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Context Statement

My focus and mission as the Ruckelshaus Center’s Senior Facilitator for Health Policy includes:

- Building a unique WSU health policy practice by embedding collaborative processes into effective WA health policy design and program implementation, resulting in systemic change and positive health outcomes and impacts for Washington communities, including marginalized populations. Linking collaborative governance practices and scholarship efforts to community engagement that results in increased access for WA residents to quality clinical and behavioral healthcare, and related social services and environmental factors that significantly impact quality of life, outcomes, mortality, and disparities.
- Leveraging effective partnerships between and within WSU Extension and other university-based programs, community, and statewide partners, as healthcare continues to be a pre-eminent force seeking improved methods of community engagement, scholarship, and practice.
- Positively impacting and advancing Center leadership, management and team success as the Center grows in reputation, visibility, and capacity.

Progress To-Date: The Center has developed a strong and growing reputation for delivering collaborative governance processes - situation assessments, process design, shared data/information bases and impartial facilitation to our state legislature, governor’s office, state and federal agencies and other leaders across the public/non-profit/private/civic and tribal sectors. These processes and tools are used to help leaders build consensus to solve seemingly intractable public policy problems. For the past six+ years, I’ve brought these practices and community-engaged scholarship into the visible area of health policy, to fundamentally change the way that policy makers, implementors and stakeholders begin to work in genuine collaboration to develop mutual gains concepts, solve current problems and plan upstream, as opposed to the traditional competitive model that battles for a fixed set of scarce resources. I’ve created a sustainable Center practice that advances WSU Extension and Center vision, is noticed nationally and is being replicated in both public and private sector organizations.

I’ve produced community engagement publications and presentation materials that have been used in graduate teaching and other forums in other states that showcase my processes that have significantly impacted Washington’s community, regional and statewide health outcomes, policy design and reform implementation efforts, and significant increases in legislative funding in a sector frequently bogged down in political partisanship, powerful stakeholder interests and regulatory complexity. The application of these collaborative governance processes to the health policy sector a re starting to replicate around the U.S. by both public and private sector organizations.

Opportunities: Health care is approaching 20 percent of our national gross domestic product. In Washington state, nearly 20 percent of our state’s general fund is spent on healthcare, second only to K-12 education as the dominant state ‘spend’. It’s not surprising that so much legislative, administrative, and lobbying effort is spent on health-related issues. My statewide work mirrors many of the current systemic ‘wicked’ issues, including the $1.5B Medicaid reform federal waiver and physical and behavioral health integration; community mental/behavioral health delivery, and attention to the significant social and political factors that affect mortality, quality of health and disparities between communities (of color, rural, endemic poverty, and other factors of inequality).

My work in this transformative environment often includes a deeper qualitative evaluation of ‘system connectivity’ – and the impacts of those connections on community well-being - between clinical and
behavioral health access, food security, economic stability, natural and built environments, education, transportation, positive social outlets, and other factors that influence health outcomes and disparities.

These interconnected complex issues create ongoing opportunities for WSU and others at both community research and practice levels to impact care access, provider workforce capacity, quality of care, provider payment reform, pandemic response, and the need for improved care coordination. These and other issues demand new processes that can help break down silos and build agreed-to solutions, both statewide and community-focused. New clinical, technological, and social program developments have the potential to both advance and confuse policy decision-making. Our consensus-building processes can help leaders, stakeholders and the public build their ‘owned’ teamed solutions. If appropriate processes are engaged, impartial facilitation efforts can help participants step back from historical conflict and entrenched positions and reset group expectations and vision to solve difficult challenges. An impartial process can also provide leaders the opportunity to build collaboratives more effectively through consensus, which has the potential to form more durable and long-lasting solutions. Under my leadership and with my colleague’s and Extension support, I have delivered these services in a variety of diverse health policy and program implementation settings across Washington and continue to develop a reputation with our state legislature, Governor’s office, stakeholders, philanthropy, and other sponsors, as the ‘go to’ Center for health policy consensus-based outcomes and conflict resolution.

**Strengths:** I have a long-standing consulting, impartial facilitation and mediation/conflict resolution background and reputation within health policy nationwide and in Washington state. My Washington qualifications include extensive work with the Health Care Authority, DSHS, Labor & Industries and the Office of the Attorney General, as well as healthcare providers, payers, associations, unions, and advocates. My work with the Center in the past six+ years has broadened that reach to include key legislators involved in health policy and appropriations, and community partnerships at local, regional, and tribal levels.

The Center is well respected, and our Advisory Board helps to open doors. Health policy engagements require the ability to evaluate and anticipate changing relationships and dynamics between many state agencies, clinical providers and health systems, public and private payers, non-profit agencies, elected officials, the Governor’s office, unions, advocacy groups and other involved parties. These dynamics change, depending on the issues at hand, federal regulatory shifts, and long-term reform stages and timing. My experience helps develop the right relationships, focus on engagements that are the correct ‘fit’ and timing for the Center, speak the language, target focused questions at the right time, design effective processes that respect known historical events and regulatory impacts on organizational interests, understand the importance of relationships and identity, and facilitate a process that has a strong chance for group trust, consensus and negotiated solutions that lead to effective implementation and outcomes.

**Challenges:** Our Center has capacity challenges, when balancing project development and leadership, WSU goals and the many ways we serve to positively influence collaboration and consensus across our region. Our small Center creates an amazing quantity and quality of project work, as well as collaborative capacity building based on a vision of academic and practice-based activities, community-engaged scholarship, events, and trainings. I continue to grow a collaborative governance ‘market’ within health policy and have successfully developed a self-sustaining practice that contributes to the Center’s reputation, breadth of work and impact on our state.

The partnerships within WSU and Extension (e.g., Health Sciences, Medicine, Nursing, Human Development) are strong, and could be leveraged to produce more meaningful statewide and community health outcomes and impacts. I continue to engage with WSU partners to create and implement new opportunities for faculty, students, and staff, and actively look for more opportunities.