



MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY

MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY AND EVALUATION LAB STRATEGIC PLAN

Spring 2025

This strategic plan outlines the next five years of growth and direction for the Master of Public Policy (MPP) program and the Evaluation Lab (Eval Lab or Lab) at the University of New Mexico. Together, they represent a shared vision: to prepare students for impactful careers in public policy while producing research and evaluation that strengthens communities across New Mexico and beyond. This plan reflects the insights of alumni, advisory board members, faculty, and students and identifies key priorities to deepen our impact, expand partnerships, and elevate student success.

Executive Summary

The University of New Mexico's Master of Public Policy program and Evaluation Lab form a collaborative response to the policy challenges facing New Mexico and the nation. This five-year strategic plan outlines our shared vision: to train the next generation of public policy leaders through hands-on, community-engaged learning—and to produce research and evaluations that improve lives across the state and beyond.

Together, the MPP program and the Eval Lab represent a transformational model of public policy education—rooted in place, driven by community engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration, and animated by a belief in the power of policy to create change. This strategic plan identifies the goals and actions necessary to grow our impact, expand opportunity for students, and further establish UNM as a regional and national leader in training policy analysts, evaluators, decision makers, and implementers.

Mission Statement

The Master of Public Policy program at UNM prepares students to generate solutions to complex policy challenges through evidence, critical thinking, and collaboration. Students learn by doing—producing real-world policy analyses and evaluations that reflect their deep commitment to the communities they serve. The program trains students in interdisciplinary, applied methods and cultivates the intellectual flexibility and ethical foundation needed to work across sectors and systems. Our mission is to develop capable, compassionate policy professionals who improve outcomes for people and communities.

Vision Statement

To be recognized as a leading public policy program in the Southwest—anchored in place, grounded in data, and dedicated to training thoughtful, skilled, and adaptable policy professionals who strengthen communities through evidence-informed decision-making.

Program Descriptions



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The MPP Program: A Premier Pipeline to Policy Careers

The Master of Public Policy program at the University of New Mexico is designed for students who are passionate about creating meaningful change. Rooted in a learn-by-doing model, our students are constantly applying their skills to real-world problems. Through coursework, capstones, and fellowships, they produce policy analyses and evaluations that directly support communities across New Mexico.

What distinguishes our students is their deep sense of place. They come from and care about the communities they serve. They bring that commitment to their academic and professional work, embodying the public service ethos at the heart of UNM's 2040 plan and the College of Arts and Sciences' strategic vision. The MPP program reflects these institutional values through its emphasis on experiential learning, equity, and community-engaged research.

Our interdisciplinary curriculum—drawing from Political Science, Economics, Sociology, and Public Administration—includes core training in policy evaluation, statistical analysis, economic and political systems, and organizational behavior. Students also explore the ethical and cultural dimensions of policymaking through coursework in inclusivity and belonging. Elective courses and capstone projects allow students to tailor their education to their professional interests, such as environmental resilience, economic development, health care access, education reform, or national security. This comprehensive academic structure ensures that students graduate not only with a strong analytical foundation, but also with applied experience producing meaningful, community-engaged policy solutions.

Graduates of the MPP program are making their mark across the policy landscape. Alumni have gone on to serve as finance fellows with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, senior advisors in international organizations, analysts at state legislative offices, researchers at leading universities and think tanks, and policy professionals across nonprofit and government sectors. They hold leadership roles in key New Mexico agencies, including the State Ethics Commission, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Finance and Administration. This strong record of placement reflects the quality of the program's curriculum, the depth of experiential learning, and the real-world preparation it offers.

The Evaluation Lab: Advancing Policy Through Applied Research

The Evaluation Lab is one of the University of New Mexico's most outward-facing initiatives and an essential pillar of the MPP program. Over the past ten years, the Lab has trained more than 100 graduate students and partnered with over 100 community organizations to deliver high-quality, collaborative, community-based program evaluations. These evaluations have supported organizations working on critical challenges—such as homelessness, child welfare, poverty, and sustainability—by providing evidence-based insights that improve outcomes and strengthen service delivery.



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The Lab exemplifies the UNM 2040 and the College of Arts and Science's 2025 Strategic Plan visions by advancing equity, educational innovation, and sustainability. It plays a crucial role in building New Mexico's capacity for rigorous evaluation and data-informed, community-driven policymaking. Through its graduate fellowship program with a practicum-centered curriculum, annual Evaluation Summer Institute, and monthly ECHO Learning Community sessions, the Lab immerses students and community organizations in hands-on research that fosters critical thinking, cultural humility, and professional skill-building. Through its website and ECHO Learning Communities, the Lab supports a commitment to open sourcing and open science, allowing government, community, and private entities access to its work. This commitment further supports organizations in capacity building and savvy evaluation decision-making.

