



CAPSTONE

PROJECT SUMMARIES

2024–2025

LEARNING IN
ACTION

PUBLIC SERVICE IS THE
**HIGHEST
GOOD,**
AND WHEN DONE
HONORABLY AND WELL,
**THE MOST
REWARDING.**

ROBERT F. WAGNER,
MAYOR OF NEW YORK CITY
1953-1965

ABOUT CAPSTONE

Capstone, in architecture, is the crowning piece of an arch, the center stone that holds the arch together, giving it shape and strength. Similarly, NYU Wagner's Capstone Program provides students with the centerpiece of their graduate education where they turn their classroom learning into practice. Capstone teams spend an academic year addressing challenges and identifying opportunities for clients, or conducting research on a pressing social question—in a complex and real-world environment. Students must quickly become familiar with an issue or content area; demonstrate process skills such as project management and teamwork; and effectively gather, analyze, and present data.

The summaries in this booklet represent the 58 Capstone projects from the 2024-2025 academic year, conducted by 228 Wagner graduate students.

The Capstone Program was originally funded with a generous grant from the Ford Foundation in 1995 and subsequently received financial support from FJC: A Foundation of Philanthropic Funds. Since the program's inception, more than 6,800 students have completed over 1,500 projects for more than 1,000 organizations.

BECOME A CAPSTONE CLIENT

Organizations—from the public, nonprofit, or private sector—interested in being a Capstone client should visit wagner.nyu.edu/capstone/clients for more information.

ABOUT NYU WAGNER

NYU Wagner's mission is to empower public service leaders to create and to implement innovative policies with sustainable impacts on the public good. Our faculty, through their research, teaching, and public service, transform approaches to resolving complex public interest problems that defy easy solutions. Our students develop interdisciplinary analytical and managerial knowledge and skills as part of an active and inclusive community dedicated to serving the public interest efficiently and equitably.

Since 1938, NYU Wagner has been educating the world's future public service leaders. We offer a Master of Public Administration in Public & Nonprofit Management & Policy, Master of Public Administration in Health Policy & Management, Master of Urban Planning, Master of Health Administration, Master of Science in Public Policy, Master of Science in Health Law and Strategy, Executive Master of Public Administration, and PhD in Public Administration.

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PROJECT SUMMARIES

MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

BROADWAY ADVOCACY COALITION

ASSESSING ARTIVISM PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT

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The Broadway Advocacy Coalition (BAC) is an arts-based advocacy organization that uses storytelling and theater to drive systemic change in New York City and the State's criminal legal system. Its Theater of Change (TOC) program is a foundational initiative to advance BAC's mission through creative advocacy. Aligning TOC with BAC's new strategic plan is critical to ensuring the program effectively contributes to systemic reform and organizational credibility. The Capstone team evaluated TOC's effectiveness and alignment with BAC's advocacy goals. They conducted surveys and interviews with BAC staff, peer organizations, and program participants to assess the program's impact and operational strengths. The team developed a performance evaluation toolkit to help BAC systematically measure TOC's outcomes and scale its reach. Final recommendations focused on enhancing measurable impact, improving visibility, and strengthening engagement with funders and participants, ensuring TOC remains a strategic asset in advancing BAC's criminal justice reform objectives. The team presented its final report to BoardStrong leadership, detailing its findings, recommendations, and best practices for scaling the technology platform.

CLIMB HIRE

CLIMBING THE LADDER: IMPROVING PARTNERSHIP AND BRAND AWARENESS STRATEGY AT A WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

FACULTY:

Adrian Ogle

TEAM:

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Climb Hire is a workforce development organization that trains underserved communities for careers in tech, aiming to advance equity within the industry. Since 2019, it has steadily built its reputation but seeks to amplify its impact through stronger partnerships and visibility. Enhancing brand awareness and strategic partnerships is critical to expanding Climb Hire's reach and securing its role as a leader in equitable workforce development. The Capstone team was tasked with identifying strategies to improve Climb Hire's brand recognition and partnership execution. They conducted internal interviews and surveys with staff, participants, and alumni, alongside external consultations with peer organizations and industry thought leaders. The team also analyzed geographic expansion targets and potential partners in those regions. The final deliverables included actionable recommendations and a toolkit to guide Climb Hire's efforts to scale its programs, strengthen partnerships, and solidify its position as a workforce development leader.

CORO NEW YORK LEADERSHIP CENTER

EVALUATING THE CORO NEW YORK FELLOWS PROGRAM IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

FACULTY:

Adrian Ogle

TEAM:

Maia Beriashvili
Sofia Garcia
Jacob Peña

Coro New York Leadership Center runs the Fellows Program in Public Affairs, a 40-year-old flagship initiative training emerging leaders in public service through experiential learning and civic engagement in New York City. This work matters because the program's operational, financial, and programmatic challenges threaten its ability to sustain its mission of cultivating diverse, ethical leaders for the public sector. The Capstone team evaluated the Fellows Program's alignment with Coro NY's broader goals and identified strategies to enhance its sustainability and impact. The team comprehensively analyzed Coro's internal operations, competitive landscape, and stakeholder perspectives—gathering insights through staff and board interviews and alumni surveys, and benchmarking against peer leadership programs. Final recommendations focused on four areas: stakeholder engagement, financial sustainability, program design, and evaluation metrics, providing Coro NY with actionable steps to modernize the Fellows Program while preserving its legacy as a transformative force in public service leadership.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATES

STRENGTHENING HEAT RESILIENCE IN LA COUNTY

FACULTY:

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TEAM:

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The Los Angeles Regional Collaborative (LARC), in partnership with Environmental Science Associates (ESA), leads the Extreme Heat Campaign to educate LA County residents about heat-related risks and connect them with critical resources through a network of over 75 organizations, collaborating with the LA Department of Public Health to develop science-based messaging. This work matters because extreme heat disproportionately endangers vulnerable communities, necessitating targeted outreach to mitigate health disparities and save lives. The Capstone team evaluated the campaign's effectiveness in two areas: the strength of LARC's partnership network and its ability to deliver actionable messaging to high-priority populations. The team analyzed peer heat resilience initiatives and applied behavioral science principles to assess communication strategies and stakeholder engagement. Final recommendations outlined steps to optimize partnerships, refine messaging, and expand equitable access to heat resources—strengthening the campaign's capacity to protect LA County's diverse communities.

GREENWICH VILLAGE CHELSEA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ADAPTING GVCCC'S MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE TO ENHANCE MEMBERSHIP RETENTION AND SATISFACTION

FACULTY:

Sonia Balaram

TEAM:

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Marisa Maurer
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Paquette
Rachel Sarch

The Greenwich Village Chelsea Chamber of Commerce (GVCCC) has supported businesses across Manhattan neighborhoods for over 70 years, offering resources and advocacy to local enterprises. Declining membership due to COVID-19's impact on small businesses threatens GVCCC's ability to serve its community effectively. GVCCC sought to adopt a Tiered Benefits Model to revitalize engagement, allowing businesses to select tailored benefits to improve retention. The Capstone team was tasked with designing this model to enhance member value and attract new participants. They conducted an environmental scan of peer Chambers, surveyed GVCCC members and non-members, and reviewed membership model scholarship to inform their approach. The final recommendations propose a tiered structure with flexible benefit options, positioning GVCCC as a relevant, adaptive resource for businesses recovering post-pandemic and fostering long-term growth.

