

THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Pathways to Housing Security in Washington State FACILITATED DISCUSSION 3: Navigating Flexibility and Consistency

August 18, 2023

9:00AM-1:00PM (online)

The Washington State Legislature has tasked the Ruckelshaus Center to facilitate discussions to inform principles, options, and recommendations for a long-term statewide strategy for housing security. This is part of a project described in Section 6 of [House Bill 1277](#) and on the [project page](#).

In August 2023, the Center is bringing together a broad range of participants in guided discussions about options that have emerged from previous interviews and small group discussions. The purpose of these workshops is to react to and refine **options for how state policies, resources, and other supports can best contribute to sustained progress toward housing security**. Each workshop is focused on a theme, while holding the whole picture of housing security in mind. For a list of themes and to register for other workshops, go to [this link](#).¹

After these discussions, a draft of guiding principles and recommendations will be developed. Feedback will then be gathered through virtual and in-person workshops in September.

A final report is due on December 1, 2023.

UNDERLYING PREMISE FOR NAVIGATING FLEXIBILITY AND CONSISTENCY

Housing security is advanced when there is availability and affordability of housing for low- and middle-income individuals and households, housing is stabilized when it becomes precarious, homelessness is prevented when possible, and experiences of homelessness are mitigated as quickly as possible.

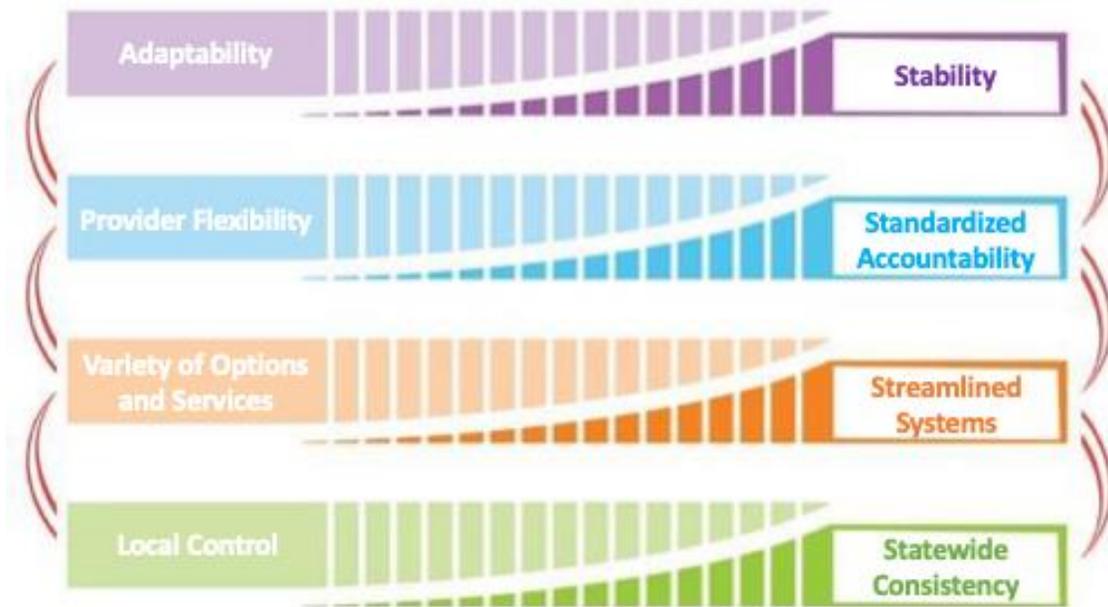
Part of the complexity of housing is that many potentially useful options can sometimes seem to be in conflict. Few aspects of housing have a single right answer that can simply be prescribed and followed; instead, success will come from the additive effect of aligning as many choices as possible in the direction of advancing housing security. Given how readily the landscape can change because of factors outside the control of the response to housing insecurity, success is more likely if a long-term strategy makes the shift from trying to decide between seemingly conflicting choices to discerning how to balance them – which is needed, to what extent, when?

Discerning this is particularly challenging when it comes to how much flexibility is needed in implementing a response to housing insecurity and how much consistency is needed to help ensure that statewide progress is being made. Flexibility and consistency are not all-or-nothing. One is not always going to be right while the other is always wrong. There is a continuum on which the two can be strategically balanced, and then adjusted in response to changing circumstances and considerations.

