



H. Wayne Huizenga College of  
Business and Entrepreneurship  
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

**NSU**  
Florida

# CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

Annual Report  
2025-2026 Academic Year

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NSU'S CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE



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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

This first annual report of the Center for Public Service reflects the work completed during the 2025–2026 academic year, a launch point and proof of concept for the Center’s role within Nova Southeastern University and the broader South Florida community.

The pages that follow highlight the work of faculty and students in partnership with public agencies and nonprofit organizations across the region. Each project reflects the Center’s core purpose: bringing academic rigor, applied research, and practical problem-solving together to help organizations improve their communities.

This year helped clarify the Center’s strategy of strong partnerships with local governments, nonprofits, and community-based institutions to create a living laboratory for applied research. These partnerships give faculty and doctoral students opportunities to conduct research in real organizational settings, while allowing partners to benefit from data-driven analysis, consulting support, and fresh perspectives.

The Center’s work is grounded in the scholar-practitioner model, which integrates theory, research, and professional practice in real-world settings. Applied research that takes place in organizations and communities responding to real challenges. This approach helps researchers and practitioners better understand problems and identify realistic solutions.

During the 2025–2026 academic year, the Center advanced this model through partnerships with the City of Miramar, the City of Plantation, the City of Coconut Creek, the City of North Lauderdale, the Broward County School Board, and the Community Foundation of Broward. The Center has secured contractual services that will continue into the next fiscal year and generate over \$100,000 in revenue for FY 2027, in addition to other proposals and research currently in development.

The 2025–2026 academic year also marked an important milestone for NSU’s first cohort from the Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) program. Four doctoral candidates, Leslyn Benjamin, Stuart Boucaud, Shalima K. Mohamed, and Shaun Gayle, completed closure projects under the Center’s applied research and engagement model and graduated from the DPA program.

Another important upcoming change is the transition of the Master of Public Administration program to an asynchronous, online modality. The Center will help maintain a strong connection between students, faculty, alumni, and practitioners through the Public Service Forum: speaker events, roundtables, industry talks, organization tours, and other outreach activities.

Looking ahead, the Student Researchers program will come online, the Public Service Forum will host monthly events in collaboration with the NSU Student Chapter of ICMA, and new partnerships with healthcare systems, nonprofits, and local government organizations are in development.

On behalf of the Center staff, we look forward to the work ahead.



Randy Cross, Ed.D.

Director of the Center for Public Service  
Assistant Professor of Public Administration





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**DON'T JUST  
GRADUATE**

### **About the Center for Public Service**

The NSU Center for Public Service is an academic research, consulting, and professional development center housed within the H. Wayne Huizenga College of Business and Entrepreneurship at Nova Southeastern University. The Center was created to bridge the gap between academic research and real-world public service by helping local governments, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies address complex organizational and community challenges.

The Center conducts applied research and consulting services in the field of public administration, with a focus on producing knowledge that is practical, relevant, and useful to public-sector and nonprofit leaders. Through a model that combines faculty expertise, doctoral-level research, and graduate student talent, the Center delivers research-based solutions that are academically rigorous and directly usable by partner organizations.

By partnering with public and nonprofit organizations across South Florida and beyond, the Center strengthens local institutions, supports innovation in public administration practice, and creates meaningful learning opportunities for students preparing to lead in public service.

## **BY THE NUMBERS**



### Breakdown by Fiscal Year



**FY26  
Contractual Services**

**\$50,000**



**FY27  
Ongoing Contractual Services**

**\$115,000**

**3** MULTI-YEAR PARTNERSHIP  
AGREEMENTS

**3** APPLIED RESEARCH  
PROJECTS

**5** CONSULTING  
ENGAGEMENTS

**20** DPA  
STUDENTS

**4** DISSERTATION/CLOSURE  
PROJECTS

**17** BUSINESS  
DEVELOPMENT  
MEETINGS



## Scholar-Practitioner Fellowship

The Center for Public Service operates as an integrated scholar-practitioner fellowship. The work that reaches the partners, organizations and communities the Center serves is produced through a coordinated structure of faculty leadership and graduate fellow execution, supported by research assistants drawn from across the H. Wayne Huizenga College of Business. This is the Center's most distinctive institutional feature.