LIVING CITY PROJECT

ENHANCING LIVING CITY PROJECT'S LONG-TERM EVALUATION METHODS

FACULTY:

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TEAM:

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Becca Litt
Enzo Manzano
Lily Schmidt-Swartz

The Living City Project (LCP) is a New York City-based nonprofit that transforms the city into a classroom, engaging students in urban challenges through experiential education and participatory design. By offering city-based programs for high school graduates, semester-leave students, and young adults starting their professional careers, LCP fosters meaningful learning experiences while addressing community needs. The Capstone team built upon the recommendations of a 2023-2024 Capstone team through three deliverables: a literature review/environmental scan, summarizing findings on evaluation practices within Gap Year programs based on interviews with industry experts; a graduate profile, outlining the design evaluation criteria and key skills LCP aims for graduates to develop by the end of the program; and surveys capturing participants' expectations, goals, and skill levels in the field, which will be an essential tool for evaluating student outcomes. The team's final report compiles these deliverables and provides recommendations to enhance LCP's long-term evaluation methods.

PROJECT SUMMARIES

FINANCE

ALBANY DIOCESAN CEMETERIES

STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

FACULTY:

Chris Good

TEAM:

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Bailey Li
Rongbo Zhang

Albany Diocesan Cemeteries (ADC) is a nonprofit operating 23 cemeteries in New York's Capital Region and Upper Hudson Valley. To ensure long-term sustainability, ADC sought strategies to enhance financial resilience through revenue diversity, partnerships, and community engagement. For ADC to maintain its cemeteries and serve families amid industry challenges, financial stability is critical. The Capstone team was tasked with identifying opportunities to strengthen ADC's fiscal health and community ties. They conducted desktop research on industry trends, analyzed ADC's financial data and internal documents, interviewed staff across departments, and benchmarked practices against peer organizations. The final report provides actionable recommendations to diversify revenue streams, foster partnerships, and boost public engagement, such as expanding memorialization services and creating community outreach programs. These strategies aim to secure ADC's operational sustainability while deepening its connection to the communities it serves.

BERGEN VOLUNTEER MEDICAL INITIATIVE

BVMI THRIFT SHOP PROJECT

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TEAM:

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Haolin Hu

Chuan He,

Shuqin Yao

Chuyue Xiao

Yuhan Wang

Bergen Volunteer Medical Initiative (BVMI) is a nonprofit providing free primary and preventive healthcare to uninsured, low-income residents of Bergen County, New Jersey, using volunteer medical practitioners. Facing funding constraints that inhibit its ability to serve patients, BVMI seeks to open a thrift store to generate sustainable revenue. Financial stability is critical for BVMI in order to maintain clinic operations and expand patient care. The Capstone team was tasked with conducting a feasibility study to assess the viability of the thrift store initiative. They performed market research, analyzed local competition, developed financial projections, and evaluated potential store locations through site visits. The team also interviewed existing thrift stores and reviewed healthcare industry trends to inform product and operational recommendations. The final report outlines a business plan and actionable steps for BVMI to launch the thrift store, including location selection, inventory strategies, and funding approaches, aiming to secure a reliable income stream to support healthcare services.

BOWERY RESIDENTS' COMMITTEE

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE RENT COLLECTION AT BRC

FACULTY:

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TEAM:

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Bingqing Hu

Nyxia Huang

Klara Steupert

Becky Zhao

Jiaxuan Zhou

The Bowery Residents' Committee (BRC) is a leading New York City nonprofit providing housing and supportive services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. As a key part of the city's social safety net, BRC's financial sustainability is critical to maintaining its mission amid rising costs and low rent collection rates. The Capstone team was tasked with identifying strategies to improve rent collection and boost revenue to strengthen BRC's fiscal health. They analyzed BRC's financial reports, Yardi database records, staff interviews, and peer organization surveys to understand systemic challenges. The final recommendations propose early intervention protocols for payment issues, a digital rent payment platform with automated invoicing, tailored strategies for high-delinquency properties, and exploring third-party property management partnerships. These solutions aim to enhance BRC's rent collection processes and long-term financial sustainability while aligning with its mission to support homeless individuals and families.

CORLEAR'S SCHOOL

PUBLIC FUNDING FEASIBILITY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AT CORLEAR'S

FACULTY:

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TEAM:

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Muze Li

Ella Sun

Zhiwei Wang

Mike Yan

Yuanhao Zhu

Corlears School is an independent early childhood institution in New York City committed to equitable, inquiry-based education for children ages two through 10. This work matters because integrating publicly funded programming like Head Start into Corlears' tuition-based model could increase socioeconomic diversity and expand access to high-quality early education. The Capstone team was tasked with assessing the feasibility of such integration, including operational, financial, and mission alignment considerations. The team conducted a demographic analysis to evaluate eligibility, researched public funding requirements and foundation grant alternatives, and assessed alignment with Corlears' curriculum and values. Final recommendations outlined a scalable public/private partnership model balancing benefits like community reach and diversity with regulatory compliance and programmatic fit challenges, guiding Corlears toward equitable, sustainable access solutions.

GUIDEHOUSE

AI-POWERED AUTOMATION FOR SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION'S
LOAN SETTLEMENTS

FACULTY:

Chris Good

TEAM:

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Yafeng Zhang
Wen Zhong

Guidehouse, a global consulting firm specializing in public sector financial management and process optimization, partnered with the Small Business Administration (SBA) to enhance its 7(a) loan program, which provides critical financing to small businesses for working capital, equipment, and real estate. This work matters because the program's reliance on manual document validation creates inefficiencies, delays, and errors, undermining timely support for small businesses. The Capstone team was tasked with identifying AI-driven solutions to automate the loan settlement process, reducing manual verification and improving accuracy. The team analyzed SBA's workflow, reviewed historical loan data, and benchmarked automation tools used in financial document handling to achieve this. Final recommendations included an implementation framework integrating Intelligent Document Processing (IDP) and Automated Quality Control (AQC), detailed in a white paper outlining efficiency gains, risk mitigation strategies, and steps to enhance scalability and compliance—positioning SBA to modernize operations and better serve small businesses.

LUMINA FOUNDATION

HIGHER EDUCATION CLOSURE RISKS AND REGULATORS

FACULTY:

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The Lumina Foundation aims to increase the number of adults with educational credentials beyond high school, including college degrees, certificates, and other industry credentials. Higher education institution (HEI) closures disrupt students' academic progress and reduce credential attainment rates. To address this, Lumina engaged the Capstone team to survey risk factors for HEI closures and analyze the regulatory framework for HEI financial monitoring by state. The Capstone team conducted a state-by-state review of relevant regulatory entities and the scope of their financial monitoring policies. Additionally, the team reviewed nationwide data sets on HEIs in the context of early warning metrics for closures, following a review of academic and professional literature on the subject. Using this research, the team created a report that the Lumina Foundation can provide to internal and external stakeholders. The report details the current regulatory triad of national, state, and accreditation organizations, identifies areas for improvement in financial monitoring frameworks, assesses risk factors for HEI closures, and provides case studies on school closures and regulatory monitoring metrics.

PSEG LONG ISLAND, LLC

ELECTRIFYING THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL BUSING

FACULTY:

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Sage Zhang

PSEG Long Island is a regional electric utility serving over 11 million customers and supporting New York's mandate for all school buses to be zero-emission by 2035. The transition to electric school buses (ESBs) faces barriers such as high upfront costs, infrastructure limitations, and regulatory uncertainty, risking delays in meeting statewide climate goals. The Capstone team analyzed these financial, operational, and policy challenges and developed actionable recommendations to facilitate the transition. The team conducted a policy analysis, stakeholder interviews, a survey of 12 Long Island school districts, and a national peer review, alongside assessing infrastructure needs and comparing costs of diesel versus electric fleets. Their final report quantifies the financial impacts of the transition and proposes strategic recommendations, including funding solutions, infrastructure upgrades, and policy advocacy. These aim to help PSEG Long Island and school districts achieve a cost-effective, equitable electrification process aligned with the 2035 mandate.