Its community-engaged model brings together evaluation teams from across disciplines and sectors, guided by expert mentors. The Lab not only equips students and community practitioners to become thoughtful evaluators—it serves as a vital bridge between academic insights and real-world impact. Graduates regularly cite their Evaluation Lab experience as pivotal in landing policy roles in government, higher education, and nonprofit sectors.

As demand for skilled evaluators grows, the Evaluation Lab is expanding its reach—including new partnerships with government agencies and a shift to a staff-led leadership model that ensures long-term sustainability. The Lab stands as a sought-after national model of university-community partnership and an engine of policy innovation in New Mexico.

Strategic Goals and Objectives

Value 1: Commitment to Community Engagement

Our program is deeply rooted in community. We recognize that public policy education must be grounded in the needs, knowledge, and experiences of the communities we serve. Through sustained relationships and responsive collaboration, we aim to deepen our engagement across New Mexico and beyond.

Goal 1: Expand the reach and capacity of the Evaluation Lab

- ✓ The Evaluation Lab plays a central role in building New Mexico's capacity for data-informed, community-based participatory policymaking. We will seek sustainable, long-term funding to support its continued growth. Priorities include hiring and sustaining permanent staff, including a Director and Associate Director, expanding the Summer Institute and ECHO Learning Community, and developing new partnerships with nonprofit and public agencies.

Goal 2: Strengthen partnerships with public, nonprofit, and community organizations

- ✓ We will deepen our connections with organizations across New Mexico by offering meaningful opportunities for collaboration, including internships, fellowships, policy

analyses, and program evaluations. These partnerships will shape both our curriculum and our students' career trajectories.

Goal 3: Create more opportunities for public-facing events and policy dialogues

- ✓ We will host and support events that bring together students, faculty, and community leaders to discuss pressing policy issues. These forums will foster two-way learning and elevate voices from outside the university.

Goal 4: Build relationships with private-sector partners

- ✓ We will expand our engagement with mission-driven private organizations that work on or are impacted by public policy. This includes exploring joint evaluation projects, data-sharing opportunities, and potential student internships or capstone collaborations in sectors such as healthcare, technology, and sustainability.

Responsible Parties: The MPP Director, Director of the Evaluation Lab, and Unit Administrator will lead these initiatives in close collaboration with community partners, with strategic input from the Program Committee and Community Advisory Board.

Value 2: Commitment to Policy Impact and Outreach

We believe public policy education should directly shape the world we live in. The MPP program and Evaluation Lab are designed not only to train future leaders, but also to influence decisions and drive change in New Mexico and beyond. Our commitment to policy impact is rooted in rigorous, applied research and in our drive to produce clear, accessible, and actionable insights for a wide range of audiences.

Goal 1: Expand dissemination of policy-relevant research

- ✓ We will continue to share our students', staff, and faculty's work through policy briefs, white papers, and public presentations. These outputs will help translate technical research into practical tools for decision-makers.

Goal 2: Strengthen relationships with policymakers

- ✓ We will continue to build deep relationships with elected officials and staff at the local, state, and national levels by offering briefings, testimony, and opportunities for direct engagement with MPP students, staff, and faculty.

Goal 3: Position UNM as a trusted source of policy insight

- ✓ Through sustained outreach, we will continue to establish the MPP program and Evaluation Lab as key contributors to the policy landscape of the Southwest—ensuring that evidence-based perspectives are part of critical conversations.



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Responsible Parties: These efforts will be coordinated by the MPP Director, with support from the Director of the Evaluation Lab and Unit Administrator, in collaboration with the Program Committee, Community Advisory Board, and College leadership.

Value 3: Commitment to Building and Sustaining an Alumni Network and Career Pathways

We are committed to supporting our students not only during their time in the program but throughout their professional journeys. Our alumni network is one of our greatest strengths, and we aim to build structures that foster meaningful connections between past, current, and future students while advancing career readiness.

Goal 1: Expand the MPP alumni network and engagement

- ✓ We will develop systems to maintain regular communication with alumni, showcase their accomplishments, and invite them back to campus as speakers, mentors, and partners.

Goal 2: Strengthen career development programming

- ✓ We will increase support for student career exploration by offering resume workshops, mock interviews, job panels, and one-on-one coaching aligned with a variety of policy careers.

