NCHEMS

Shaping State Policy to Encourage Stewardship of Place

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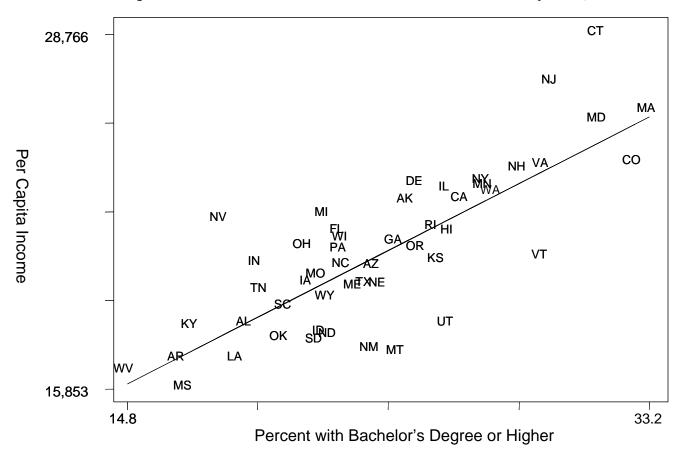# Shaping State Policy to Encourage Stewardship of Place

I.   INTRODUCTION

State governments and those elected to lead them have the core obligation to create conditions within which the citizens of their state can have economic security and a good quality of life—where they can be safe, healthy, and provided with cultural and recreational venues in which they can enjoy their leisure time. This is a daunting task. Needs are many and resources are limited, even in the best of times. If these lofty goals are to be achieved, the states' policy leaders must take full advantage of all the assets and tools at their disposal.

And they have many tools. State governments directly provide many important services—providing transportation networks, public safety services and, when prevention fails, correctional facilities; maintaining state parks and other recreational services; and supporting health care provision for those without the means to acquire such services on their own. They also support institutions of higher education, **potentially** one of the most important assets available to state governments as they seek to improve the life circumstances of their citizens. Data reveal a strong relationship between educational attainment and economic security (see Figure 1). It is possible to have high education attainment and the same per capita income as states with lower education attainment (Vermont relative to Pennsylvania, for example). However, states with the highest per capita incomes all have a highly educated populace.

Data reveal a similarly strong relationship between educational attainment and general wellness—the more educated the citizenry the less likely they are to engage in unhealthy
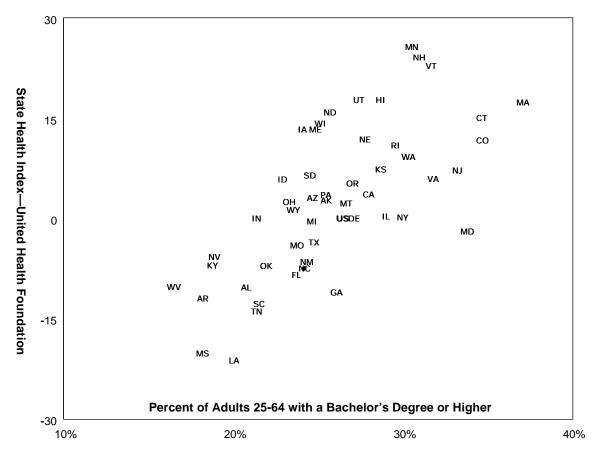
behaviors and the better their overall health (see Figure 2). Here, the story is a little less

unambiguous. Nevertheless, the message is clear, especially at the low end—poor performance

on health measures and low education attainment go hand in hand.

FIGURE 1.
Relationship Between Educational Attainment and Personal Income by State, 2000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census

FIGURE 2.
Relationship Between Educational Attainment and Health

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census; United Health Foundation

Colleges and universities are venues for many leisure activities—athletics and personal fitness, enjoyment of the fine and performing arts, for example—not just for students but for residents of the communities in which they are located as well. Perhaps most important, these institutions house collections of considerable, diverse intellectual assets that can be brought to bear on the issues and problems of the surrounding communities under the right set of circumstances.

While these educational establishments have great potential to contribute to the achievement of state and regional priorities, this potential is seldom realized. Too often universities are in, but

not truly part of, the region or metropolitan areas in which they are located. The possible reasons for this disconnect are numerous and varied:

- A failure of leadership.

