

THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Pathways to Housing Security in Washington State

FACILITATED DISCUSSION 1: Strategic Framework

September 8, 2023

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

The Washington State Legislature has tasked the Ruckelshaus Center to facilitate discussions to inform principles, options, and recommendations for how state policies, resources, and other supports can best contribute to sustained progress toward housing security. This is part of a project described in Section 6 of [House Bill 1277](#) and on the [project page](#).

In September 2023, the Center is bringing together a broad range of participants in online and in-person workshops for a guided discussion about the strategic framing of options that have emerged from previous interviews, small group discussions, and online workshops. For a list of dates and venues and to register for other workshops, go to [this link](#).¹

A final report is due on December 1, 2023.

UNDERLYING PURPOSE OF ADVANCING HOUSING SECURITY

Housing security is advanced when housing for low- and middle-income individuals and households is available and affordable, when circumstances of precarious housing are stabilized, when homelessness is prevented as much as possible, and when experiences of homelessness are mitigated as quickly as possible.

Housing security is a cornerstone of a flourishing society and a functional economy because it intersects with so many other factors that contribute to whether individuals, families, communities and the state as a whole can thrive, such as economic security, health, and safety.

STRATEGIC SHIFT TO A NETWORKED STRATEGY FOR HOUSING SECURITY

In facilitated discussions to date there has been widespread convergence that progress toward housing security will require an increase in the supply of affordable housing, greater availability of and access to a wide range of support services, and more capacity in workforce and infrastructure. Even when imagining a future with more abundant resources and more successful systems, the reality of needing to agree across varied perspectives on resource allocation and implementation models will remain. In developing a long-term strategy, there is interest in shifting the framework for seeking that agreement.

Across a wide range of roles, perspectives, and experiences, people –using different language, contexts, and lenses – have observed a common pattern in the current systems of responding to housing insecurity: policies and practices often foster exclusion in ways that are counterproductive to the goal of advancing housing security. This pattern was described in many aspects of this complex

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

issue, sometimes as an unintended consequence of something else, such as resource scarcity, a desire for accountability, or a need for growth management. For example:

- eligibility criteria that exclude many who are in need of support
- housing placements that separate people from their communities of support
- competitive or restricted funding processes and policies that exclude actors who could contribute to the response
- performance measurement that incentivizes exclusive attribution of services provided rather than a collective contribution to desired outcomes
- processes to develop housing solutions that sow debate and division within and between neighborhoods, municipalities, and counties
- a real estate market that does not function to meet a diversity of housing needs
- land use and zoning policies oriented to what cannot be built
- the ramifications of historic and ongoing systemic racism and other forms of societal exclusion

People also converged on the desired alternative to this pattern of exclusion -- again, not everyone was referring to the same context nor did they all use the same words, but the shared concept of the desired alternative can be summarized as a response that builds a networked system of supports and resources focused on helping communities—at all scales—thrive.

Reflecting how housing insecurity has community and societal, in addition to individual, effects, ‘thriving communities’ emerged as a multidimensional concept that can inform how to design solutions to better meet a range of needs. For example:

- communities of support for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- cooperative relationships among communities of providers
- geographic localities with the infrastructure and capacity to support housing for the socioeconomic diversity needed for a functioning community
- policies that enable a community to grow, diversify, and foster equitable access in its housing supply

DISCUSSION PROMPTS ABOUT SHIFTING TO A NETWORKED STRATEGY FOR HOUSING SECURITY

- ***How have you been able to contribute to building a thriving community?***
- ***What appeals to you about the idea of a strategy for housing security focused on building thriving communities?***
 - ***What would this look like where you work or live?***
 - ***How would you talk about this idea to those who make decisions about housing policies and services where you work or live?***
- ***Where in the current response to housing insecurity do you see exclusionary practices?***
- ***What concerns you about the idea of a strategy for housing security focused on building thriving communities?***
- ***What would you need to be able to work in ways that use networks to build thriving communities?***

- ***What could the state do differently to make it easier for you to work in community-centered ways?***
 - ***In what ways do you see laws, policies, guidance, and other support provided by the state helping or hindering your ability to work in a community-centered way?***

EMERGING OPTIONS RELATED TO A NETWORKED STRATEGY FOR HOUSING SECURITY

Prior workshops in August discussed emerging options for actions the state could take to advance housing security in the following thematic areas: *Meeting Needs Along the Housing Continuum*, *Responding Holistically to People's Needs*, *Connecting Housing Security and Economic Security*, *Navigating Flexibility and Consistency*, *Defining Success and Managing Performance*, and *Shifting Views of Homelessness and Housing Instability*.