PUBLIC POLICY

GREATER NEWARK CONSERVANCY – COALITION FOR HEALTHY FOOD IN NEWARK SCHOOLS

FROM POLICY TO PLATE: EXPANDING HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS IN
NEWARK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

FACULTY:

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Bryan Matthew

The Greater Newark Conservancy (GNC) addresses public health and education through school food systems, launching the Coalition for Healthy Food in Newark Schools (HFiNS) to transform Newark's school food system by ensuring access to fresh, healthy, and culturally relevant meals. Persistent gaps in funding, eligibility barriers, and lack of inclusive meal options underscore the need for equitable nutrition policies in Newark schools. The Capstone team was tasked with identifying research-based solutions to create healthier, inclusive, and academically supportive lunch environments for students. They conducted qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to analyze needs and propose policies, including plant-forward and gluten-free meal initiatives. Though data revealed that plant-based and gluten-free options are not current priorities for school administrators, the report recommends strategies to increase student engagement and urges administrators to prioritize these options to advance equitable nutrition policies.

HUDSON VALLEY PATTERN FOR PROGRESS

INCREASING HUDSON VALLEY MUNICIPALITIES' CAPACITY TO COMPETE

FACULTY:

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Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress is a nonprofit that provides research, planning, and training to advance equitable, sustainable solutions for Mid-Hudson Valley communities. The organization works with municipalities to address civic challenges, including improving access to critical grant funding. Small- and mid-sized municipalities often lack the capacity to compete for state and federal grants, limiting their ability to fund essential projects. The organization tasked the Capstone team with identifying strategies to help these municipalities better secure grant funding. The team conducted desk research and interviewed over 35 stakeholders to analyze challenges across the grant lifecycle: planning, searching, applying, and implementing. Their findings revealed that limited staff capacity and administrative burdens hinder municipalities at every stage. The final report provides recommendations for municipalities, counties, regional partners, and policymakers, including collaborative grant-seeking models and strategies to streamline processes to reduce barriers and improve funding access for underserved communities.

THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

DNA USE AND MISUSE IN THE U.S.: SAFEGUARDING GENETIC PRIVACY

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TEAM:

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The Legal Aid Society's DNA Unit advocates for ethical oversight of forensic DNA technologies in criminal investigations. It focuses on six emerging tools: DNA indexing, rapid DNA, familial search, phenotyping, infant blood-card use, and Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy (FIGG). The growing use of these technologies risks privacy violations, biased outcomes, and misuse without accountability. The Capstone team was tasked with analyzing their national deployment and developing policy strategies to regulate their use. The team reviewed literature, built a dataset of 400 laws/policies/funding streams, and interviewed legal, forensic, and civil liberties experts. The final deliverables—a dataset and policy roadmap—provide actionable recommendations for transparency, oversight, and advocacy to ensure ethical, accountable use of DNA technologies.

MAYOR'S OFFICE TO END DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

HOME+ PROGRAM PERSONAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEM OUTCOME EVALUATION

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Destiny Mingo

The New York City Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV) administers the Home+ program, launched in 2021, which partners with five community-based organizations citywide to reduce domestic violence through flexible funding, locksmith services, and the Personal Emergency Response System (PERS). This work matters because PERS—a safety device for survivors—directly impacts survivors' physical safety and emotional, physical, and mental well-being, which are critical for breaking cycles of abuse. The Capstone team evaluated PERS outcomes to assess its effectiveness in enhancing survivor safety and holistic wellbeing. To do this, the team analyzed client surveys, conducted a survivor focus group, and interviewed ENDGBV staff and partner organizations. The final report provided actionable recommendations to strengthen PERS implementation, ensuring the program better meets survivors' needs and aligns with ENDGBV's mission to combat domestic violence and gender-based violence.

NYC COUNCIL MEMBER ALEXA AVILÉS

REVITALIZATION OF THE SOUTH BROOKLYN WATERFRONT

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Adam Dore-Young
Eri Hirose
Dane Nielson

New York City Council Member Alexa Avilés represents the 38th District, including Red Hook and parts of Park Slope, Sunset Park, and Dyker Heights, and serves as Vice Chair of the Brooklyn Marine Terminal (BMT) task force, guiding the Economic Development Corporation's plans. As waterfront development progresses, balancing community needs with flood resilience and maritime industry priorities is critical. The Capstone team was tasked with assessing the feasibility and desirability of a waterfront park in Red Hook adjacent to the BMT. They conducted desk research on the flood-mitigation benefits of wetlands parks and interviewed stakeholders, including environmental scientists, maritime experts, local planners, and educators. The final report outlines a four-step framework for launching the project, addressing financial guidelines, community needs, site selection, and maritime integration, with recommendations to align the park's design with flood resilience and local priorities.

NEW YORK CITY MAYOR'S OFFICE

REIMAGINING BID FUNDING MODELS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CONTAINERIZATION

FACULTY:

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TEAM:

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Seoyeon Lee
Gabriella Must
Yuan Xu

The "New" New York Panel, a joint initiative by Governor Kathy Hochul and Mayor Eric Adams, seeks to promote equitable economic development by revitalizing public spaces. The initiative engaged the Capstone team to identify strategies for Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to implement New York City's trash containerization mandate equitably. The report focuses on three midsize BIDs—Columbus-Amsterdam (Manhattan), Bed-Stuy Gateway (Brooklyn), and 82nd Street Partnership (Queens)—and employs a mixed-methods approach. This includes qualitative interviews with BID leaders and city officials and quantitative analysis of municipal financial data (FY2019–2023) via the Capstone Dashboard. Key findings indicate that containerization compliance costs will significantly burden districts relying on the assessment tax funding model. The report recommends a multi-pronged approach: establishing a needs-based grant program for high-burden BIDs, facilitating peer learning opportunities, and creating a framework for long-term public-private partnerships.

STRAFFORD REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

EXPANDING CHILDCARE ACCESS IN STRAFFORD COUNTY, NEW HAMPSHIRE

FACULTY:

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TEAM:

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Danya
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Kevin Sullivan
Hanyan Su

The Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC) is a regional agency focused on economic development and planning in Strafford County, New Hampshire, addressing critical infrastructure and community needs. This work matters because childcare shortages in the region hinder workforce participation, strain local businesses, and limit access to affordable care for families, exacerbating economic inequities. The Capstone team assessed childcare availability, workforce challenges, and policy solutions to expand access and support SRPC's economic goals. To achieve this, the team conducted a regional childcare analysis, economic impact evaluations, cost-benefit assessments of state programs, and engaged stakeholders through literature reviews, policy analysis, and provider/policymaker consultations. Final deliverables included a report with policy recommendations, mapping tools visualizing childcare availability, and an interactive digital resource—equipping SRPC with actionable strategies to enhance childcare access, stabilize the workforce, and foster economic growth.

TRENTON ANIMAL SHELTER

IMPROVING ANIMAL WELFARE PRACTICES IN TRENTON, NEW JERSEY

FACULTY:

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Shermansong

TEAM:

Chelsea
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Victoria Li
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Lance Wang

The Trenton Animal Shelter protects and cares for animals in Trenton, New Jersey, serving as the last resort for stray and surrendered dogs. They collaborate with local businesses, rescue groups, and community partners to host adoption events, provide veterinary referrals, and support fostering programs. The shelter's effectiveness directly impacts public health, animal welfare, and regional jurisdictions. The Capstone team was tasked with providing actionable recommendations to improve shelter operations and community animal welfare practices. The team conducted a needs assessment, analyzing internal operations and interviewing stakeholders. The final recommendations prioritize three solutions: a mobile veterinary clinic partnership to expand affordable care access, public education programs and community adoption events to boost engagement, and enhanced staff training and data management systems.

VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA-GREATER NY

IMPROVING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTERS AT VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA-GREATER NEW YORK

FACULTY:

Palak Kaushal

TEAM:

Amisa Ratliff
Sonya
Woolward
Haoran Lu

Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY) is a leading nonprofit provider of human services for individuals and families in the New York City region, including specialized shelter services for domestic violence (DV) survivors. With DV incidents on the rise and record levels of homelessness, the underutilization of VOA-GNY's DV shelters—averaging 78 percent occupancy over the past five fiscal years—raises serious concerns. VOA-GNY engaged the Capstone team to identify barriers to full shelter occupancy and recommend strategies for improvement. The team conducted a literature review, analyzed internal data, visited shelters, and interviewed staff and DV advocates to understand the challenges. The final report presents recommendations, including legislative advocacy, reconfiguring room setups, and expanding wraparound services to help VOA-GNY reach and better support more DV survivors.

PROJECT
SUMMARIES

ADVOCACY & POLITICAL ACTION

COWRIE INITIATIVE

ADVOCACY PLAYBOOK: CREATING PATHWAYS TO BLACK MINORITY DEPOSITORY SUCCESS IN FLORIDA, GEORGIA, AND TEXAS

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TEAM:

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Leon Rivera
Chloe
Fauber-Lyle
Carly Gubitz
Briana Mancilla

The COWRIE Initiative is a grassroots nonprofit empowering communities of color through financial literacy, advocacy, and social programming to advance economic equity. This work matters because Minority Depository Institutions (MDIs), critical for closing racial wealth gaps, face systemic underfunding and decline, particularly in states like Texas, Georgia, and Florida. The Capstone team was tasked with developing an Advocacy Playbook to strengthen Black MDIs through legislative and coalition-building strategies. To achieve this, the team conducted an organizational scan of MDIs, analyzed state and federal legislation, and distributed surveys to identify advocacy gaps and opportunities. The final Advocacy Playbook outlined actionable steps—including policy recommendations, coalition-building frameworks, and toolkits—to help COWRIE advocate for Black financial prosperity and protect MDIs, fostering systemic economic change.

NORTH STAR FUND

EXPLORING HOW TO BUILD A VALUES-ALIGNED ENDOWMENT

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Angeles

TEAM:

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Ryan Arecco
Lina Dieudonné
Titus James

North Star Fund (NSF) is a social justice foundation supporting grassroots organizing led by communities of color in New York City and the Hudson Valley, mobilizing donors across race and class to fund movements for racial and economic equity since 1979. This work matters because NSF's historical model of annual grant redistribution faces pressure from rising operational costs and movement demands for sustained, multi-year funding—raising critical questions about how social justice philanthropy can balance immediacy with long-term sustainability. The Capstone team was tasked with evaluating the feasibility of a values-aligned endowment to support NSF's mission without compromising its principles. The team conducted 25 interviews with experts in values-aligned investing, NSF staff, and donors to assess financial, ethical, and operational considerations. The final report provided actionable recommendations on endowment feasibility, investment strategies, communication frameworks, and governance models, equipping NSF to navigate internal decision-making and contribute to broader philanthropic debates on sustainable, justice-driven funding.

SALT LAKE CITY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOODS

ADDRESSING SALT LAKE CITY'S HOUSING DISPLACEMENT

FACULTY:

Elizabeth
Angeles

TEAM:

Dylan Campana
Sam Gerstle
Sinéad López

The Salt Lake City Department of Community and Housing (SLC CAN) empowers tenants and addresses housing challenges through advocacy, education, and resource provision, aiming to close gaps in tenant-focused support systems. This initiative matters because equitable access to housing resources is critical for vulnerable renters navigating affordability crises and systemic inequities. The Capstone team was tasked with designing recommendations for a Tenant Advocate Program within SLC CAN's Tenant Resource Center to support renters throughout the leasing lifecycle. The team interviewed six Utah organizational leaders and seven U.S. and Canadian municipal officials to analyze existing tenant programs, policies, and service delivery models to achieve this. Final recommendations outlined best practices for piloting the Tenant Advocate Program, equipping SLC CAN to enhance outreach, dispute resolution, and tenant education—strengthening its capacity to serve Salt Lake City's renters.

UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL MARYLAND

DEVELOPING A HUMAN-CENTERED APPROACH TO TRANSPORTATION

FACULTY:

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TEAM:

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Connie Wu
Sarah Carmona

United Way of Central Maryland (UWCM) is a nonprofit organization serving Greater Baltimore by advancing access to housing, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. This work matters because systemic transportation barriers disproportionately harm ALICE (Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) populations, limiting their access to jobs, healthcare, and education—critical drivers of economic mobility. The Capstone team evaluated these transportation challenges and their impact on ALICE residents to inform UWCM's advocacy for equitable transit solutions. The team conducted a literature review, analyzed 185 resident survey responses, and interviewed five state government and transportation advocacy representatives. Final recommendations centered on human-centered policy and infrastructure improvements to reduce inequities, aligning with UWCM's 2050 Maryland Transportation Plan goals and ensuring underserved communities are better connected to essential services.

URBAN LEAGUE OF GREATER HARTFORD

LEGISLATIVE ANALYSIS REPORT & ADVOCACY PLAYBOOK

FACULTY:

Kalima Johnson

TEAM:

Maddie Beckley

Mary Deschler

Esther

Iyanuoluwa

Oloruntola

Toritsene Nanna

Amarachi

Ngadia

The Urban League of Greater Hartford (ULGH) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing racial equity and economic opportunities for underserved communities in Greater Hartford through workforce development, education, housing, and youth programming. This work matters because Hartford faces a stark racial wealth gap, with poverty rates exceeding 20 percent due to systemic inequities in education, employment, and income disparities—despite Connecticut's overall affluence. The NYU Capstone team was tasked with developing a strategic plan to reduce this wealth gap through workforce development advocacy. To achieve this, the team analyzed workforce policies, identified key partners (e.g., advocacy groups, legislators), and mapped advocacy opportunities to address systemic barriers. Final deliverables included a legislative engagement toolkit and advocacy playbook outlining partner outreach strategies and policy recommendations to strengthen ULGH's capacity to advocate for equitable workforce development and close the racial wealth gap.

PROJECT
SUMMARIES

SOCIAL IMPACT, INNOVATION & INVESTMENT

ACUMEN FUND, INC.

INSTITUTIONAL FUNDING ECOSYSTEM ANALYSIS AND COMPLIANCE
MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT FOR ACUMEN

FACULTY:

Art Kleiner

TEAM:

Thomas Chen

Daisuke Murata

Lin Qi

Doris Qian

Acumen Fund, Inc. is a nonprofit impact investor addressing global poverty by deploying patient capital to social enterprises in multiple regions, including Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and the U.S., using blended finance and returnable funds to mobilize public, philanthropic, and private capital. This work matters because while Acumen's innovative funding models enable flexible support for high-impact ventures, they also introduce complex, multi-funder compliance demands that risk diverting resources from its core mission. The Capstone team was tasked with analyzing Acumen's funding ecosystem and streamlining compliance management to reduce administrative burdens. The team conducted a comprehensive review of funding agreements, sector-specific compliance requirements, and internal processes, supplemented by stakeholder interviews and benchmarking of institutional funding trends. Final recommendations included standardized compliance protocols, enhanced accountability frameworks, and process automation tools—equipping Acumen to navigate regulatory complexities efficiently while scaling its poverty alleviation efforts.