- An absence of knowledge about how to play a meaningful and appropriate role in the community.

- An absence of expectation that town-grown relationships be truly substantive and symbiotic rather than social and cosmetic.

- Absence of resources—either at the institution or at the partners within the community.

The litany could go on. In the final analysis, however, the failure of universities to be fully engaged in their communities—to be stewards of their particular place—is arguably a failure of state high education policy.

In the main, higher education is a state responsibility. About 80% of the higher education students are enrolled in public colleges and universities, and for most of these institutions the primary policy levers are those applied at the state level. It is there that missions are established, substantial amounts of funds are allocated, accountability mechanisms determined, and governance structures decided. In spite of the potential power of state policy to affect the extent to which institutions direct their attention to state and regional priorities, this power seldom is wielded effectively. State policy has long been focused on building institutional capacity, not on ensuring that this considerable capacity is utilized to achieve priority state purposes. Now the policy mechanisms are so deeply embedded that change is strongly resisted. Everyone involved

knows the current rules of the game; changing them requires behavioral changes in both institutions and state bureaucracies.

While states have been fixated on capacity building, other players have focused on procedures for purchasing services that meet their needs from these institutions. The federal government and its emphasis on purchasing research services have been particularly influential in creating behavioral changes inside colleges and universities. This phenomenon has both positive and negative features. On the positive side, the federal government has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that mechanisms—both financial and those for ensuring performance—can be created that will focus the attention of the intellectual assets of a university on issues that governments deem important. On the negative side, the federal government has been so successful at pursuing its agenda over such a long period of time that other players have a difficult time vying for attention. The types of institutional (and faculty) behaviors that serve the interests of "purchasers" of research so well have been thoroughly ingrained in the inner workings of universities (such as the criteria for promotion and tenure—and in the widely accepted definition of scholarly work) that any outside body such as state government having an interest in purchasing other kinds of services is now flying directly in the face of very strong countervailing forces.

The difficulty of getting institutional behaviors aligned with state and regional needs is exacerbated by the problems of devising state policy that goes beyond a one-size-fits-all approach. The reality is that all states, including the geographically smallest and the least populated, are comprised of subregions that differ in every imaginable way—in the nature and maturity of their economies, in their wealth, in the demographic characteristics of their populations, in the nature of their capacities to deal with issues locally, and in their politics. It is

inevitable that these subregions will have very different kinds of problems that must be addressed, at least at the level of specifics. For example, all regions may have economic development needs, but in one region this may be reflected in a need for creating jobs, in another for sustaining industries and jobs already there, and in yet another for training a sufficiently skilled workforce to respond to employer demand. State policy is noticeably poor at being flexible and adaptable enough to be molded to these distinctive needs. As typically devised, it is a very crude and blunt instrument.

The fact that state policy has not been particularly effective as yet in creating environments in which colleges and universities—and their faculty and staff—are intent on actively pursuing state and regional priorities does not mean that the task is impossible. Indeed, there is little choice but to find ways to succeed. The needs of states and the communities within them are such that there is little choice but to fashion policy tools that encourage colleges and universities to become more engaged as partners in their communities and to willingly accept the mantles as stewards of their particular places.

II.   THE ELEMENTS OF THE STATE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

While institutions of higher education often feel overwhelmed by the variety of policies, procedures, regulations, and statutes that govern everyday life, the general types of state policies that can be employed to create a supportive environment for institutions becoming good stewards of place are relatively few in number. They include:

A. A Clear Statement of Goals and Priorities

A clear statement of the priority needs to be addressed and the desired outcomes to be achieved is a necessary basis for effective public policy. In most states, this has not been achieved. Where goals have been established, they are usually so ill-defined as to preclude consistent interpretation. Goals expressed as "access" or "quality" do little to guide decisionmaking processes. Further, relatively few states have made the policy shift from a focus on means (the institutions) to one framed in terms of the ends to be achieved. Yet in the absence of a so-called "public agenda," there is no basis for shaping the other policy tools in ways that make them mutually reinforcing. Even with a clearly defined agenda, there can (and likely will) be serious disagreements about **how** the ends are to be achieved. The fact that the desired ends are stated confines the debate to one about implementation and provides a consistent template against which proposed actions can be judged and a rationale for explaining why certain policies are being pursued—"we are implementing this policy or taking this action because it helps us achieve [the desired objective] which we have established as a statewide priority." A fundamental principle is that goals must be stated in such a way that the measures of accountability are clear.

