



## Fern Tiger

- Founder, Creative Director **Fern Tiger Associates (FTA)**  
[www.ferntiger.com](http://www.ferntiger.com)
- Oakland, CA-based strategy and design firm --
  - *organizational effectiveness*
  - *communication solutions*
  - *community engagement*
  - *creative documentation*

*Created to strengthen communities and organizations*
- Professor, Urban Studies, **University of Washington Tacoma**



*Porous Relationship  
::  
Transforms University  
and Community  
Simultaneously*

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### Authentic University Engagement

- Honest flow of information (transparency)
- Lay people on same playing field as academics and institutional reps
- Co-creation of research design and knowledge
- Commitment to community thinking, brainstorming, analysis
- Use of results to influence decisionmaking
- Necessitates transformation of university as well as community



## Overview of Session

### The Action Lab @ UWT

- The Social *Embeddedness* Project
- Learnings from 20 US campuses
- Tacoma and UWT
- Feasibility Study (and observations) to develop The Action Lab
- Vision
- Concept and structure
- What's next?

### Activity

### Broader Q & A

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## The Social Embeddedness Project

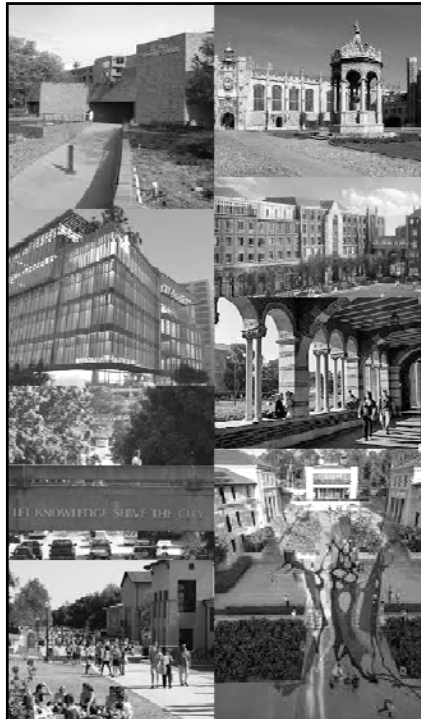
### Two year study for ASU

- 149 Stakeholder interviews (one-on-one, in-person – internal/external; regional)
- Multi-day, on-site visits to 15+ US universities in 11 different cities (70 in-person interviews; campus leaders and community leaders)

### Prep for UWT Action Lab Concept

- Review of ASU study
- Visits/Interviews at additional universities
- Interviews with 50 university/community leaders

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## Learning from 20 US Campuses

- Engage critical mass of faculty
- Collaborative planning process
- Refine university mission/vision
- Develop relevant courses
- Inform community about university's goals; demonstrate commitment; build trust
- Develop plan for sustainability
- Seek permanent funding stream
- Participate in national dialogue
- Design/implement evaluation
- Understand all outreach by university to distinguish engagement
- It's the little things that count

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## Action Lab @ UWT (The UWT Action Lab)

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## Tacoma and University of Washington Tacoma

- Historically working class city; can do attitude; “in shadow of Seattle”
- Mid-sized urban port city (200K+)
- Located on Puget Sound; complex system of marine waterways
- Mid-1990s suffered decline (suburbanization, divestment in urban core)
- Community fought for UW campus to be created; active leadership; 25 years later credited by community as having revitalized city



## University of Washington Tacoma - 2015

- “Urban-serving university”
- Re-purposed, renovated century-old industrial buildings into architecturally award-winning campus
- Campus seamlessly integrated into downtown; UWT as hub; pedestrian-friendly
- Served as “attractor;” creating downtown arts/museum hub
- Seeks involvement in local/regional issues
- Partner with YMCA to build facility
- 4,500 students; 300+ faculty

## Background: The Action Lab @ UWT

- Feasibility Study for “South Sound Research Center”
- Community-based; financially self-sustaining; regional focus; UWT-rooted; support nonprofits
- Consider evaluation as income generator
- Strong desire for (current lack of) an entity to: produce/house ongoing robust data collection and sophisticated community research; guide interactive inquiry on complex, interdisciplinary issues
- UWT uniquely positioned, highly respected – openly committed to future of region
- Proposed Action Lab: dynamic, evolving, shaped by community priorities – unique nationally