ARJUNA CAPITAL

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NEW FOSSIL-FUEL-FREE ETF

FACULTY:

Carolyn Hou

TEAM:

Maeve Holland

Brown

Maria Audrey

Chadili

Lara Jansen

Loren Sass

Arjuna Capital offers fossil-fuel-free, performance-oriented investing, working with high-net-worth individuals, families, and foundations to create a suite of sustainable investments. They provide a comprehensive range of debt and equity offerings in both public and private markets. The objective of the Capstone team was to evaluate the market dynamics of a new fossil-fuel-free Exchange-Traded Fund (ETF) by analyzing the ETF landscape and its competition. In the initial phase, the team researched the ETF industry and conducted a market and competitive analysis. The methodology was anchored around three key pillars: academic literature, industry insights, and competitor analysis, supported by expert interviews to validate the team's findings. The team also conducted primary research and outlined target customers' key requirements and needs, guiding a final recommendation on market positioning—this recommendation aimed to differentiate Arjuna's fossil-fuel-free ETF from competitors and attract growth in assets under management.

BEYOND CAPITAL FUND

CLOSING THE SUPPORT GAP FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN AFRICA & INDIA

FACULTY:

Art Kleiner

TEAM:

Halley Dunn

Kayla Foster

Yutong Zheng

Beyond Capital Fund (BCF) is a women-led nonprofit evergreen impact investment fund that provides seed-stage capital and pro bono advisory support to for-profit social enterprises serving low-income communities in India and Africa, focusing on addressing systemic barriers women entrepreneurs face. This work matters because empowering women-led ventures in under-resourced regions is critical to advancing gender equity and fostering sustainable economic development. The Capstone team analyzed the entrepreneurial ecosystem to identify gaps and opportunities for BCF to strengthen its support model for women entrepreneurs. The team conducted a landscape analysis of accelerators, incubators, and funders, supplemented by surveys and in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs across India and Africa. The final recommendations outlined strategic adjustments to BCF's program design and positioning, enabling the organization to address structural challenges better, refine capacity-building curricula, and amplify its impact on gender-inclusive entrepreneurship.

IBM

MAPPING AI ADOPTION & UTILIZATION: INSIGHTS FROM THE SOCIAL IMPACT SECTOR

FACULTY:

Art Kleiner

TEAM:

Emma

Benninghoff

Ella Boublik

Alexa Miller

Tyler Trembley

IBM is a global technology leader whose Research team develops AI solutions to optimize performance and cost for businesses and nonprofits, focusing on scientific innovation. Generative AI's potential to drive social impact is hindered by adoption barriers and inclusivity gaps among non-technical stakeholders in the nonprofit and public sectors. The Capstone team assessed generative AI's use in the social impact sector, identified challenges/opportunities, and evaluated its inclusivity for non-technical domain experts. The team conducted 25 interviews with nonprofit leaders, government officials, foundations, and tech consultants, supplemented by external research on AI adoption trends. Recommendations included creating a resource hub with AI policy templates, sector-specific "master class" training, and expanding IBM's nonprofit workshops to bridge technical gaps and foster equitable AI adoption.

PINNACLE GROUP, INC.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

FACULTY:

Mo Coffey

TEAM:

Riley Kerin

Jessica Mantell

Shanti Tawee

Haiwen Wang

Pinnacle Group, Inc. is a global contingent workforce provider offering talent solutions and strategic services to organizations managing flexible labor needs. This work matters because robust environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reporting is increasingly critical for maintaining stakeholder trust, regulatory compliance, and competitive positioning in the professional services industry. The Capstone team was tasked with developing an ESG measurement and reporting strategy to align Pinnacle's sustainability initiatives with industry standards and stakeholder expectations. To achieve this, the team conducted a literature review of corporate sustainability practices, benchmarked Pinnacle against peer and aspirational companies through a professional services industry landscape analysis, and performed an internal review, including a SWOT analysis of Pinnacle's existing ESG practices. Final recommendations included short-term strategies for immediate ESG integration and long-term structural reforms, positioning Pinnacle to enhance its sustainability reporting ratings, strengthen governance frameworks, and solidify its role as an ESG leader in the contingent workforce sector.

REBUILD BY DESIGN

MOBILIZING CRA INVESTMENT IN EQUITABLE CLIMATE INFRASTRUCTURE

FACULTY:

Mo Coffey

TEAM:

Pei Li Chua

Daniel Gunton

Claire McLean

Allison Shao

Alexander

Tellides

Rebuild by Design, a policy initiative of NYU's Institute for Public Knowledge, develops climate resilience solutions for vulnerable communities through collaborative design and systemic equity-focused strategies. The 2023 updates to the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) present a critical opportunity to address climate inequality by redirecting private investment toward low-to moderate-income (LMI) communities historically harmed by redlining and disinvestment. The Capstone team was tasked with analyzing how the revised CRA could expand private-sector funding for climate resilience projects in LMI areas. The team reviewed the literature on the CRA's legacy, analyzed state-level CRA policies, evaluated potential regulatory shifts under the Trump administration, and cataloged eligible climate adaptation projects alongside private-sector case studies. The final deliverable included guiding principles for financial institutions to leverage CRA funding effectively, prioritizing equitable investments in high-impact resilience initiatives to combat systemic climate disparities.

RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS INITIATIVE FOR JUSTICE

ADVANCING CRIMINAL LEGAL REFORM THROUGH CORPORATE ENGAGEMENT

FACULTY:

Mo Coffey

TEAM:

Jenna Dyer

Monét Smith

Crystal Tang

Haiyun Wang

The Responsible Business Initiative for Justice (RBIJ) partners with corporations to advance criminal justice reform through public safety initiatives, equitable hiring practices, and community investment. This work matters because integrating criminal legal system engagement into ESG frameworks enables companies to align profit with purpose, address systemic inequities, and demonstrate measurable social impact. The Capstone team was tasked with developing guidance for companies to track and report their justice-related initiatives using an ESG lens. To achieve this, the team conducted a literature review, analyzed existing policies, and interviewed stakeholders to identify best practices and barriers. Final recommendations included actionable KPIs and guidelines for four focus areas: fair chance hiring, support for incarcerated employees, ethical supply chain management, and community justice partnerships—equipping companies to operationalize equity while enhancing ESG accountability.

STEPHEN GAYNOR SCHOOL

ASSESSING MARKET ATTRACTIVENESS FOR STRATEGIC EXPANSION

FACULTY:

Carolyn Hou

TEAM:

Ina Marwantina

Jiayi Li

Ruoyu Wu

Shucheng Qing

Stephen Gaynor School, a leader in special education serving pre-K through middle school students, is exploring expanding its Early Childhood (EC) program to Brooklyn to increase access to specialized learning for young children with diverse needs. This initiative matters because equitable access to tailored early education is critical for addressing developmental gaps and fostering long-term academic success, particularly in underserved areas. The Capstone team analyzed market demand and the competitive landscape for an EC program in Brooklyn. The team employed a mixed-methods approach, combining desk research on local education policies, competitive analysis of existing programs, and in-depth interviews with parents and stakeholders to identify key enrollment decision factors. The final deliverables provided insights on the feasibility of expansion, highlighting opportunities to meet unmet demand and strengthen Brooklyn's access to high-quality special education services.

SURDNA FOUNDATION

MEASURING IMPACT IN HEALTHCARE: A CAPITAL PERSPECTIVE

FACULTY:

Carolyn Hou

TEAM:

Ana Ceron

Oviedo

Christine

Rutkowski

Lefan Fu

Yangzheng Li

The Surdna Foundation, a family foundation advancing social justice through philanthropic grants and mission-aligned investments, focuses on leveraging private capital to address systemic inequities, including disparities in the U.S. healthcare system. This work matters because aligning investments with health equity goals is critical to driving systemic change. However, gaps persist in how impact is defined, measured, and prioritized within private healthcare portfolios. The Capstone team was tasked with evaluating how Surdna's healthcare investments could advance equity by analyzing fund managers' approaches to impact and identifying barriers to meaningful outcomes. The team conducted a sector-wide landscape analysis, assessed Surdna's endowment exposure, and interviewed 17 fund managers, asset allocators, and healthcare professionals. Findings revealed inconsistent definitions of "impact," structural limitations in influencing portfolio companies, and opportunities for greater accountability. Final recommendations urged Surdna to clarify impact expectations, integrate equity metrics into due diligence, and advocate for standardized reporting—enabling the foundation to align its capital with its mission to transform healthcare equity.