Multiple dimensions of flexibility and consistency are relevant to the response to housing insecurity, and these dimensions are also interdependent with each other. A decision about where to be on the continuum to resolve a challenge in one dimension can cause a change to another, which may be mutually beneficial or may create new, unintended challenges.

¹ <https://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/projects/current-projects/pathways-to-housing-security/2023-housing-security-workshops/>

INTERDEPENDENT DIMENSIONS OF FLEXIBILITY AND CONSISTENCY



Framework and graphic adapted with permission from [Human Systems Dynamics Institute](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR WORKSHOP 3

- 1.1 *What is good about adaptability? What happens if there is too much adaptability? What is good about stability? What happens when there is too much stability?*
- 1.2 *What is good about flexibility in providing housing and services? What happens if there is too much flexibility? What is good about standardized accountability? What happens when there is too much standardization?*
- 1.3 *What is good about having a variety of options and services? What happens if there is too much variety? What is good about streamlined systems? What happens when systems are too streamlined?*
- 1.4 *What is good about local control? What happens if there is too much local control? What is good about statewide consistency? What happens when there is too much statewide consistency?*
2. *What principles should guide decisions about how much flexibility or consistency is needed and in what circumstances?*
3. *What could the state do to help put those guiding principles into practice in the response to housing insecurity?*

EXAMPLES OF DESIRED ASPECTS OF FLEXIBILITY AND CONSISTENCY

FLEXIBILITY	CONSISTENCY
<p><i>Adaptability</i></p> <p>Funding priorities, programs, and service provision need to change as circumstances change.</p> <p>There is a need for public investment in innovation and experimentation to better address housing insecurity.</p>	<p><i>Stability</i></p> <p>Time frames for funding programs and services and for assessing performance need to be longer.</p> <p>Implementers need predictable, stable support for operations and capital expenses.</p> <p>Public funds for housing security need to be used for things with a proven track record of success.</p>
<p><i>Flexibility in Providing Housing and Services</i></p> <p>Providers need to be able to match people to the supports and housing needed for their specific circumstances.</p> <p>Services and housing need to be adaptable in response to different cultural norms and needs.</p> <p>Organizations need flexibility to build relationships and coordinate according to the local context.</p> <p>There is a need to track what matters most in the context of each provider or local context.</p>	<p><i>Standardized Accountability</i></p> <p>Central oversight and guidance are needed to ensure quality and alignment in the response to housing insecurity.</p> <p>Funders need systems of accountability to ensure that funds are being used as intended.</p> <p>There is a need to comparably assess and track what the needs are and how well they are met across different levels and contexts.</p>
<p><i>Variety of Options and Services</i></p> <p>Support for a variety of options for temporary shelter and housing placement is needed to be able to match the patterns of housing insecurity in different geographic locations and specific populations.</p> <p>The variety and accessibility of available services beyond housing needs to be expanded to appropriately match people’s needs.</p> <p>Diversity in funding sources and financing models is needed to support diverse providers and flexible implementation.</p>	<p><i>Streamlined Systems</i></p> <p>Administrative processes, such as eligibility assessments, funding applications, and reporting need to be less variable and less duplicative.</p> <p>People accessing services need the system to be easier to understand and more consistent across providers and agencies.</p> <p>Less variability in services and programs facilitates smooth handoffs and follow up between providers.</p> <p>Services and programs needs to be comparable enough to be able to capture and assess the performance of the whole response.</p>
<p><i>Local Control</i></p> <p>Local policies, regulations, and strategies need to match local possibilities on aspects such as scale and type of housing, land use, available infrastructure, and community acceptability and cultural norms.</p> <p>Local jurisdictions need to be able to adjust what is considered affordable housing, fair market pricing, and eligibility for housing assistance based on their local economic conditions.</p> <p>Strategies developed by local jurisdictions need tailored technical support from the state.</p>	<p><i>Statewide Consistency</i></p> <p>State policies need to override local resistance to best practices in housing security.</p> <p>More consistent statewide policies such as land use, zoning, and permitting policies are needed.</p> <p>Statewide income eligibility standards would facilitate more equitable assistance across localities.</p> <p>Consistent communication and engagement is needed for policy updates and rollout of new initiatives.</p>