Tier 1 Pilot Grant Application: Laying the Foundation
Autumn 2026 Cover Sheet

Project Information

Project Title	Who Owns Puget Sound? A Platform for Mapping Property Ownership and Housing Insecurity in Western Washington
Budget Request from Initiative	$25,000
Budget Match (if applicable)	$25,000
Total Project Budget	$50,000

Applicant Information

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Abstract

Please provide a description of your project appropriate for a lay reader. Limit your description to no more than 250 words.

We propose developing a publicly accessible, deanonymized longitudinal database of rental property ownership in Western Washington. Researchers identify patterns of activity among housing investors, especially very large rental owners, as a cause of eviction dynamics, targeted cost appreciation, patterns of property neglect, and community displacement for racialized and working-class communities. A community data platform using linked administrative data can facilitate identification of owners of rental property and would be an invaluable tool for policymakers, tenant advocates, and researchers

interested in responses to the housing crisis. Drawing on past experiences developing comparable databases, the researchers will harmonize and link tax assessor records, state business filings, eviction records, and other property-level data to develop a proof-of-concept of the regional database through a harmonized database of recent King County owners. Support from the Population Health Initiative will facilitate hiring of research assistants to undertake core data harmonization tasks.

Tier 1 Project Research Plan

Please provide a narrative description of your proposed project. Your description must include your project aims, description of the problem to be addressed, and your proposed plan, design, and methods. **Limit of one page, including tables and visuals, but excluding references**. References, if needed, should be included as an appendix to the one-page research plan.

Ownership of single-family homes by real estate investment trusts, private equity firms, and other large corporations has become a major source of concern by communities and regulators concerned with rising housing unaffordability and housing insecurity (An et al. 2024; Fields 2022; Seymour et al. 2023). In Washington, the Urban Institute recently estimated that as much as 7 percent of the total single-family housing stock is now owned by "mega-investors" who own more than 1000 properties, prompting new legislation to limit corporate ownership in SB5496 (Goodman et al. 2023). A large body of research identifies housing cost burdens as one of the most important social determinants of health, particularly for low-income and minoritized communities (DeLuca and Rosen 2022). However, researchers continue to work in a data poor environment where discerning the true extent of property ownership by owners of any kind remains difficult. Various limitations in existing publicly accessible data undermine understanding of the full extent of corporate and investor ownership, and preclude assessment of the role of investors in shaping housing markets and neighborhoods. Moreover, these limitations undermine scale-based regulation currently being attempted, as state and federal laws aiming to curb investment will be ineffective without measures of ownership by investors of all kinds.

To address this knowledge gap, this study's primary aim is **to build "Who Owns Puget Sound?" a community-accessible database and geographic information system that connects the dots between siloed public information on property records and their owner identities for Western Washington.** The goal of this platform is to empower low-income tenants, community organizations, housing advocates and policy makers with information about housing and building ownership that can lead to better tenant protections and effective housing regulation. As a research tool, meanwhile, "Who Owns Puget Sound?" will also provide invaluable longitudinal microdata for linking dynamics in real estate investing and property circulation to data on neighborhood change, eviction and housing insecurity, housing pricing, and ultimately community-level health and socioeconomic stratification.

This study builds upon the expertise and previous work of the Primary Investigators. In past work, the researchers have built platforms to map corporate ownership and eviction trends in the Bay Area of California (Prof. McElroy- *Evictorbook* and *The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project*), and have developed computational methodologies for longitudinally tracking ownership of all land in central Texas (Prof.

Messamore). Following previous approaches, the researchers will gather a combination of business filings, publicly accessible property records, eviction data, and real estate pricing records for King County and the surrounding region, and then extensively process and harmonize these records, followed by computational determination of the true owners of properties across these various linked datasets. Finally, in partnership with Puget Sound Sage and the Anti-Eviction Mapping project, we will work with full-stack software developers to build a platform where this data can be accessed by community members, researchers, and regulators in a secure manner.