B. Financing and Resource Allocation Policy

Of all the tools available to states, this is the most powerful. It is the one policy that is revisited every legislative cycle. It is the one policy that provides incentives for action rather than constraint or sanctions. It is clear that it can work—witness the universities' responses to funding made available by the federal government in furtherance of its

research agenda. Finally, states are already spending massive amounts on higher

education; it then becomes a question of how funds are being targeted rather than

simply one of how much to spend that establishes the linkage to the public agenda.

Experience indicates that:

- In the absence of clear objectives (a plan), the budget becomes the plan; and

- In the absence of a linkage between the budget and the plan, the budget still
  becomes the plan.

The resource allocation mechanism, more than any other device, drives institutional

behavior. Ensuring that the incentives embedded in the resource allocation mechanism

lead to pursuit of stated objectives is a critical feature of sound state policymaking.

C. Accountability Tools

Historically, accountability of higher education to the state has revolved around

finances. Were the state's funds used without waste and in the ways intended?

Expansions beyond that have been largely confined to the institution as the unit of

analysis with the measures being employed being relatively innocuous and chosen

because data were readily available. Retention and graduation rates are typical of this

type of accountability. Much less common is accountability where the requirement is

that institutions (and the overall system of higher education) are held accountable for

contributions to achieving state goals. Such a system demands:

1. A clear statement of goals, and

2. Agreement on the ways in which progress is to be demonstrated.

Such a system requires mutual understanding and agreement between state policymakers and institutional leaders—conditions rarely found in practice.

D. Rules, Regulations, and Procedures

When it comes to signaling intentions regarding desirable institutional behaviors, the favorite tools of policymakers are mandates. With few exceptions these mandates focus on **"how"** things are to be, essentially shifting responsibility for achieving the desired ends (if indeed there are any stated) from the institution to the policymakers. If institutions follow the mandates and the outcomes are not the ones anticipated, whose fault is it? There is probably no other type of policy tool where the application is more frequent and the results less beneficial. A quote from Richard Elmore is appropriate at this juncture:

> The system is *bottom heavy* and *loosely coupled.* It is bottom
> heavy because the closer we get to the bottom of the pyramid,
> the closer we get to the factors that have the greatest effect on
> the program's success or failure. The system is loosely
> coupled because the ability of one level to control the behavior
> of another is weak and largely negative….
>
> The skillful use of delegated control is central to making
> implementation work in bottom-heavy, loosely controlled
> systems. *When it becomes necessary to rely mainly on*

> *hierarchical control, regulation, and compliance to achieve*
>
> *results, the game is essentially lost.*
>
> From *Complexity and Control: What Legislators and*
> *Administrators Can Do About Implementing Public Policy*

In spite of their often good intentions, mandates and procedures more often than not become excuses for inaction and lack of performance rather than contributors to accomplishment of desired outcomes.

E. Governance Structures and Policy Leadership

Inevitably, higher education policymaking devolves to a conversation about governance and decisionmaking authority. Too often such conversations are misdirected, focusing on questions of who hires and fires presidents, who controls the treasury and approves contracts and purchasing procedures. Lost in this discussion are two critical issues:

1. Who/which entity in the state is responsible for leading the public agenda—
    identifying the priority issues, building consensus around those issues and designing
    a consistent set of policies, procedures, and accountability mechanisms intended to
    further this agenda. The emphasis here is on **what** are the desired objectives and
    whether progress is being made toward achieving those objectives. These are the
    strategic decisions.

2. How much freedom will institutional leaders have in determining **how** the assets of
    the university will be deployed in pursuit of these ends. These are tactical decisions.

As a practical matter, the more state-level policymakers focus on tactical matters, the more they will abdicate their responsibility for the truly strategic decisions that ought to be their primary responsibility.

