

2025 PROGRAM VIEWBOOK

Executive Program in Social Innovation Design (XSD)



PROGRAM LENGTH

7 Months

PROGRAM FORMAT

Social Innovation Design (XSD) is an executive program from the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Social Impact Strategy (CSIS) at the School of Social Policy & Practice (SP2).

This innovative program provides a mix of experiences through our core courses, a range of electives, a synchronous community convening, and an independent studio project. Discover the nuts and bolts of human-centered design, community needs assessment, performance measurement and mobilization strategy.

Few programs combine training in design with strategy tools for social impact. This program integrates these two distinct yet complementary subjects—and offers both independent and collaborative learning.

CERTIFICATION AND COURSE CREDIT

The Executive Program in Social Innovation Design (XSD) is a non-credit, non-degree, master's level certificate program. At program completion, students who have completed all program requirements will receive a signed certificate from the School of Social Policy and Practice at the University of Pennsylvania. Alumni of the Executive Program in Social Innovation Design (XSD) are eligible to complete the Master of Science (MS) in Nonprofit Leadership (NPL) in an [accelerated format](#).

Now is the time to build what matters.

Our mission is to empower emerging changemakers with the tools, mindsets, and community needed to create meaningful impact. Through a unique combination of design thinking and social innovation strategy, we offer a learning experience that is both rigorous and deeply personal. The Executive Program for Social Innovation Design will start you on the road towards a more creative and purposeful life —whether launching a new idea, shifting direction, or deepening your current work.

Rooted in values and driven by purpose, the program brings together a global, diverse cohort of professionals united by the desire to build a better future. So far, we’ve trained over 1,400 students, each unique and brilliant, from more than 40 countries. Join a community where creativity meets impact, and where your ideas are given the space—and support—to grow.

Ready to
learn more?
Let’s dive in.

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“I was most surprised at the speed and implementation of learning—how quickly I interacted with a new skill set, and the program support to experiment in the real world. XSD was a rigorous, valuable program, which is to be expected at Penn. But I didn’t expect the joy of interacting with teachers and colleagues who want to change the world. I found community here.”

Allison Augustyn
Design Thinking leader, consultant, and coach
Executive Program in Social Innovation Design Student
(2021–22) and XSD Teaching Fellow (2022–24)



A program built to turn your ideas into action

In seven months, you'll complete a series of immersive online courses, dive into a hands-on studio project, and attend a dynamic 2-day in-person summit on Penn's campus. You'll learn tools across human-centered design, community engagement and business modeling—each designed to help you think bigger and build smarter. Whether you choose to focus full-time or alongside your work, this flexible, rigorous program meets you where you are.

Program Highlights



STRUCTURED LEARNING

Fresh content is released online every Monday, so you can review it at any point during the week, on your own time. Weekly content includes video lectures, readings, tools and discussions that take 4-6 hours a week to complete.



APPLIED ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments invite you to integrate tools into your own work and discover new possibilities. Many students even develop and launch new initiatives during the program, either on their own or through their existing work.



ACCESS TO COMMUNITY










Throughout the program, participate in group video calls for constructive feedback from a dedicated teaching team and your peers. Whether you're feeling "stuck" or want to bounce around ideas, your colleagues are just a video call away.



IVY LEAGUE EDUCATION

You'll learn relevant, powerful tools that you can apply immediately. Graduates receive an Ivy League education and a signed certificate from the University of Pennsylvania, a credential that's known and respected around the world.

Program Timeline

	September				October				November				December				January				February				March				April			
 Orientation Session (Virtual) Sept 4, 2025																																
 Self and Society Sept 8 - Sept 28, 2025 3 Weeks																																
 Design Thinking for Social Innovation Sept 29 - Dec 7 8 Weeks																																
 XSD Summit Oct 30 - Oct 31 2 day on-campus convening																																
 Engagement for Impact Jan 5 - Jan 25 3 Weeks																																
 Vision Day (Virtual) Feb 5 1 day optional event																																
 Program Electives Feb 9 - Mar 1 3 Weeks One elective required. In prior years, elective offerings have included: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business Models• Mobilizing People• Performance Management• Digital Media for Social Impact• Inclusive Technology & Ethical Design *See pages 15-18 for course descriptions.																																
 Independent Studio Project Dec 1 - Mar 29 Ongoing Online Project																																
 Certificate Celebration (Virtual) April 24 1 day optional event																																

Your work is personal. The learning that supports it should be too.