This study addresses the population health pillars of human health, and social and economic equity, in the context of housing unaffordability and evolving regulation in Seattle.

Tier 1 Project Evaluation Plan

The following questions should be specifically addressed to explain how you will evaluate whether your project was successful.

1. What are your measures of success for this project?
2. How are you planning to utilize the results of your work to pursue a future project to generate proof-of-concept once the eight-month project is complete?

This measure of success for this project is the development of a contemporary (circa 2025-2026) King County ownership database with meaningful construct validity. The researchers are already in possession of all data necessary to undertake the project, and researcher time and effort will be directed toward the cleaning and harmonization of data for the duration of the eight-month grant period. After harmonization, ownership will be identified using ownership detection algorithms developed by researchers in previous studies of Austin, Texas and the Bay Area of California. As in previous work, construct validity will be determined by comparing researcher generated estimates against estimates from proprietary platforms for specific housing stock (e.g. Costar for new multifamily properties) and filings with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for a limited number of well known, publicly traded real estate investors.

The results of this work will facilitate future research and allow for future grant applications. At the conclusion of this project, the final database will be delivered to community partner Puget Sound Sage and become part of a publicly available data dashboard for tracking ownership. This proof-of-concept could then be expanded in future research to longer time horizons as well as a regional scope, incorporating data from Thurston County, Snohomish County, and Pierce County. Finally, the construction of the initial database for King County will enable future grant applications for the linking of other relevant data, such as eviction and rents data, and potentially administrative data on the tenants of rental properties in future iterations.

Project Timeline

Please include a brief description of the timeline for the major milestones of the project you are proposing.

- January 2027: Begin harmonizing King County tax assessor data (addresses, names, property record data columns, etc.).
- March 2027: Begin harmonizing Washington Secretary of State data (business locations, boards of director information, names of organizations, etc.)
- May 2027: Initial data linkage and deployment of ownership identification algorithm.
- June through July 2027: Data validation and database evaluation.
- August 2027: Delivery of database to Puget Sound Sage.

Biographies

Please include a brief biography for each investigator or community partner listed on the cover sheet of this application that highlights relevant experience in terms of the work proposed.

Andrew Messamore is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Washington. His work employs computational and statistical methods to study urban inequality, community dynamics, and civic infrastructure. His recent work develops theories and methods for linking and harmonizing administrative data to examine the evolution of rental landlord populations over time. His work has been published in *Social Problems, Social Currents, Social Networks, Journal of Urban Affairs, Urban Studies*, and other outlets.

The Evaluation Plan, Project Timeline, <u>and</u> Biographies all must fit on the same page.

Tier 1 Project Budget

	Requested from Initiative	Funding Match
Salaries		
Faculty	$0	$0
Staff	$0	$0
Student	$10,300	$10,300
Benefits Based on Payroll Load Rate in Effect	$8,708	$8,708
Supplies and Materials Supplies, Equipment Under $2,000, etc.	$0	$0
Equipment Equipment Over $2,000	$0	$0
Tuition	$5,900	$5,900
Other	$0	$0
Total Direct Costs (PHI-requested funding cannot exceed $25K)	$24,908	$24,908

Budget Justification

Support from the Population Health Initiative will provide funding support for one quarter of 50% FTE for one graduate research assistant (GRA). The graduate research assistant will work with the co-investigators to clean, process and harmonize tax assessor records in King County with business filings from the Washington Secretary of State. We estimate $10,300 in stipend support for the GRA, $8,708 in fringe benefits and fringe and administrative costs, and $5,900 in tuition support. The co-investigators (Messamore) will match this funding with their personal start-up funding to provide a second quarter of support to the GRA.

[Briefly detail expenses listed above and explain how funds will be used. Please describe the source(s) of matching funds if included (and include confirmation as an additional page; a .pdf of an email from the individual making the commitment is sufficient). If other sources of funding are being combined with this award to carry out the proposed research, it is critical to address the ways in which the other funding will be used to complete the study or complement the Population Health Initiative award.]

Project Budget and Budget Justification are limited to one total page.