At the level of institutional governance, the core questions revolve around the extent to which the values that drive the governing body reaffirm the stewardship agenda or are antithetical to it. If an institution has its own governing board, chances are that the value system of the board is (or can be made) compatible with the stewardship of place agenda. If the institution is part of a system—particularly a system comprised of diverse types of institutions—the values of the governing board are likely to reflect those of the institution with the highest status in the system. If this is a major research institution, the likelihood is great that the stewardship of place agenda will not be highly valued. In this instance, it is doubly important that there be a policy leadership entity at the state level that is responsible for forging, sustaining, and promoting an agenda that supports institutions becoming stewards of place.

Within each of these categories of policies, there are myriad alternative specific entailments. In the next section, the kinds of policies in each of these categories that are especially supportive of (or detrimental to) an institution's being a steward of its unique place are described and/or illustrated.

III. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUPPORTIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK

If states are to shift their higher education policy framework from one based solely on institution development and maintenance to one that also encompasses the utilization of the assets thus created to achieve state purposes, some fundamental changes will have to be made in most states.

The changes will have to start with the policy leadership capacity of the state and percolate through the other categories of policy, especially goal-setting, finance, and accountability. In an article entitled *The Need for State Policy Leadership*, written by a group of higher education policy analysts (including the author of this paper) and published by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (NCPPHE), the case was made that capacity for state policy leadership must include:

- A broad-based public entity with a clear charge to increase the state's educational attainment and prepare citizens for the workforce.

- Strength to counter inappropriate political, partisan, institutional, or parochial influences.

- Capacity and responsibility for articulating and monitoring state performance objectives for higher education that are supported by the key leaders in the state; objectives should be specific and measurable, including quantifiable goals for college preparation, access, participation, retention, graduation, and responsiveness to other state needs.

- Engagement of civic, business, and public school leaders beyond state government and higher education leaders.

- Recognition of distinctions between statewide policy—and the public entities and policies needed to accomplish it—and institutional governance.

- Recognition that the role of statewide policy leadership is distinct from the roles of institutional and segmental governing boards.

- Information gathering and analytical capacity to inform the choice of state goals/priorities and to interpret and evaluate statewide and institutional performance in relation to these goals.

- Capacity to bring coherence and coordination in key policy areas, such as the relationship between institutional appropriations, tuition, and financial aid.

- Capacity to influence the direction of state resources to ensure accomplishment of these priorities.

If this capacity were in place, however, there is no guaranty that appropriate policy would follow. Each of the policy tools listed can be applied in ways that are effective and in ways that are ineffective. Characteristics of policies that are effective are presented in the balance of this section.

A. The Statement of Goals/Priorities—the Public Agenda

Goals that are truly strategic cannot be attained quickly. They must be pursued consistently over an extended period of time—years if not a decade or two. (The higher education goals established in Kentucky in the late 1990s were targeted for the year 2020.) This means that they cannot be tied to individual political leaders; they must transcend the terms of office of political leaders. Experience indicates that certain characteristics of agendas—their substance and the ways in which they are developed and nurtured—increase the likelihood of their long-term effectiveness. Among these characteristics are:

1. <u>A focus on the state and its citizens, not on the institutions of higher education</u>. The focus has to be on the **ends** to be achieved, **not the means** of achieving them.

2. <u>Rooted in data and information</u>. The identification of priorities has to be based on information that clearly demonstrates the need for addressing certain problems. A trail of evidence is more long-lasting than a trail of rhetoric. Information is important not only in identifying the items on the agenda, but in communicating the rationale for their selection to a broader audience. A few simple graphs that reveal the gaps to be closed are critical communication tools, not only to policymakers but also to the media.

3. <u>Developed by business, education, and political leaders who can "move the agenda</u>." Creating a public agenda is not only an analytic task—it is largely a political task. In effect, the statement of priority goals is a statement of strategic direction for the state. If it is to have a chance at success, it must bear the imprimatur of individuals who are recognized and trusted as leaders throughout the state.