This program isn't just about learning—it's about growing alongside a diverse, mission-driven community. Across seven months, you'll collaborate, reflect, and test new ideas with the support of expert faculty, dedicated peers, and an ecosystem built for transformation.



IN-PERSON SUMMIT

A required 2-day campus convening in Philadelphia brings the cohort together for immersive sessions.

At the summit, students will:

- Define and refine their studio project ideas
- Learn from Penn faculty and expert practitioners
- Build lasting relationships with their cohort

WEEKLY JAMOUTS

Each week, the teaching team will host optional video calls.

The purposes of these calls are:

- To get to know each other and learn from one another's work
- To discuss the curriculum and ask questions
- To work on your homework alongside your classmates

STUDIO PROJECT

Throughout the program, students apply their learning in an independent project. You will:

- Choose a topic you care about
- Define a problem, develop a solution, and plan a pilot
- Apply design tools and reflect on your process

VISION DAY

An optional virtual mid-program event where students present progress and gather feedback.

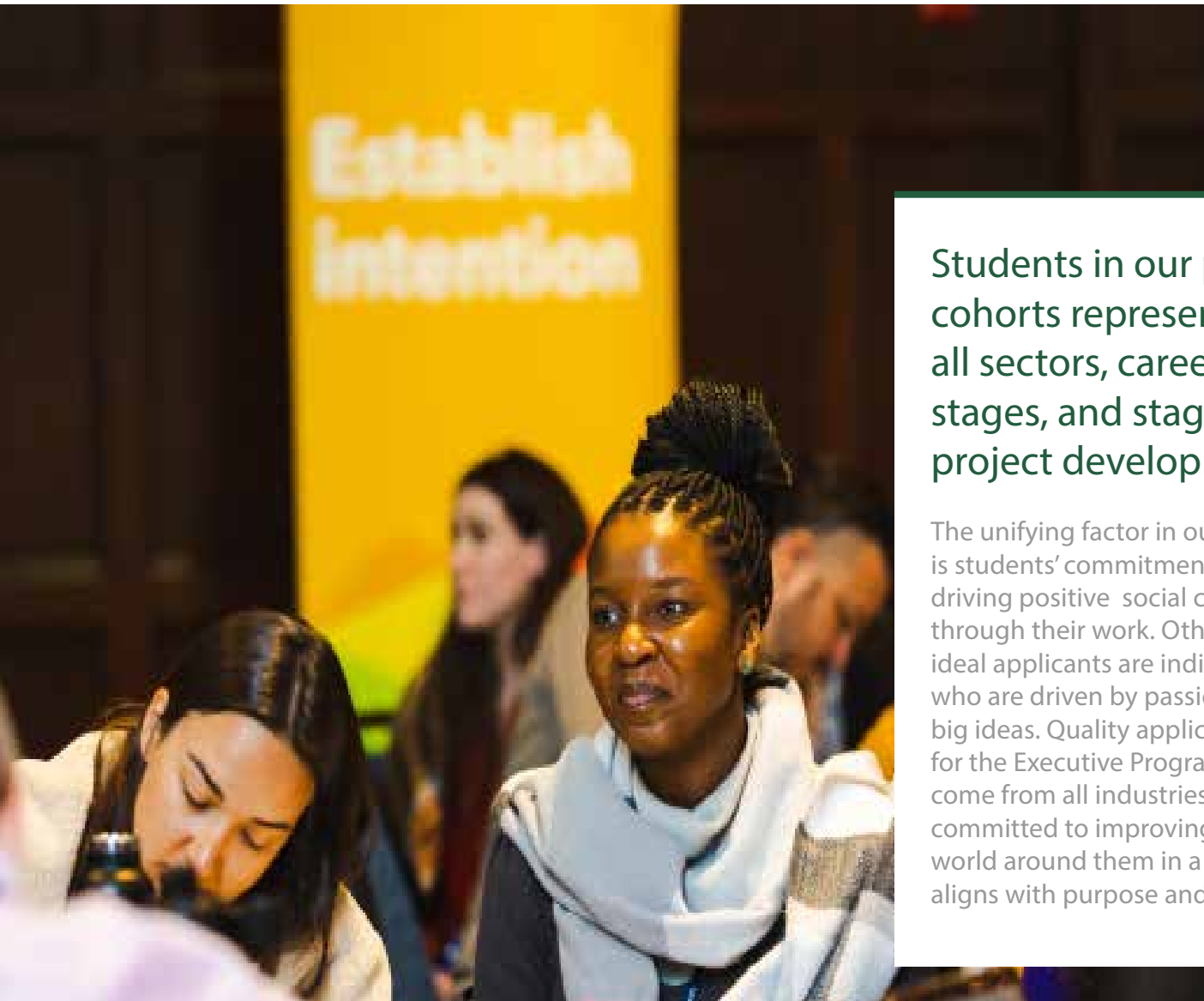
Vision Day is an opportunity to:

- Share your studio project concept
- Receive feedback from faculty and peers
- Reconnect with the cohort mid-program

Inviting those who believe in a better world

Our Alumni Network

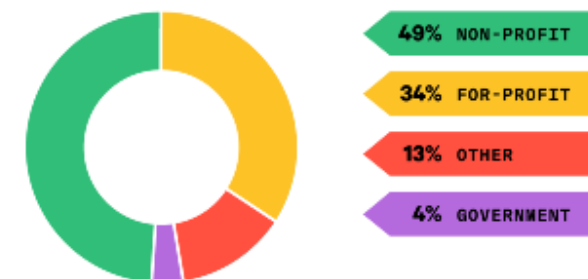
The Center for Social Impact Strategy has trained more than 1,400 impact-driven leaders from more than 40 countries. Our alumni have gone on to support one another's work, visit each other across continents, and even start new initiatives together. Alumni also benefit from continued learning and networking engagements, including free courses and annual alumni gatherings hosted by the Center for Social Impact Strategy online and at the University of Pennsylvania.



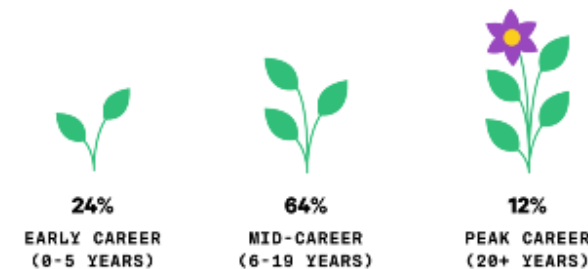
Students in our prior cohorts represented all sectors, career stages, and stages of project development.

The unifying factor in our cohort is students' commitment to driving positive social change through their work. Otherwise, ideal applicants are individuals who are driven by passion and big ideas. Quality applicants for the Executive Program come from all industries. All are committed to improving the world around them in a way that aligns with purpose and values.

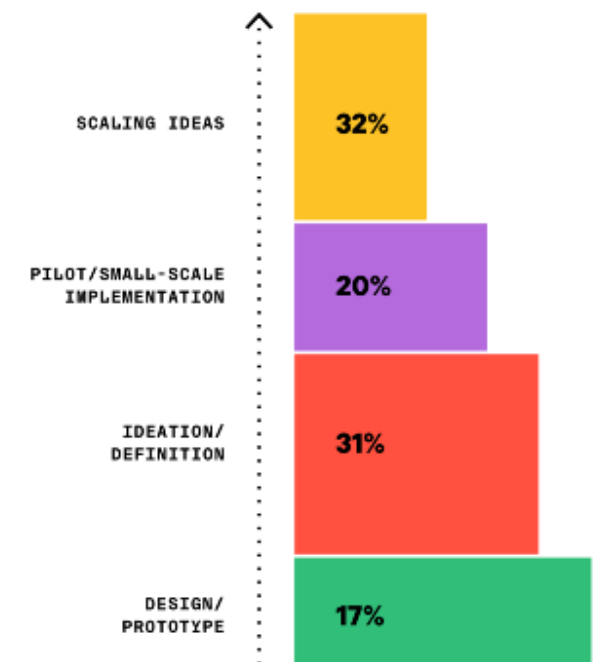
From all sectors



At all career stages



At all stages of project development



Admissions — and Next Steps



No application fee		
Early enrollment deadline	June 29, 2025	\$4200
Regular enrollment deadline	August 15, 2025	\$5250
Just in time enrollment deadline	September 9 , 2025	\$5250

The program takes place from September 8, 2025 to March 29, 2026. There are no application fees and the application should not take longer than 40 minutes to complete.