Goal 3: Leverage alumni connections for student opportunities

- ✓ We will formalize mentorship and internship pipelines by connecting students with alumni working in government, nonprofit, and private-sector policy roles.

Responsible Parties: The MPP Director and Unit Administrator will lead these initiatives, working closely with the Program Committee and alumni volunteers, with guidance from the Community Advisory Board and College of Arts and Sciences.

Value 4: Commitment to Innovative and Evidence-Based Policy Analysis, Making, and Evaluation

At the heart of the MPP program is a commitment to the craft of policymaking—developing students’ skills in designing, analyzing, and evaluating public policies that improve lives. Our curriculum equips students to navigate complex systems, assess trade-offs, and apply data and theory to real-world decision-making. We aim to develop professionals who not only understand how policy works, but who are capable of shaping and assessing it in practice.

Goal 1: Strengthen interdisciplinary training in core policy competencies

- ✓ We will continue to regularly assess and refine our core curriculum to ensure students are gaining robust training in policy analysis, economic reasoning, political systems, and evaluation methods.



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Goal 2: Increase opportunities for students to produce and share applied work

- ✓ We will continue to expand student involvement in hands-on projects—through the Evaluation Lab, capstones, and client-based coursework—and support avenues for publishing or presenting their work.

Goal 3: Support faculty innovation in policy teaching and research

- ✓ We will encourage faculty collaboration across departments to develop new courses, pursue joint research initiatives, and bring real-world policymaking experiences into the classroom.

Responsible Parties: The MPP Director will coordinate with affiliated faculty and department partners to implement these goals, supported by the Program Committee and the College of Arts and Sciences.

Value 5: Commitment to Interdisciplinary Collaboration

We believe that today's complex policy challenges require insight from across disciplines. The program is built on deep relationships with departments across the university—including Political Science, Economics, Sociology, and Public Administration—and we are committed to strengthening and expanding those collaborations. Interdisciplinary thinking enriches our curriculum, deepens our research, and prepares students to lead in cross-sector, cross-disciplinary environments.

Goal 1: Expand cross-listed and team-taught courses

- ✓ We will work with partner departments to design and offer new courses that bring together faculty and students from multiple disciplines to explore policy issues from diverse perspectives.

Goal 2: Support interdisciplinary research and project collaboration

- ✓ We will create more opportunities for faculty and students to engage in joint research and evaluation projects, especially those that address regional and state policy concerns.

Goal 3: Embed collaboration across all aspects of student learning

- ✓ From capstones to internships, we will encourage projects that integrate multiple forms of knowledge and engage with experts and practitioners from a variety of fields.

Responsible Parties: The MPP Director, in collaboration with partner department representatives and the Program Committee, will lead this work with input from the Dean's Office and relevant faculty.



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Implementation Approach and Timeline

This strategic plan is both a reflection of the work already underway and a guidepost for future growth. Many of the goals outlined here represent ongoing commitments—initiatives already embedded in the culture and daily operations of the MPP program and the Evaluation Lab. As such, implementation will be iterative, responsive, and rooted in the principles of continuous improvement.

We intentionally do not assign specific deadlines to individual goals. The College of Arts and Sciences has set the tone for strategic planning as aspirational, and we embrace this model. Our program operates with limited staffing and strong collaboration across units, so implementation timelines will vary based on opportunity, capacity, and emerging needs.

The MPP Director, Director of the Evaluation Lab, and Unit Administrator—together with the Program Committee, Community Advisory Board, faculty partners, and external stakeholders—will revisit this plan annually to assess progress and make adjustments. Our emphasis is on intentional growth, grounded in mission, sustained by relationships, and directed by the evolving needs of our students and communities.

Evaluation and Review Process

The Master of Public Policy program and Evaluation Lab will treat this strategic plan as a living document—one that evolves with the needs of our students, partners, and the policy landscape in New Mexico and beyond. Rather than adhering to a fixed schedule, we will revisit and reflect on the plan periodically as part of our ongoing planning and collaboration.

At a minimum, we will conduct a formal review of the plan every three years in consultation with the Program Committee and Community Advisory Board. During these reviews, we will assess progress, reflect on lessons learned, and consider revisions based on available resources, institutional priorities, and emerging opportunities.

The plan may also be updated between formal reviews as needed. Implementation of goals will remain iterative and adaptive, guided by the judgment of program leadership and informed by ongoing feedback from students, faculty, and community partners.