leadership Program of Michigan State University to present insights for lawmakers in the state's House of Representatives and Senate. In Nevada, we partnered with the Guinn Center from the University of Nevada-Reno to serve as the keynote speakers at their Gallagher Dialogues, attended by more than half of the members of the state legislature, as well as the governor and others in the executive branch.

Through approximately monthly visits to Capitol Hill, we have been significantly expanding our interactions with congressional staff, lawmakers, good governance partners, and media. Each of these connections has helped us to identify better ways to connect with congressional staff.

In May of 2025, we started planning a joint briefing with the Program for Legislative Negotiations from American University, and conducted this joint briefing two months later with over 100 congressional House and Senate staff in attendance. We also held in-person meetings with former and current members of the U.S. Congress who work on congressional modernization issues, as well as congressional staff representing personal, committee, and leadership offices in the U.S. House and Senate. In total, CEL connected via electronic/virtual and in-person meetings with over 79 House and Senate congressional offices in the past year, to help advance our many programs on Capitol Hill.



Funding Updates

Thanks to the generous financial support by the U.S. Democracy Program of the Hewlett Foundation and the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, today the Center continues to thrive. Additionally, the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy as well as Vanderbilt University continue to support the work of the Center in meaningful ways.

Most noteworthy is a newly secured \$250,000 grant (for FY26 and FY27) from the U.S. Democracy Program of the Hewlett Foundation, which offers general program support and provides the most substantial resources for our congressional work. We have worked to deliver effectively on prior Hewlett grants and we have met all financial and reporting requirements.

We have begun to use the \$1.5-million three-year grant (FY25 through FY27) from the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation to support our state lawmaking effectiveness work. This grant is allowing us to finalize the development of our State Legislative Effectiveness Scores, to continually update those scores at the conclusion of each legislative term, to make them available on websites for broad consumption, to build a research community around the use of these scores and around effective lawmaking in the states more generally, to build connections to media in the states to focus on effective lawmaking, to generate a New Member Guide for all newly elected state legislators, and to pilot some programming for existing lawmakers in various states (starting with Georgia and Montana, where the Blank Family Foundation focuses the bulk of their work).

As we continue to act on our 2023-26 Strategic Plan, the CEL is more confident than ever of the importance of its mission to enhance the effectiveness of individual lawmakers and U.S. legislative institutions. We continue to embrace our founding argument that “the search for effective lawmakers is perhaps as crucial as it has ever been. It is at times when institutions are failing that effective leaders are needed more than ever.” (Volden & Wiseman, 2014, p. 13). We are proud of what we have accomplished thus far, and look forward to the work we have in store in the future.

Continuing Objectives

- Release updated Legislative Effectiveness Scores at the completion of each Congress
- Cultivate the next generation of scholars through our post-doctoral, graduate affiliate, research assistant, and small grant programs
- Support our faculty affiliates, producing new scholarship
- Strengthen our signature congressional engagement programs with additional staff and member briefings

Growth Objectives

- Significantly expand our Office Hours program in Congress
- Update and publicly release our State Legislative Effectiveness Scores
- Adapt our New Member Guide and circulate to newly elected state legislators
- Build networks of media partners and good governance organizations in the states to promote effective lawmaking
- Expand our Conversations with Lawmakers series

The Center for Effective Lawmaking
2025 Annual Report
thelawmakers.org

To support the Center for Effective Lawmaking,
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