Tuition covers three required core courses, one elective, and a two-day, in-person summit hosted at the University of Pennsylvania. Students will also complete a required independent studio project that puts their learning into action. Upon successful completion of all program components—including the coursework, summit, and studio project—students receive a certificate from the School of Social Policy & Practice at the University of Pennsylvania.

Financing Options

Our program is designed to have the lowest tuition possible without losing the integrity of the educational experience. We are proud to say that the Executive Program in Social Innovation Design (XSD) is among the most affordable executive programs available today. While scholarships are not available, interest-free payment plans are available for admitted students. Previous students have also gotten partial or full tuition covered from their employers. If you have questions about finances, please don't hesitate to reach out to admissions@csis.upenn.edu so we can discuss.

A non-refundable \$950 deposit is required to enroll in the program.



Email an admissions advisor

[email: admissions@csis.upenn.edu](mailto:admissions@csis.upenn.edu)



Attend an information session

<https://csis.upenn.edu/executive-program/xsd/#info-sessions>



Start your application today

<https://platform.onlinelearning.upenn.edu/offering/>

About the Center for Social Impact Strategy

The Center for Social Impact Strategy is a research and action center based in the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy & Practice. Our mission is to make tools and resources for social impact available to anyone, anywhere. We believe in providing cutting edge content with immediate real world application.



OUR OBJECTIVES

1. Provide training and tools to people who seek to make change around the world.
2. Deepen understanding of the distinctive strategies adopted by world changers as they seek to innovate and generate social impact.
3. Create a thriving global community of leading social innovators who are committed to the growth and success of the entire field.

OUR VALUES



Establish Intention
Our actions and words are informed by the aspirations we set for ourselves.



Listen In
When in conversation, we don't wait for our chance to speak, but rather actively listen.



Believe in a Better World
Though some days may feel grim, we anchor ourselves not in problems, but possibilities.



Build Community
We know we can't do it alone; we open ourselves to others for support and guidance.



Authorize Yourself
Our worth is inherent and internally-sourced; we may have to take risks to make the right choice.



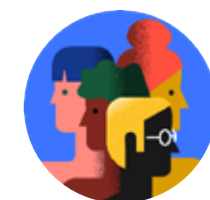
Lead with Empathy
Our work is driven by compassion and generosity; we assume the best in others.



Make It Happen
We are driven by action; we don't think to build, but rather build to think.



Create Every Day
Our creativity is cultivated through a daily practice; our days are up to us to create.



People Matter
We remember that to affect many, we must affect some and to affect some, we must affect one.

Core Courses

Self and Society / 3 weeks

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

This course will lead you through a journey of discovery about your deepest passions and the world's most pressing needs. Our goal is to help you find that powerful point of intersection between your identity and the problems that weigh most heavily on your community; setting intentions so you can leverage your time in the program most effectively, to take the course with purpose and with clarity; gaining greater insight about yourself and the impact you can create on the world. This course takes you to a point where you are now ready to engage in the world and navigate the courses that follow in the program.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

Kaveh Sadeghian is a creative director with experience in corporate and social enterprise marketing. With a background in ethnographic research, he integrates data and design to create experiences that evoke social engagements and human connection. At CSIS, Kaveh also oversees the creation of innovative learning collateral and marketing collateral. As an independent consultant, Kaveh designs for several high-impact organizations, including the World Bank, the New School, the University of Maryland, and IBM. His favorite word, since the age of 3, has been "why."

