

Statement of Purpose- Jackie Vaughn

The status quo within policy and the non-profit industrial complex is the failure to critically analyze how their work impacts the collective power of the communities they are intended to serve. This has contributed to the ongoing erosion of the cause for self-determination and autonomy in communities that have been disenfranchised, historically underinvested, and who experience structural oppression within all institutions and systems. As someone who has worked in different levels of policy and within the non-profit system, my personal journey to becoming an accountable gatekeeper has led me to pursue a Master's in Public Administration at Evergreen State College-Tacoma. My experiences started as a community organizer, to directing the organizing strategy for a major tax reform campaign, and now as a Co-Director of Surge Reproductive Justice, I have decided that a Master's in Public Administration is a tool that can support my continued journey of working with my community to create systems and policy change.

In 2014, I accepted a position as a community organizer for Planned Parenthood of Greater Washington and North Idaho. As an organizer, I was responsible for recruiting and mobilizing volunteers to the organization's calls to action. These actions operated on a standard cycle of spring and summer consisting of outreach and voter registration. Fall focused on getting out the vote efforts and independent expenditure campaigns for Planned Parenthood-endorsed candidates. Winter was all hands on deck, mobilizing volunteers for the legislative session. While I firmly believed in the clinical work of Planned Parenthood and deeply cared about the relationships I was building with volunteers, I began to have concerns regarding the c3 and c4 organizing tactics of the organization.

It troubled me that volunteers were constantly referred to in regard to numbers and quotas. I consistently noticed that the majority of the volunteers were those who held a high level of privilege and were not impacted by the policies we were mobilizing on. These volunteers had the economic means to access their reproductive health care with private insurance. They did not rely on the ever-changing guidelines of Title X dollars and the dynamics of navigating care from federally qualified health centers (FQHC). Even more concerning was the realization year after year at our lobby day events that the volunteers could not speak to or explain the bills that they had come to Olympia to meet with their legislators about. Before I came to Planned Parenthood, my organizing focused on grassroots efforts centered on racial equity. The feeling that I was part of a process that was not invested in working with communities disproportionately impacted by health disparities to create change was undeniable.

Before leaving my position at Planned Parenthood, I began to organize internally with like-minded staff and volunteers with whom I had worked closely to develop into leaders. We organized internally to address the power dynamics that existed between the policy team and their lack of connection to the community. I designed an organizing curriculum that taught fundamental organizing skills so that leaders could have the tools to decide on the priorities they wanted to organize. I also led work to call out and create solutions to address the lack of a racial equity analysis within the organization. While these actions created temporary changes,

ultimately, the organization was too large and deeply stuck in its processes to create systemic change within the organization.

In 2017, I was brought onto a tax reform campaign here in Washington to develop a racial equity framework for the campaign. With the lessons learned from working at Planned Parenthood, I was determined to make the campaign center race and space for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities to lead. While I was specifically brought onto the campaign to develop a racial equity framework, I quickly realized that the organizations that were steering the campaign were not interested in doing the work to shift power dynamics and resources so that BIPOC communities could lead on the work. This was due to the accepted belief within the campaign that racism was not a factor in our state's tax policies and a deep reluctance to shift power to those disproportionately impacted by Washington's upside-down tax code.

Because my undergraduate degree was in Race and Culture Studies, the skills I bring to policy work are looking at historical patterns, laws, and current data to identify how structural racism is manifested in specific policies and institutions. With this background, I developed an analysis and theory of change for the campaign that directly connected the tax system as a tool of economic oppression for BIPOC communities while simultaneously being a tool for white communities to build generational wealth. Despite the research and development of a new campaign strategy, I realized that, similar to Planned Parenthood viewing volunteers as quotas, communities of Color were the quotas for this campaign.

During this time, I began organizing outside of the campaign with the local anti-racist organizing community. We worked to shift resources in the campaign to support the time of BIPOC organizations to participate in policy development. They worked to create what is now known as the Working Families Tax Credit, which goes into effect this year. The policy was intended to indirectly lower the cost that those who pay a disproportionate share of their income on state and local taxes. While the overall campaign struggled to put into place a racial equity framework, working with BIPOC communities to develop the policy is the reason that the policy will be accessible to those communities.

The experiences of Planned Parenthood and the tax reform campaign shaped my perspective and developed the framework of community-directed policy that I brought to Surge Reproductive Justice. In the 2022 legislative session, we passed HB 1881 to establish birth doulas as a new profession. We facilitated a three-year process with doulas and birth workers to create and pass the policy. Using a process that centered on education, leadership development, and bringing stakeholders to work as a collective. Our bill passed with its original language, as developed by the doulas. This process of community-directed policy and the Participatory Action Research model we use at Surge has grounded my work with the community in an accountable and power-shifting way.

I seek a Master's in Public Administration because I want to support my community in bringing about systems and policy change by making the information I learn accessible to my community.

While I firmly believe you do not need a degree to create systems and policy change based on your own lived experiences, I do see great value in being able to build our collective toolbox with the information that would be taught in this program. The knowledge learned in this program would not be for just me, but I would work to bring this information back to my community to support our collective strategies and solutions.

I am specifically applying to Evergreen Tacoma because of the history and legacy of Dr. Maxine Mimms and Dr. Marcia Tate-Aruna. As someone who works to make systems and policy change accessible to my community and as an anti-racist organizer in Seattle, I know that I stand on the shoulders of these two women. As someone who has been a part of Black-led organizing, I have been honored to be in intimate community spaces with these two women. Earning my MPA from a school that is rooted in the legacy I organize around validates to me how self-determination and autonomy can be centered while creating systemic change.

I deeply agree with the missions and values of this program. Two elements that reflect my own personal values are “students learn to act as facilitators in defining and pursuing the public interest.” and “ imagine new possibilities to accomplish positive change.” The idea of being a facilitator connects to my current framework of community-directed policy. Facilitation, as opposed to dictation, promotes self-determination in our communities. It is imperative and urgent for me to facilitate work that requires our communities to imagine new possibilities for positive change. I firmly believe our current institutions and systems disenfranchise and harm Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities. We can work collectively to create change through public policy that ensures *all of our communities are healthy and thriving*.