4. <u>The agenda represents a consensus</u>. While the initial statement of an agenda may be the handiwork of a select set of leaders, the agenda will "have legs" only if there exists a broad consensus about the goals to be pursued. Thus, there is the need for a concerted effort to widen the circle of supporters—a campaign to build understanding of the problem to be addressed, not the means of addressing them (which can come later). Decisionmaking in government and education is widely

dispersed. It is not a command-and-control system. Progress is made only when this wide variety of decisionmakers is rowing generally in the same direction.

5. <u>There is a means to keep it alive</u>. A long-term agenda cannot be developed and then left alone. It needs constant—at least annual—visible attention. The states that have been most successful reconvene the initiating group (and their successors) on an annual basis to reconfirm their commitment to the agenda, to orient new members to the priorities and the rationale for their selection, and to review progress. A formal mechanism for periodic rejuvenation is a necessary component.

6. <u>There is an expectation of regional variation</u>. The agendas in all states will necessarily differ to reflect the differing needs of the states. In most states that have pursued the formulation of such an agenda, however, there is attention in some form to:

   - Ensuring that more students graduate from high school and have taken a rigorous academic program in the process.

   - Getting students from underserved populations into and through college.

   - Diversifying and expanding the state's economy.

An agenda that's supportive of institutions' being stewards of place recognizes that the general goals play out in different specific ways in different communities and, in fact, requires institutions to go through a local agenda-setting process that makes explicit the local interpretations of these goals. It is also likely that local or regional needs may lie beyond the scope of state priorities; a critical need in one area may not be an issue at all

for the state as a whole. These are the cases in which it is especially critical that state policy be such that it encourages institutional responsiveness to these needs.

Whatever the priority goals, there is a need to push the discussion to the point of stating the concrete conditions/behaviors that would be observed if progress toward these goals was being achieved. For example, if economic development were the objective, one entailment could be an increase in the number of high-value jobs found in the state/region. This requirement is not at the level of specific measurement, but it needs to be at a level that makes the rhetoric of the goal sufficiently concrete that there is no ambiguity about the intent that lies behind the words.

B. Finance and Resource Allocation Policy

In the final analysis, policy agendas without supporting financial policies—resource allocation mechanisms explicitly linked to pursuit of the priority items—are doomed to failure. If the state's allocation mechanisms do not reflect the agenda in a very direct way, it will soon become apparent that the agenda is not really important and institutions will quickly lose interest.

It is recommended that allocation of state funds to higher education (in addition to capital funds and those set aside for student financial aid) be comprised of two distinct pieces, one that provides base funds for maintaining institutional capacity and the second to further the achievement of the priority items on the agenda. This notion is easy to adopt but often difficult to sustain, especially in particularly hard economic times. Under such circumstances the institutional cry (and the state's predilection) is to "fund the base" at the expense of funding for the priority agenda. Such a stance sends a

completely erroneous message—that the highest priority issues are not a priority at all—and likely signals the death knell for the agenda. Once momentum is stopped, it is very hard to rekindle. Passage of time and the building of a new agenda will be required to get things back on track.

In the agenda component of the budget, specifically the portion intended to be supportive of stewardship of place initiatives, two mechanisms should be considered:

1. Investment or trust funds that provide fixed levels of support for each institution expected to pay particular attention to the stewardship agenda. This funding should be targeted for infrastructure building (regional databases, faculty and staff training, curriculum redesign, and other related maters). This funding should become a part of the institution's base funding, available for use on a recurring basis. However, there should be a requirement that it be "fenced off" for continued development and maintenance of the institutional capacity required for the institution to sustain its role as a steward of place; absent such formal "designation," the temptation will be to commingle these funds with all other general operating funds, a situation guaranteed to result in loss of focus over time. This tactic is recommended because it strengthens the hands of presidents inside the institution—they can point to new funds that require certain internal changes—and it removes the argument that, "We can't do this without more money."

2. Performance funding that is acquired only when institutional capacity is focused on the stewardship agenda in ways leading to demonstrable progress toward agree-

- Be employed only if performance measures related to goal achievement can be unambiguously defined.

- Be constructed in such a way that institutions are measured against their own objectives—they compete against themselves and not each other.

- Emphasize continuous improvement rather than achievement of fixed standards.