PROJECT
SUMMARIES

HEALTH MANAGEMENT & POLICY

CENTER FOR MEDICARE AND MEDICAID SERVICES

STRENGTHENING HEALTH SYSTEMS: EXTREME WEATHER IN THE U.S. CARIBBEAN

FACULTY:

Rain Henderson

TEAM:

Charlotte

Borgers

Abby Briggs

Caroline Shore

Abe Sinay-Smith

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), a federal agency administering public health insurance programs, through its Region II Office in NYC, focuses on strengthening health systems across New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Severe storms and extreme heat are escalating threats to healthcare access in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, where systemic vulnerabilities exacerbate climate-related health risks. The Capstone team analyzed how the territories' legal, historical, and geographic contexts intersect with weather-related health challenges. The team synthesized academic research, policy documents, and insights from interviews with healthcare and policy experts familiar with the U.S. Caribbean to address this. Their findings highlighted actionable recommendations for CMS, including optimizing Medicaid funding, mitigating physician shortages, managing chronic diseases, and fortifying critical infrastructure. These recommendations aim to bolster the CMS Rural Health Council's mission to advance equitable health outcomes in vulnerable communities.

NYU LANGONE DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MEDICINE

OPIOID OVERDOSE PREVENTION IN SCHOOLS

FACULTY:

Rain Henderson

TEAM:

Yonathan
Debessai
Ava Binao Guo
Kailing Xiao

The Ronald O. Perelman Department of Emergency Medicine at NYU Langone operates as an independent academic department, treating over 400,000 patients annually, and its Prevention Education Partnership (PEP) has educated over 10,000 learners since 2015. The opioid overdose crisis necessitates community-level interventions to save lives. The Capstone team was tasked with creating a School-Based Opioid Overdose Preparedness Program for NYU Langone's Family Health Centers School Health Program and affiliated high schools. They collaborated with PEP to develop training sessions, naloxone distribution protocols, and emergency response plans for school staff and students. The final program was successfully piloted, recommending expanded implementation to strengthen overdose preparedness in school communities.

NYU LANGONE ORTHOPEDIC HOSPITAL

NYU LANGONE ORTHOPEDICS ASC EXPANSION TO WESTCHESTER COUNTY

FACULTY:

Rain Henderson

TEAM:

Zixin (Cindy)
Guan
Julia Ivanishchak
Praewa (Wawa)
Kulatnam

NYU Langone Orthopedic Hospital (LOH), a nationally ranked leader in orthopedic and neurological care, provides world-class inpatient and outpatient services in Manhattan. As part of its strategic growth, LOH is exploring a new ambulatory surgery center (ASC) in Westchester County to improve patient access, expand its geographic reach, and adapt to evolving reimbursement and operational demands. This initiative matters because it addresses barriers for patients traveling to Manhattan while positioning LOH to meet industry trends and enhance care efficiency. The Capstone team was asked to assess the ASC's feasibility, identify surgical cases and providers suitable for transition, and propose operational, financial, and workforce models for success. The team analyzed financial data, surgical volumes, resource utilization, market trends, stakeholder feedback, and site visits and consultations to do this. Final recommendations included a surgeon block schedule and a strategic business expansion plan to guide LOH's ASC development, ensuring alignment with its growth objectives.

PROJECT
SUMMARIES

SIMULATION IN HEALTHCARE MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE

COMPLEX MULTI-HEALTH SYSTEMS

STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING THROUGH EVIDENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT (EBM) PRACTICES

FACULTY:

Carla Sampson

TEAM:

Sarah Casey
Jasmine Chea
Annie Kushnick
Kevin Wright

Within the Advanced Simulation in Healthcare Management, over a six year period, the Capstone team's hospital operated inpatient, ED, outpatient, and primary clinical lines and competed against three hospitals in a community of 800,000 residents. Sustainably delivering high-quality care to the most significant admission share requires balancing human resource capacity and economic viability amid internal constraints and external competition. The team was tasked with designing a strategy to optimize operations, maximize admissions, and ensure financial stability. They applied evidence-based management practices while analyzing financial data, surgical volumes, resource utilization, and stakeholder feedback to refine workflows and performance. By the final period, the hospital achieved \$3.25 million in net revenue, secured a market-leading 32 percent cumulative admission share, and implemented long-term sustainability solutions, including opioid epidemic prevention programs, acquisition of a primary care unit, and telemedicine expansion, solidifying its reputation for high-quality community care.

URBAN PLANNING

BFJ PLANNING

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AS STORMWATER MITIGATION IN ISLIP, NY

FACULTY:

Meredith Phillips
Almeida

TEAM:

Maisah Bateman
Anthony
Cardenas
Kristen
Cawthorn
Maggie Huang
Ellie Karpe
James Walmer

BFJ Planning, a consulting firm engaged by the Town of Islip, supports updating the town's comprehensive plan to address housing, sustainability, and resilience issues. This work matters because Islip faces persistent stormwater flooding, disproportionately impacting communities like Bay Shore and threatening infrastructure and equity. The Capstone team was tasked with researching and recommending solutions to mitigate flooding impacts, focusing on green infrastructure interventions. To achieve this, the team conducted an existing conditions analysis of Islip, prioritizing Bay Shore, and combined spatial mapping, environmental vulnerability assessments, and community feedback to identify localized strategies. Final recommendations included tailored green infrastructure projects and implementation tools—such as site-specific designs and policy guidance—to help Islip advance flood resilience while aligning with broader planning goals.

BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS THE RIVER, 11TH STREET BRIDGE PARK

BUILDING BRIDGES TO BUSINESS RESILIENCE: COMBATING DISPLACEMENT FOR ANACOSTIA'S BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES

FACULTY:

Meredith Phillips
Almeida

TEAM:

Peter Estes
Henry Hoffmann
Deaunte
Johnson
Lauren Newman
Katya Rudnik

The 11th Street Bridge Park, a Building Bridges Across the River (BBAR) project, has catalyzed development in Washington, D.C.'s East of the River communities. BBAR launched an Equitable Development Plan (EDP) to address displacement risks and ensure lasting benefits for residents and businesses. Small business preservation is critical to mitigating displacement as new investments reshape the area. The Capstone team assessed existing conditions and developed policy recommendations to strengthen local entrepreneurs and foster economic resilience. They conducted a literature review, stakeholder interviews, and an evaluation of the small business support ecosystem, identifying gaps in resource utilization, barriers to property ownership, and strategies to improve business success. The final report provides actionable strategies to enhance long-term stability for local entrepreneurs, including closing resource gaps, expanding ownership pathways, and fostering a supportive environment. These recommendations ensure businesses in Historic Anacostia thrive alongside new investments, aligning with the EDP's goals.