The Center's project team is continuing to synthesize and incorporate the input received about these options in the August workshop.

In parallel, further discussion is warranted on the extent to which some of those emerging options, listed below, could contribute to developing a long-term, statewide strategy for housing security that is less exclusionary and oriented more towards inclusively advancing social and economic wellbeing across the state.

Discussion Prompts

- ***Which of these options stand out as a way to help foster a less exclusionary, more community-building approach to housing security?***
 - ***What about them makes you think so?***
 - ***How might any of these options inadvertently reinforce an exclusionary system?***
 - ***What would help prevent that from happening?***
- ***What is missing that would help you work on housing security in ways that help to inclusively build thriving communities?***

Emerging Options

Option 1 (Multiple Successes): Recognize multiple, co-existing ways of understanding success.

Option 2 (Diversity of Knowledge): Use knowledge of various types and from various sources to design, implement and monitor policies, programs, and services.

Option 3 (Experiential Expertise): Amplify the insights and expertise of communities and individuals affected by homelessness and housing instability by supporting them to participate in making decisions about, implementing, and assessing the performance of laws, policies, programs, and services related to housing insecurity.

Option 4 (Core Competencies): Establish universal core competencies in culturally responsive, anti-racist, and trauma-informed principles for providers, administrators, and leaders across sectors, and regularly provide the training needed to put those competencies into practice.

Option 5 (Variety of Housing Options): Expand the supply, variety, location, and quality of supported options and pathways for temporary and longer-term housing, to be able to better match people to their types and level of need and to their preferences.

Option 6 (Respond to Geographic Variability): Support the response in diverse geographies equitably, to accommodate the ways in which housing challenges manifest differently in different places and therefore require different strategies.

Option 7 (Cooperation Across Jurisdictions): Incentivize greater cooperation across geographic and political jurisdictions.

Option 8 (Equitable Access to Housing): As policies are implemented to increase the supply of affordable housing, ensure equitable access for those transitioning from homelessness and most at risk of housing instability.

Option 9 (Holistic Eligibility): Reconfigure eligibility criteria using a cross-sector, multifactorial, periodic assessment designed to help people access the supports they need over time to synergistically stabilize their housing, health, behavioral health, and socioeconomic circumstances.

Option 10 (Income Eligibility Cliff): Extend housing assistance eligibility to replace binary thresholds with a sliding scale to help people gradually transition to housing stability as their socioeconomic stability also gradually improves.

Option 11 (Person-Centered Navigation): Evolve current case management and care navigation efforts into a cross-sector navigation system that responds to the specific needs of individuals and households and follows them longitudinally as those needs evolve.

Option 12 (Mitigate Eviction): Shift from policies that merely prohibit eviction to add comprehensive eviction prevention strategies that mitigate the reasons for and impacts of impending eviction for tenants, neighbors, and property owners/managers.

Option 13 (Financial Stability of Implementers): Support the financial stability of those implementing the response to housing insecurity by offering diverse funding models to diverse grantees and partners.

Option 14 (Close Cooperation among Services and Sectors): Support closer cooperation at all levels of the response among agencies, programs, and services that provide interdependent forms of assistance.

Option 15 (Align Policymaking): Assess laws and policies in all areas of government for the potential to affect housing security, and assess housing laws and policies for their potential to affect interrelated goals in other areas.

Option 16 (Total Investment and Benefit): Analyze and communicate the comprehensive investments that advance housing security, the benefits they yield, and for whom.