- Allow consideration of measures of activity as well as outcomes produced. This is especially important in some of the "macro" issues such as economic development where external forces can negate even the best intended and formulated sets of activities. Such measures might include the amount of faculty effort devoted to stewardship activities, the number of partnerships developed to work on clearly defined community problems, etc.

In the end, it must be recognized that the specific form of the funding mechanism will have to be tailored to the unique objectives of the state and the different ways they play out in the local/regional context. The important thing is that funds be provided explicitly for the stewardship agenda and that the linkages between these funds and attention to this agenda be clear.

C. Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability mechanisms are an increasingly common, but seldom effective, tool of state policy. As noted earlier, they are infrequently related to the state agenda, instead focusing on institutional performance in areas having little to do with those identified as priorities. Thus, they send another form of message, one that downplays the importance of the agenda. It has been noted that, in higher education, we measure what matters— and if it is not being measured, it must not matter.

Accountability mechanisms that are most effective:

- Take shape at the time goals are being developed. Planning and accountability are two sides of the same coin; addressing the topics simultaneously adds clarity to the planning discussion and provides guidance to those developing the accountability mechanisms.

- Tie explicitly to the priority items on the public agenda.

- Result in an annual report card that not only serves to monitor progress on achievement but also provides the vehicle for annual renewal and recommitment to the agenda.

- Get publicly referenced. Use of the report card by the governor and other leaders—and by the media—is a key component in keeping the agenda alive.

- Allow for institutional variation within a statewide context. This is especially important around the stewardship component of the agenda, where community

differences must be somehow reflected in the agenda pursued and, by extension, the nature of the accountability required.

D. Rules, Regulations and Procedures

In the main, this tool often proves to be more harmful than helpful. It keeps attention on "doing things right rather than on doing right things," and keeps policy leaders from addressing truly strategic issues. Perhaps more important, the accumulation of different items of "red tape" puts institutions in a position of becoming compliant rather than entrepreneurial.

Having said this, however, there are occasions in which regulatory provisions can propel the stewardship agenda. Almost always, stewardship activities are those that must be done in partnership with other entities—public schools, economic development agencies, state agencies (e.g., health and human services, labor), and local governments. With few exceptions, these entities, too, are recipients of state funds. The agenda is helped if receipt of some of these funds is conditional on involvement of the local university in some way. Money put "in the middle" to change behaviors of all participants in a beneficial way is particularly important. For example, funds provided to regional P-16 councils that can be accessed by public schools and the regional university only if they collaborate to improve their collective performance reinforce not only pursuit of certain goals but the importance of joint action. Such arrangements do not guarantee that good things will occur, but they do create conditions in which the odds are improved.

Like all other tools, regulatory mechanisms can be applied positively or negatively. The litmus test is intentionality and whether or not regulation reinforces pursuit of goals.

E. Alignment of Tools

The policy tools available to state governments have been sketched individually. Perhaps more important than the design and application of any one is the extent to which they are aligned and mutually reinforcing. If any one of the policy tools is out of line, the whole house of cards can come down. The stark reality is that "public agendas" are fragile constructions. They serve to tug institutions away from their own self-serving behaviors. Any excuse to revert to type will be taken and well-intentioned university leaders who believe in and promote the stewardship agenda can easily lose the little bit of leverage they have. Without consistent—and persistent—emphasis on externally-referenced goals, the energies of the institution will be devoted to business as usual. Public agendas are change agendas. Without constant nurturing, they are almost sure to fail—and even with constant attention, success is not a given.

F. Policy Leadership

The previous section on alignment of tools, probably more than any other single factor, makes the case for an entity whose job is to manage the public agenda. In many states, the obvious choice will be the state higher education coordinating agenda. In states without such a locus, the assignment is more problematic. While there are several alternatives, many come with built-in negatives. The responsibilities can be housed somewhere in the executive branch, but such an arrangement works against the

requirement that the agenda transcend the terms of office of political leaders. Similarly, an institutional governing board could be made the responsible party; however, their primary task will inevitably be seen as creating and maintaining institutional capacity— the business-as-usual agenda. Other options include non-governmental organizations (such as the Pritchard Committee in Kentucky), well-regarded business roundtables and informal but self-sustaining entities such as the North Dakota Roundtable.