### HOW THE FELLOWSHIP WORKS

#### Faculty Leads

Public administration faculty design project scopes, set research methodologies, and serve as quality assurance on every deliverable. They are active contributors who hold the work to professional and scholarly standards. Faculty also chair doctoral committees, ensuring that fellow work translates into completed degrees and publishable research.

#### Doctoral Fellows

DPA students work on Center engagements that become the applied research for their degree completion. They serve as lead researchers and project managers on their engagements: conducting interviews and focus groups, analyzing data, drafting deliverables, and presenting findings to government, non-profit, and community leaders.

#### Student Researchers

Launching in AY 2026-2027, undergraduate and graduate students will be engaged in supporting roles on Center projects. Students will be trained to assist with data collection and other aspects of the research and consulting processes. The program formalizes and expands the role graduate research assistants played during 2025-2026.

### WHY THIS MODEL WORKS

The fellowship produces work that purely professional teams or purely academic teams cannot. For partners, the model means receiving work that combines academic rigor with operational practicality: defensible at the level of professional practice and grounded in the public administration scholarship that informs it. For fellows, the model means training that no classroom can replicate; doctoral fellows leave the Center with portfolios of completed client engagements, real client relationships, and the judgment that develops only through repeated exposure to high-stakes professional work. For the field of public administration, the model contributes scholar-practitioners, graduates whose training is neither purely academic nor purely professional, but integrated.

# THE INAUGURAL DPA COHORT

The first graduating cohort of NSU's Doctor of Public Administration program. Each fellow has led substantive applied research and consulting services for their closure project research.



## Leslyn Miller

Doctor of Public Administration, Class of 2026

### City of North Lauderdale | HR Policy Modernization

Leslyn led the modernization of the City of North Lauderdale's human resource management policies, a system unchanged in substance for decades. Her closure project drew on a benchmark of peer municipalities, confidential interviews and focus groups across every level of the city's workforce, and analysis of a 2024 employee survey, producing a fully revised policy manual and an implementation plan for city-wide adoption.



## Stuart Boucaud

Doctor of Public Administration, Class of 2026

### City of North Miami | Joint Use Agreements as Economic Development

Stuart's closure project examines how Joint Use Agreements (JUA), the contracts that govern shared use of public facilities, can be repositioned as instruments of local economic development in fiscally constrained municipalities. Using the City of North Miami as the focal case, his research will produce an implementation-ready framework for integrating JUAs into local economic development policy.



## Shalima K. Mohamed

Doctor of Public Administration, Class of 2026

### City of Miramar / Broward County Public Schools | Local Government Academy Evaluation

Shalima's closure project assessed the pilot launch of Miramar's Local Government Academy in partnership with Broward County Public Schools, with a focus on how the program shaped students' civic knowledge, attitudes toward government, and awareness of public service careers. The work produced an evaluation framework for the Academy's early instructional modules and identified how the model can support stronger school-municipal partnerships, improve student engagement, and help communities begin developing the next generation of local government professionals.



## Shaun D. Gayle

Doctor of Public Administration, Class of 2026

### City of Miramar / Broward County Public Schools | Local Government Academy Evaluation

Shaun's doctoral research is an evaluation of the BCPS Local Government Academy project, which examined how experiential civic education can help high school students better understand local government, economic development, and public-private collaborations. Through a model centered on instruction, mentorship, internships/apprenticeships, and applied learning, the project engages the business community and government agencies to garner their perception, reaction, feedback and recommendation on the Academy's potential to strengthen civic awareness, workforce readiness, and future career pathways in public service, business, and community leadership.

# CONSULTING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Center's consulting engagements are both with partner organizations and one-time services designed to produce concrete deliverables within agreed timelines. Led by faculty with academic and practitioner expertise and supported by doctoral fellows researching those same areas, the work combines academic rigor with practical consulting value. This year's portfolio included five engagements, some of which will support closure projects for DPA students entering the dissertation phase next academic year.