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## Vision for The Action Lab

*A center that provides robust, action-oriented research to address shared social concerns; promotes and facilitates vigorous community dialogue and engagement leading to increased regional knowledge, action, and appropriate local solutions.*





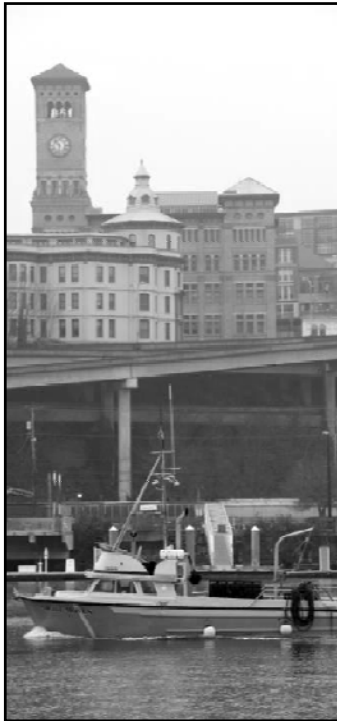
## Programs/Services/Empowerment

- Develop creative engagement tools and session design, trainings, processes to build/support community capacity to tackle complex problems
- Innovative, entrepreneurial, problem solving expertise
- Facilitation of community dialogue
- Quantitative/qualitative analysis (GIS mapping, policy research, professional presentation skills, infographics, etc.)
- Well-designed data platform
- Series of publications

## Organizational Staffing

- Innovative professional staff; University Director-level leadership to set tone/vision; initiate/oversee activities; promote Lab
- Professional skill set: communication, meaningful analysis, insightful reporting, thoughtful public dialogue, participatory processes
- “Community Fellows” (potential to co-teach); Faculty Fellows” (potential to work in community)
- Year-long, competitive, upper-division/graduate internships (learning ops)





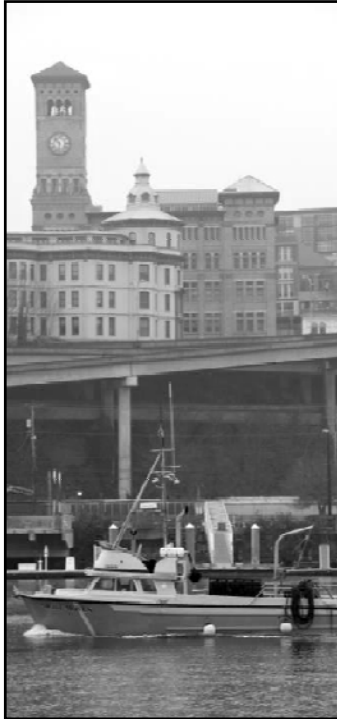
### What makes the Action Lab unique?

- Inviting, creative, informative physical space; possible storefront; open evenings/weekends
- Trusted active player; catalyst for new kinds of collaboration
- Additive knowledge (thru longterm relationships, data)
- Building the narrative of Greater Tacoma



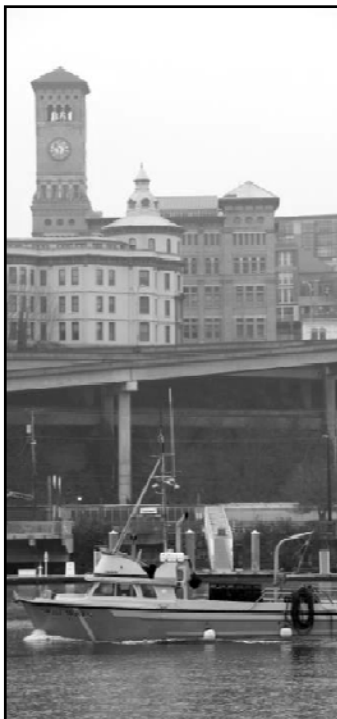
### What's Next (for the Action Lab) ?

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## Activities

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## The Core Questions

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- Any case studies/examples of similar undertakings?
- Is this replicable? Can it be adapted? Can it be sustained? Financial sources?
- Is it best to build it gradually – progressing in stages as capacity and trust is built at both community and university?