Engagement for Impact / 3 weeks

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

Communities have histories that shape how they approach the world and we changemakers who might lack similar experience need to be able to meet them there. You will unpack why the urban issues we deal with are so intense and learn about the psychological effects of displacement, power dynamics around control of funding and getting people to think critically. P You will take the tools of design out of the classroom and into the world, interpreting the lived reality of communities.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

Julie Donofrio is the Managing Director of PennPraxis, where she oversees Praxis's operations and communications, and leads projects focused on community engagement, capacity building, evaluation, and neighborhood planning. Julie earned Master's degrees in City & Regional Planning and Historic Preservation from the University of Pennsylvania School of Design and also teaches in the Department of City and Regional Planning, serving as the faculty coordinator of the first-year planning studio, and teaches an elective course on community-engaged design in practice. Julie received a Bachelor's degree in History and Spanish from Wake Forest University in

Design Thinking for Social Innovation / 8 weeks

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

This course will help you move from dreams of change to someone who can design and implement change. You will learn the tools and techniques of human-centered design, enabling you to understand people's needs, identify authentic demand in the community, and design products, programs, and interventions that meet people's needs. Students will co-create with the community, prioritize, evaluate, and refine their ideas so that they can be successfully implemented and drive social change. Develop a process for creative problem solving and acquire tools that you can use in your everyday work whenever you are designing for complex contexts and seemingly intractable social issues.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

Sarah Rottenberg is an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Stuart Weitzman School of Design and the Executive Director of the Integrated Product Design Program, a master's program at Penn that brings together design, business, and engineering. She also works as a consultant to innovation strategy consultancies and corporate clients, training teams in design research methodologies and facilitating strategic product and business design sessions. Sarah began her career as a design researcher at Doblin and was formerly a Directing Associate at Jump Associates. She has a Master of Arts in Social Sciences from the University of Chicago, where she specialized in anthropology, and a Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service from Georgetown University.

Independent Studio Project / ongoing

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

The studio project is the opportunity for students to put what they've learned in the program into practice. Students will complete an independent project in which they will define a problem, develop a solution and plan to pilot that solution on a topic of their own choosing. This component is the final certificate requirement; students will reflect upon their application of design thinking tools in their process.

Elective Courses

Elective course offerings may vary from year to year. The courses below represent elective courses offered for previous years. You are required to take one of the five elective short courses for evaluation. Each elective runs for three weeks and after completing all the required coursework, you will be able to audit the remaining elective courses.

Business Models for Social Enterprise

INSTRUCTOR: SUZI SOZA

To be successful at scale, any great intervention needs a business model behind it. This course explores the differences between nonprofit, for-profit, and hybrid enterprises, all of which can be marshaled for social impact. Having a strong financial base will accelerate your ideas for social innovation and allow you to reach the impact you design.

Performance Management

INSTRUCTOR: PETER FRUMKIN, JED EMERSON & SARA OLSEN

What you measure determines what you do. Good performance measurement is the key to operational improvement, stakeholder support, and a clear understanding of mission value. In this course, we explore the tools of performance measurement that can be deployed in depth in service of tracking your social innovation and organizational health. Measuring impact is no longer a luxury but an operational necessity in today's world.

Digital Media for Social Impact

INSTRUCTOR: ROSEMARY CLARK PARSONS

Digital media platforms and their users are changing the way social movements mobilize. Building successful movements in the digital age requires a thorough understanding of digital media and their affordances and limitations as organizing resources. Drawing on case studies of movements from around the world and cutting-edge social science research, this course will equip you with an actionable toolkit for strengthening your digital media practices.

Mobilizing People

INSTRUCTOR: JOE MCCANNON

How do ideas and visions of change spread and reach millions of people? This course explores the dynamics of social movements and the mobilization of people behind causes. Building powerful and effective social movements requires not just good strategy but a set of well-defined skills to maximize the commitment of others. In this course, you will learn how to get large-scale impact from the power of people.

Inclusive Technology and Ethical Design

INSTRUCTOR: JESSA LINGEL

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are powerful tools of connectivity and social change, but they also contain embedded ideological tensions that can produce inequalities and deepen inter-group disparities. At the core of this class is a sustained analysis of how race, gender, class, and sexuality shape the development and use of ICT. Drawing on a range of theories for communication, information, media, race, gender, sexuality, and technology, this course helps students understand ethical critiques of science and technology; develop critical analyses of public policies that have consequences; identify barriers to the recruitment and retention of historically marginalized groups



The Center for **Social Impact Strategy**

TO VIEW OUR FULL LIST OF UPCOMING PROGRAM OFFERINGS,
PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT [CSIS.UPENN.EDU](https://csis.upenn.edu)



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