Whatever the structural solution, the roles to be played by this entity are singularly important. Without the anchor to windward provided by a supportive and long-term state policy framework fostered by some state-level entity, institutional progress on a stewardship agenda will be extraordinarily difficult to achieve. If the charge to this entity is the right one—to develop a public agenda, devise and manage a set of (aligned) implementation policies, and sustain the agenda over time—this entity should not be a source of conflict but a necessary partner in helping the state achieve an agreed-upon set of goals for its citizens.

IV. LOOKING BACKWARD BEFORE MOVING FORWARD

Once a set of agreed-upon priorities are in place, the natural inclination of all parties involved is to initiate whatever actions are within their purview to move the agenda. Governors promulgate executive orders, legislatures pass new laws, and institutions go about the business of seeking new funds and proposing new initiatives. Before all this energy directed at doing new things is unleashed, however, experience suggests the wisdom of taking a serious look at the policies and procedures already in place, both at the state level and inside the institutions. Just because new policies are put in place does not mean that the old ones all go away. In fact, the most important

action that can be taken may take the form of clearing the underbrush--eliminating some of the old policies and identifying needed changes in others. This step is what the staff at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) have labeled conducting a **policy audit**.

The policy audit is a conceptually simple idea. It involves:

- Starting with the statement of intended goals and outcomes.

- Identifying the major policies and procedures that affect institutional operatives and behaviors—not just higher education policies but general state administrative policies (travel policies, procedures for contracting and purchasing, civil service policies if appropriate, etc.).

- Identifying those which are supportive of the (stewardship) agenda and those which create disincentives or barriers to successful pursuit of that agenda.

Practical experience indicates that two distinctly different kinds of activities are called for in conducting such an audit.   The first is an analytic task that involves rounding up the principal higher education policies, especially those dealing with such things as resource allocation, accountability, and those uniquely higher education processes such as program approval, and test these policies using two questions:

- If an institution chose to maximize its benefits within the constraints of this policy, what behaviors would it exhibit? The follow-up question is, "Are these behaviors consistent with pursuing the stewardship agenda or antithetical to such pursuits?"

- If an institution were intent on following good practices in being stewards of place—as described, for example, in the publication of the American Associate of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) entitled *Making Place Matter*—would the policies being examined support the stewardship agenda or serve as barriers to its accomplishment?

Almost uniformly the results of such investigations make the case that extant policies are detrimental to the change agenda. This is not surprising; they were put in place to maintain institutional capacity, not ensure utilization toward desired ends. While this process results in likely foregone conclusions, it nonetheless serves to pinpoint which aspects of current policy are particularly deleterious.

This process is fundamentally conceptual in nature. But if one wants to really understand how regulations and policies are being applied and implemented, there is no substitute for asking questions of those in the trenches—questions like:

- What stands in the way of our doing *x*?

- What would have to change if we wanted to pursue the following strategy?

- Is the barrier a clear matter of state law or an interpretation of state law?

- And perhaps most important, is this barrier one imposed from outside, or have we done it to ourselves through our internal policies and procedures?

It is surprising how often the constraints are self-inflicted. Procedures developed years ago in one context have become Standard Operating Procedures. When asked, those responsible for implementing these procedures are rooted in state law and could not possibly be unilaterally

changed or ignored without suffering dire consequences. In many cases, Pogo was right—

slightly paraphrased, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

The conduct of such audits is a useful precursor to more proactive policy formulation for several

reasons. First, it identifies several behaviors that can be modified solely through internal,

unilateral action, thus allowing rapid progress in some areas and avoiding the embarrassment of

blaming others for self-imposed problems. Second, it can lay out an agenda for change that can

be accomplished at low political risk; few political leaders complain about actions designed to

"clear up the books." Finally, it lays a firm foundation for proactive policy change in that it

documents specific barriers to pursuit of the policy agenda. All are beneficial outcomes and

demonstrate due diligence and sound preparation for changes and new initiatives that are

requested.