CITY OF STAMFORD TRANSPORTATION, TRAFFIC, AND PARKING DEPARTMENT

STAMFORD DOWNTOWN CURBSIDE MANAGEMENT PLAN

FACULTY:

Michael Keane

TEAM:

Austin Celestin
Kiersten Mills
Leo Ruyter-
Harcourt
Elliot Wareham
Alex Yu

The City of Stamford Transportation, Traffic, and Parking Department (TTPD) ensures safe, efficient mobility for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and motorists while balancing competing demands on public infrastructure. Stamford's rapid residential growth and evolving curb uses—from delivery zones to bike lanes—require adaptive parking strategies to prevent congestion and equity gaps. The Capstone team was tasked with developing a parking plan to address these shifting needs, prioritizing accessibility and reducing reliance on private vehicles. To achieve this, the team conducted an existing conditions analysis, stakeholder interviews, surveys, on-site data collection, and a review of best street design and parking management practices. The final deliverables included short-, medium-, and long-term guidelines for parking reform and targeted case studies for four key corridors, providing TTPD with actionable strategies to optimize curb space and promote sustainable transportation alternatives.

NEW YORK CITY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

EXTREME HEAT IN NEW YORK CITY

FACULTY:

Sarah Kaufman

TEAM:

Laura
Blumenfeld
Harrison Crist
Claire Crisp
Cole Perry
Melanie Reyes

New York City Emergency Management (NYCEM) collaborates with community organizations like We Stay/Nos Quedamos to address public health threats exacerbated by climate change, focusing on extreme heat's disproportionate impact on historically marginalized neighborhoods. This work matters because structural racism and disinvestment have left low-income communities, such as Melrose in the Bronx, with heat-trapping infrastructure and inadequate cooling resources, intensifying health risks as temperatures rise. The Capstone team was tasked with co-developing localized heat mitigation strategies tailored to Melrose's vulnerabilities and assets. To achieve this, the team combined urban heat island research, spatial vulnerability mapping, and community engagement—including surveys, interviews, and site visits with We Stay/Nos Quedamos. The final deliverables included a report for NYCEM, a community roadmap for heat resilience, and a toolkit empowering residents to advocate for interventions like green infrastructure and cooling centers, centering equity in climate adaptation.

NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY GARDENS: LEVERAGING TRANSFERABLE DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS TO ENHANCE PUBLIC IMPACT

FACULTY:

Michael Keane

TEAM:

Daniela
Aizencang
Maha Aldawood
Alanis Allen
Kiersten Klang
Ally La Pinta
Campbell Munn

New York Restoration Project (NYRP) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and revitalizing community gardens and green spaces across New York City. TDR transactions involving NYRP-owned gardens require careful planning to balance community benefits with financial sustainability while navigating complex zoning regulations. The NYU Wagner Capstone team was tasked with developing guidelines and resources to help NYRP evaluate and execute TDR transactions, focusing on air rights transfers from garden properties to developers. To achieve this, the team conducted stakeholder interviews, analyzed zoning codes (including impacts of the City of Yes amendments), and created detailed development potential assessments for garden sites and adjacent properties. Final deliverables included process documentation, a zoning database, evaluation recommendations, and a test case—equipping NYRP with tools to streamline future TDR decisions and maximize community and ecological value.

REBUILD BY DESIGN

WELCOMING CHANGE: LOCAL STRATEGIES FOR CLIMATE MIGRATION

FACULTY:

Sarah Kaufman

TEAM:

Doug Berger
Ella Copiatti
Nic Saladino
Clara Smith
Kara Stoley

Rebuild by Design is a climate change nonprofit organization that uses collaborative, innovative approaches to help communities build resilience to climate change. This work matters because, as climate change worsens and the risk of displacement increases, Rebuild by Design's work becomes essential in preparing cities to effectively and inclusively manage incoming climate migrants. The Capstone team was tasked with developing strategies for receiving communities to integrate climate migrants, boost economic growth, and enhance social infrastructure, recognizing that entire U.S. regions will eventually become uninhabitable due to climate change. The team prepared a comprehensive literature review on climate migration and integration processes, interviewed city officials, long-range planners, and other policy experts, and created case studies of receiving cities. The final deliverables included a report, an interactive map, and a presentation establishing city archetypes with tailored recommendations for each archetype.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CORPSAFRICA

CREATING A USER-FRIENDLY OPERATING MANUAL TO SUPPORT FURTHER GROWTH

FACULTY:

Lauren
Stackpoole

TEAM:

Nina Hassler
Kelsey
Patterson
Xuyan Zhou

CorpsAfrica trains and empowers young African leaders to serve in rural communities, fostering locally led development. As the organization has expanded rapidly over the past decade, ensuring consistency and accessibility in its operating manual has become essential. However, the manual was not user-friendly, difficult to navigate, and outdated, creating challenges that hindered operational efficiency, internal communication, and further growth. To address this, CorpsAfrica engaged the Capstone Team to redesign the manual, making it more intuitive, visually engaging, and easily accessible to staff. The team conducted a comparative analysis of similar organizational manuals, interviewed key stakeholders in person and via surveys to identify usability challenges, and applied human-centered design principles to restructure the content for clarity and ease of use. The final deliverable includes an interactive manual accessible via the Intranet for streamlined navigation and real-time updates while maintaining a refined version of the existing platform for continuity. This new resource will enhance future training, improve internal communication, and strengthen CorpsAfrica's operational efficiency as it grows.

EK KADAM AUR

EXPANSION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

FACULTY:

Lauren
Stackpoole

TEAM:

Karya Antmen
Joshua Chun
Jackeline
Rodriguez
Nikola Stokuka

The Ek Kadam Aur (EKA) Foundation is a nonprofit organization working to dismantle structural barriers to education for visually impaired students across eight Indian states through its Arunodaya Program, which pairs students in remote areas with mentors to build literacy and numeracy skills for formal schooling. Expanding access to tailored educational support for visually impaired students is critical to bridging equity gaps and enabling long-term academic success in underserved regions. The Capstone team evaluated the Arunodaya Program's effectiveness in Kolkata, West Bengal, and assessed its viability for international expansion. To do this, the team conducted 10 days of fieldwork, interviewing students, mentors, and administrators to identify success factors and replicable conditions. Final deliverables included a comprehensive report with recommendations for scaling the program, highlighting key environmental and operational criteria for successfully adapting to new contexts—equipping EKA to broaden its global impact.

INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

EVALUATING LAND USE PLANNING AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

FACULTY:

Paul Smoke

TEAM:

Silvana
Jaramillo
Miranda
Hazoury Lora
Samantha
Serrano

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) is a leading regional institution reducing poverty and inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean through health, education, and infrastructure initiatives. In 2022, the Dominican Republic enacted Law 368-22, mandating municipalities like Pepillo Salcedo to develop Municipal Development Plans (PMOTs) to guide sustainable growth. This work matters because equitable, climate-resilient urban planning is critical for addressing vulnerabilities in rapidly developing regions like Pepillo Salcedo. The Capstone team evaluated Pepillo Salcedo's PMOT, focusing on its alignment with environmental protection, urban resilience, and inclusive economic models. To do this, the team conducted a literature review on land-use planning best practices, executed a site visit, and facilitated workshops with local stakeholders, IDB representatives, and Dominican government officials. The final deliverable was a standardized framework to assess PMOT quality, enabling the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development to ensure plans balance sustainability goals with local needs—strengthening nationwide urban development efforts.

READY FOR READING

SCALING LITERACY IN RWANDA: DESIGNING A TRAINING OF TRAINERS PROGRAM

FACULTY:

Lauren
Stackpoole

TEAM:

Celia Huang
Dyne Lee
Eunice Morales
Kamila Palucha

Ready for Reading (RfR) is a Rwanda-based nonprofit advancing literacy and education through community-driven programs, including its Adult Literacy Program, which empowers individuals economically and personally. To expand its impact, RfR plans to develop a Certified Training Program using a Training of Trainers (ToT) model to scale adult literacy instruction. Scaling literacy through ToT risks long-term viability due to the model's lack of inherent financial sustainability. The Capstone team was tasked with assessing RfR's capacity to implement the ToT program. They reviewed existing ToT models, conducted a field visit to Rwanda, participated in RfR's activities, and interviewed staff, beneficiaries, and partners. The team developed a training toolkit and strategic recommendations for program rollout. It emphasized the need for additional financial sustainability measures to strengthen RfR's organizational capacity and ensure long-term success.