## AI ROADMAP AND TRAINING

The City of Coconut Creek engaged the Center to develop a practical approach for using AI in city operations. The project begins by assessing how prepared each department is, followed by a phased plan to introduce AI tools and train staff. It addresses both technical skills and broader concerns including privacy, fairness, transparency, and ethical use. Data collection and staff interviews are underway. The methodology is designed so other cities can apply the same approach.

## LEADERSHIP ALIGNMENT & DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

The City of Miramar engaged the Center to design a leadership program for senior staff, establishing a common approach to managing the city. The program runs 32 hours across six sessions, covering the fundamentals of leading people, coordinating across departments, communicating with staff and the public, managing performance, leading change, and a final session to integrate the material.

## NONPROFIT EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP BOOT CAMP

In partnership with the Community Foundation of Broward, the Center developed an intensive five-day training program for executive directors and senior staff at nonprofit organizations across South Florida. Each day focuses on a single topic and is led by a faculty member with expertise in that area: financial management and fiscal sustainability, strategic planning and organizational leadership, human resources and employment law, board governance and community engagement, and a closing session that integrates the material.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The City of Miramar engaged the Center to conduct a study of its small business programs and identify opportunities for future growth. The project examines industry trends, barriers to small business growth, and benchmarks from comparable cities, while also incorporating input from business owners, residents, and city staff. The final report will provide a clear picture of Miramar's economic strengths, opportunities for small business development, the structural challenges it faces, and where the city should direct its investment, partnerships, and policy efforts.

## HR POLICY & CODE MODERNIZATION

The City of North Lauderdale engaged the Center to revise its employee handbook, which had not been substantially updated in decades, to better reflect the operations and administrative functions of a modern municipality. The project included a review of policies from comparable municipalities, confidential interviews and focus groups with staff, analysis of a 2024 employee survey, and comparison against national HR standards. The result is a new handbook covering hybrid work, AI and technology use, and updated rules for discipline and performance reviews, with an implementation guide.

# APPLIED RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP

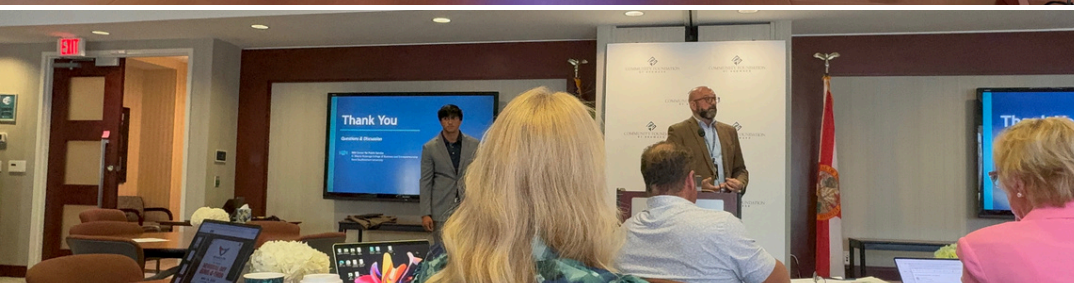
The Center conducts applied research to help communities improve quality of life, strengthen public policy, and address issues such as health, wellbeing, service delivery, and organizational performance. These projects are grounded in real challenges facing the public, with research questions shaped by practitioner needs and findings designed to support practical improvements. Many projects also serve as DPA closure projects. This year's portfolio included three applied research projects.



## Community Foundation of Broward: AI Integration in Nonprofit Grant Operations

**Partner: Community Foundation of Broward | Type: Exploratory applied research | Status: Ongoing into 2026-2027 Academic Year**

The Center is engaged in an exploratory research partnership with the Community Foundation of Broward examining how artificial intelligence can be integrated responsibly into nonprofit grant operations. Beginning in early 2026, the research deepened through a focused engagement with the Foundation's grants team, structured around three research areas: human and behavioral dimensions of AI integration in grantmaking, leadership and organizational response to AI-enabled inquiry, and the data warehouse architecture required to support AI-assisted grant operations responsibly. The work is exploratory because the question itself is comparatively new in the nonprofit sector. Deliverables include a scholarly research report and presentation materials, with publication readiness contingent on IRB review.