UNITED NATIONS CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT FUND

IMPLEMENTING ISO 14093 IN UGANDA – STANDARDIZING CLIMATE FINANCE FOR LOCAL ADAPTATION

FACULTY:

Paul Smoke

TEAM:

Tracy Cole
Alissa D'Vale
Jan Fan
Johannes Sahala

The United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) supports inclusive local development and climate adaptation through mechanisms like the Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility (LoCAL), which channels climate finance to local governments in developing countries for locally led adaptation. In 2022, LoCAL was formalized into the ISO 14093 standard to scale up decentralized climate adaptation by providing a globally recognized framework for credible, accountable fiscal transfers. Empowering local governments to implement context-specific adaptation measures is critical for building resilience and ensuring equitable climate finance access. The UNCDF tasked the Capstone team with assessing ISO 14093's relevance, utility, and implementation challenges, focusing on Uganda (LoCAL's first pilot country). The team conducted a literature review on international standards and field research in Kampala (interviews with government officials, development partners, and UNCDF staff). It produced three deliverables: a literature review, a fieldwork report, and a final report. The final report provides recommendations for promoting ISO 14093 adoption, addressing government readiness concerns, clarifying certification processes, and outlining associated costs to facilitate decentralized climate adaptation.

UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

SUPPORTING UN DESA WITH THE PREPARATION, IMPLEMENTATION, AND FOLLOW-UP OF THE 2025 HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FORUM (UNDCF)

FACULTY:

Paul Smoke

TEAM:

Mahira Khan

Ida Kusiima

Chengzhang Xu

The United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) serves as the Secretariat to the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF), the UN's central platform for policy dialogue on international development cooperation to address global challenges like poverty reduction and sustainable development. This work matters because nearly 600 million people remain in extreme poverty, and a \$4 trillion financing gap threatens progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), necessitating urgent reforms in development cooperation frameworks. The Capstone team was tasked with supporting the preparation, implementation, and follow-up of the 2025 DCF High-Level Meeting to advance actionable solutions. To achieve this, the team researched Official Development Assistance (ODA), analyzed the 2024 Development Cooperation Survey, developed country profiles, and documented discussions during DCF meetings and preparatory sessions for the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4). Final deliverables included synthesized meeting summaries, survey analyses, and country profiles—providing critical inputs for UN DESA's reporting and shaping the FfD4 outcome document to strengthen global development cooperation and financing strategies.

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

ANALYZING THE NEXUS BETWEEN FINANCIAL INCLUSION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN COLOMBIA

FACULTY:

Paul Smoke

TEAM:

Brian Angulo

Sergio Osnaya-Prieto

Shagun Suryam

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) works to strengthen social protection systems globally, including in Colombia, where it seeks to expand financial inclusion—access to and use of financial products—to advance human development. Financial inclusion is critical for reducing poverty and inequality, particularly in rural areas where barriers like high costs and economic informality persist. The Capstone team was tasked with studying the link between financial inclusion and human development to inform UNDP's future programming in Colombia. The team interviewed representatives from Colombia's financial inclusion programs, fintech sector leaders, and global experts on financial inclusion. Their analysis identified key barriers, including affordability gaps and rural informality, and proposed policy recommendations such as creating a regulatory framework to foster fintech innovation and improving financial literacy initiatives. These findings guide UNDP's efforts in designing targeted strategies to expand financial access and drive equitable human development across Colombia.

VIOLET ORGANIZATION FOR RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT

NAVIGATING U.S. ADVOCACY: STRATEGIES FOR HUMANITARIAN RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT

FACULTY:

Lauren Stackpoole

TEAM:

Dantong Bi
Kimberly Yang

Violet Organization for Relief and Development is a humanitarian organization providing emergency aid and relief services in conflict-affected regions of Syria, including healthcare, education, and disaster response. Expanding advocacy efforts to the U.S. is critical to sustaining support amid heightened challenges, such as the 2023 Turkey/Syria earthquake and shifting political dynamics, which have strained Violet's capacity to prioritize global outreach. The Wagner Capstone team was tasked with creating a U.S.-focused advocacy sourcebook to identify partnerships, resources, and strategies to amplify Violet's visibility and funding. To achieve this, the team conducted on-the-ground research, mapped U.S.-based educational opportunities for Syrian students, identified donor networks and in-kind support channels, and curated media connections such as advocacy-aligned podcasters. The final deliverable included a comprehensive sourcebook with actionable recommendations and resource directories, equipping Violet to launch its U.S. advocacy program effectively while balancing urgent on-the-ground priorities.

WORLD BANK

ASSESSING THE FEASIBILITY OF IMPLEMENTING DIGITAL PUBLIC WORKS (DPW) IN RWANDA

FACULTY:

Paul Smoke

TEAM:

Ashley Fu
Tianyi Song
Tiffany Verga

The World Bank engaged the Capstone team to assess the feasibility of implementing Digital Public Works (DPW) in Kigali, Rwanda, as part of its Rwanda Urban Development Program. DPW offers a digital alternative to traditional public works, combining data generation for government use with income and digital skill-building for youth. Through stakeholder interviews, site visits, and insights from Kenya's DPW pilot, the team evaluated Kigali's institutional capacity, labor market, and digital infrastructure. Despite challenges such as limited digital literacy and coordination gaps, the study found strong alignment with Rwanda's Vision 2050. The final report outlines phased, locally grounded recommendations to pilot DPW in a way that promotes inclusion, employment, and long-term development.

PROJECT
SUMMARIES

RESEARCH IN QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

EDUCATION POLICY

SCHOOL-WIDE COMPLIANCE TRANSITION & ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN FLORIDA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Florida's public education system oversees statewide policies such as the Class Size Reduction (CSR) mandate, which shifted compliance from district-level to school-wide averages in 2006 to improve educational equity and resource allocation. This work matters because understanding the causal impact of CSR policy changes on student achievement is critical for shaping equitable and effective education strategies. The Capstone team was tasked with estimating the causal effect of this transition on Grades 3–5 student outcomes using Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) data. The team applied a Regression Discontinuity (RD) design to analyze test scores from approximately 3,100 schools, isolating the policy's impact at the compliance cutoff. Final findings revealed a statistically significant decline in standardized test performance post-transition, offering policymakers evidence to refine CSR implementation and optimize resource distribution for equitable student success.

IMPACT OF UPZONING POLICIES ON FAMILY COMPOSITION IN NYC

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Upzoning in New York City is a policy tool to address housing shortages and promote affordable housing development. While prior studies have analyzed upzoning's effects on rents and demographics, its impact on families with children—potentially linked to shortages of two-plus bedroom units—remains understudied. Understanding these dynamics is critical to ensuring housing policies do not inadvertently displace families or worsen inequities. This study investigates the causal effects of upzoning on family size and composition by linking NYC spatial rezoning data with longitudinal census data from the American Community Survey. Researchers applied Callaway & Sant'Anna's difference-in-differences methodology for staggered upzoning implementation across neighborhoods. The final report identifies changes in neighborhood demographics post-upzoning, revealing unintended consequences of policies aimed at alleviating the housing crisis. Findings aim to inform equitable housing strategies by clarifying how development policies shape family dynamics and demographic patterns.

PROJECT SUMMARIES

INDEPENDENT PROJECT

ZONING TOOLS AND LAND USE REGULATIONS

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HOW ZONING TOOLS AND LAND USE REGULATIONS PROMOTE COASTAL RESILIENCY IN MIAMI BEACH (FL) AND THE ROCKAWAYS, QUEENS

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