# APPLIED RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP



## City of Miramar/Memorial Healthcare System: Community Health and Wellness, Senior Citizens Wellness Pilot Program

**Partner: City of Miramar; Memorial Healthcare Systems | Type: Exploratory Applied Research | Status: Ongoing into 2026-2027 Academic Year**

The Center will lead an applied research project in partnership with the City of Miramar building on the National League of Cities Community Health and Wellbeing Accelerator grant program awarded to the Miramar in 2025. The 2025-2026 academic year established the foundation: securing the research and data coordination with Memorial Healthcare System, formalizing the scope and methodology of the project's research design. Initial data gathering will begin over the summer of 2026.

The work is organized into three objectives: a structured capacity assessment using the NLC capacity checklist; secondary data analysis characterizing Miramar's senior population and current senior services delivery; and a practitioner-driven research design in which the Center, working with the Accelerator committee, identifies a focused research question of operational relevance and conducts the empirical work to answer it. A pilot program will be initiated to test the recommendations for service delivery improvements that are informed by the data gathering process. Future research will expand into other areas of the NLC capacity checklist.



## Reimagining Doctoral Education in Public Administration Through a Scholar-Practitioner Lens

**Partner: NSU Doctor of Public Administration Program | Type: Applied Higher Education Research / Program Case Study | Status: Research Design in Development**

The Center is supporting a research project examining a redesigned Doctor of Public Administration program as a case for rethinking doctoral education in the field of public administration and public affairs. The study explores how a professional doctorate can maintain doctoral-level rigor while focusing on applied inquiry, workforce relevance, and scholar-practitioner formation.

The project will use program document analysis, a scholar-practitioner survey, and focus groups with DPA students and public service stakeholders. The study focuses especially on the Doctoral Closure Project as a rigorous applied alternative to the traditional dissertation and as a model for preparing public service professionals to use research, theory, and evidence to address real-world organizational and community problems.

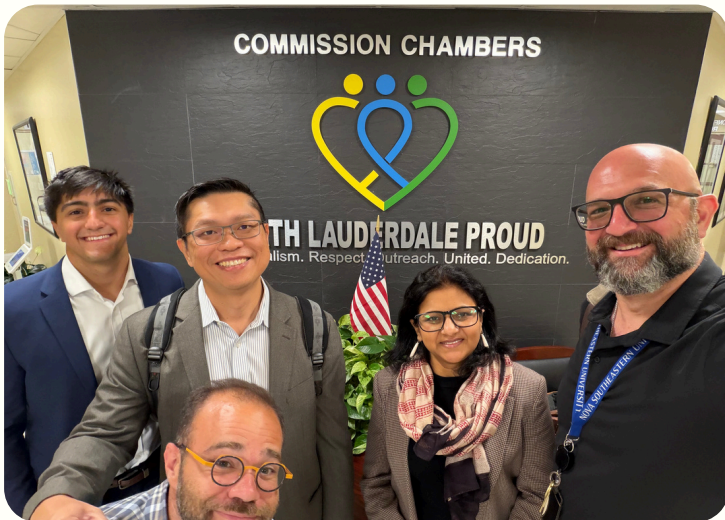


# STUDENT IMPACT

NSU'S CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

## THE PUBLIC SERVICE FORUM

The Center's practitioner engagement series, which teams with NSU's Student ICMA Chapter, bringing together elected officials, public-sector leaders, NSU faculty, and students around questions of public administration practice. The first event brought three mayors and more than fifty attendees together for a roundtable on municipal leadership. The Forum moves to a monthly calendar in AY2026–2027.

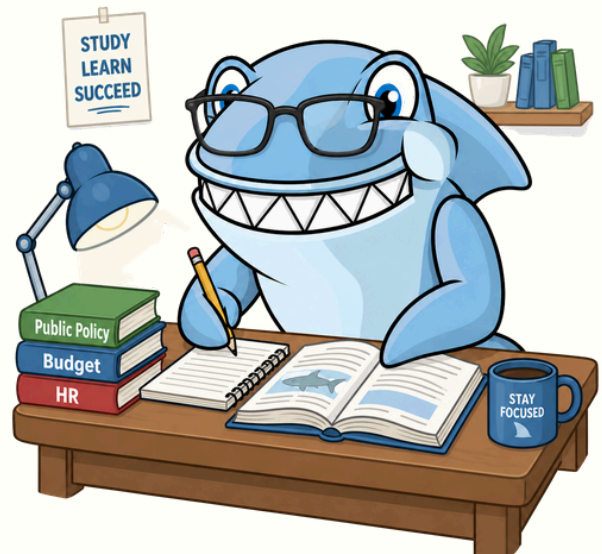


## STUDENT RESEARCHERS PROGRAM

The Student Researchers program launches in 2026–2027 as the third tier of the Scholar-Practitioner Fellowship. It engages master's and undergraduate students in supporting roles on Center projects. The program builds research capacity for the Center and gives students hands-on experience in public administration work.

## CROSS DISCIPLINE COLLABORATION

The Center partnered with an undergraduate marketing class in the Huizenga College's Department of Marketing. Student teams developed marketing strategy proposals for the Center and presented their work at semester's end, with selected ideas now in conversation for 2026–2027 implementation. The engagement offers a template for collaboration with other disciplines and exposes students to public sector work.



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## MEET THE FACULTY



**Fabienne Cadet, Ph.D.**

Chair and Associate Professor of Marketing, with a Ph.D. in Marketing from Hampton University and research on consumer behavior, services marketing, and branding published in journals including the Journal of Business Research and Thunderbird International Business Review.



**Adam M. Williams, Ph.D.**

Professor of Public Administration, with a Ph.D. from Florida Atlantic University, whose research focuses on public affairs education, human resources and organizational dynamics, and public procurement.



**Thomas Wuerzer, Ph.D.**

Professor of Real Estate Development and Director of the Terry W. Stiles School of Real Estate Development, whose applied research uses geographic information systems to address economic development and real estate challenges, and who serves as co-director of the Florida Climate Institute at NSU.



**Kuang-Ting Tai, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor of Public Administration, with a Ph.D. from Rutgers University–Newark, whose research examines how advanced information technologies reshape the interface between government and the public, with prior work on transparency, e-participation, and open government.



**Pallavi Awasthi, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor of Public Management, with a Ph.D. in Public Affairs from Florida International University, whose research and consulting work spans public sector leadership development, strategic and performance management, digital innovation, and sustainable community capacity building.



**Ricardo Russi, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor and Director of the James Donnelly Property Management and Real Estate Program, with more than 30 years of experience as a licensed real estate broker, community association manager, and project manager.

# HOW TO PARTNER

THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE WELCOMES NEW PARTNERSHIPS.  
TO BEGIN A CONVERSATION CONTACT US:



## **Randy Cross, Ed.D.**

Director of the Center for Public Service and Assistant Professor of Public Administration, Ed.D. from Barry University, and a 30-year career as a practitioner and college educator. Included 25 years at the City of Miramar in roles ranging from Police Bureau Commander to Procurement Director, Human Resources Director, Chief Operating Officer, and Assistant City Manager. Twenty years of teaching in higher education as an adjunct professor at Barry University and FAU, and now Assistant Professor of Public Administration at NSU.

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## **Casey Seidman, M.P.A.**

Public Sector Business Relations Expert at the Center for Public Service, with an M.P.A. and B.S. in Political Science from Arizona State University, whose career in policy analysis, higher education advising, and nonprofit fundraising includes legislative advocacy work that contributed to Arizona's 2013 Medicaid Expansion.

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The work described in this report is the result of the hard work and dedication of the faculty and students of the H. Wayne Huizenga College of Business and Entrepreneurship at Nova Southeastern University. With a special thanks to Kyle Bell, graduate student in the College of Computer Science and Dr. Cross's Graduate Assistant, who did amazing work this academic year.

We are grateful to the people and organizations whose contributions made this all possible.

# NSU Florida