Coming out of these activities, the institutions and the state policy leadership group need an

agreed-upon agenda for action—those changes to finance and accountability policy, allocation of

decision authority, and operating rules and procedures—that can be carried through formal

channels. The better developed the agenda and the greater the consensus around it, the more

likely its successful adoption.

V.   AN AGENDA FOR THE COALITION

Being stewards of place requires institutions to work with community partners in applying their

considerable intellectual talents to improving the economics and quality of life of the

communities of which they are a part. Because communities—especially the metropolitan areas

in which members of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) reside—are

so different from each other, the challenges and opportunities that present themselves for

institutional involvement are inevitably different. Each institution will have to pick its own path within its own unique environment.

In spite of the fact that being stewards of very different places requires very different responses, there is an agenda for the CUMU institutions acting collectively. Part of this agenda involves taking steps to improve understanding of, and receptivity to, the notion that achieving statewide goals requires action at the local and regional levels—action that will necessarily take different local forms in pursuit of common, broader priorities. Part of the agenda involves developing answers to the questions:

- How do we develop state policy that not only allows, but encourages, differing institutional behaviors in pursuit of statewide priorities?

- How do we legitimately avoid the trap of one-size-fits-all policymaking?

There are undoubtedly many items on this agenda. A preliminary list follows; additional entries are actively solicited.

A. Start Building the Necessary Coalitions

The idea of becoming stewards of place is an inherently attractive one. Other types of institutions, particularly community colleges and universities in more rural parts of the state, share this agenda. Some of these institutions are natural partners; they are located in your metropolitan areas and have complementary talents to lend to the cause. The universities located outside the metropolitan areas share the policy and public relations dilemmas as their metropolitan counterparts—how to pursue a local or regional agenda within the framework of state policy without being accused of being self-serving, not

being a team player, and breaking ranks when a united front is called for. Eventually these coalitions must be formed at the state level, but some initial conversations with national organizations such as the AASCU, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) are in order. Presentations and discussions at their annual meetings are designed to build coalitions around the big ideas and to gain acceptance of the proposition that ways must be found to achieve state goals, measured in the ways that states will measure them—through local and regional actions that may vary considerably from one region to another. The objective should not be to shape any particular state's policies but merely to help prepare the ground for seeds that will be sown later "back home."

One of the messages especially important to a SHEEO audience is recognition of the need for policy leadership around formulation of a public agenda and indication of support should they pursue such an activity. Any message that aligns universities with state higher education policy organizations would be a welcome message indeed.

B. Develop Recommendations Regarding Approaches to Accountability in Key Areas

As has been noted numerous times in this paper, variations based on community and regional distinctiveness is a hallmark of being stewards of place. Nevertheless, there are some common threads—for example, an almost universal interest in improving the public schools (especially in metropolitan areas) and a similarly broad interest in matters related to economic development. Sharing ideas about how to measure progress (at the local level) toward these state priorities is an important starting point. More broadly, the challenge is finding measures of the extent to which institutions are being

good stewards of place. It will be hard to persuade state policymakers to reward institutions for being good stewards of place if they have no mechanism for assessing the benefits being provided in return. At this point, there is no conventional wisdom on how best to demonstrate performance in this arena. A collection of well-considered ideas in this realm would be welcomed by all parties.

C. Develop Recommendations for Financing Policies that Support Stewardship of Place

Eventually state higher education policy devolves to a question of finance—how should funds be distributed in furtherance of the public agenda. Earlier in this paper, broad categories of funding tied to stewardship of place were proposed, one devoted to building the necessary capacity and the other to rewarding performance. Flesh needs to be added to this skeleton. Ideas are needed about how to:

1. Describe in believable terms the kinds of (extra) infrastructure that must be put in place to pursue the stewardship agenda and put a price tag on these requirements.

2. Make this infrastructure a continuing part of the institution's base budget.

3. Link funding to performance in ways satisfactory to both state policymakers and institutional leaders. If nothing else, some "first principles" regarding funding the stewardship agenda (such as the suggested principle that institutions be judged against their own goals rather than each other) would be welcome additions to the higher education funding discourse.

4. Compile the results of policy audits. It is at least as important to document barriers to be removed as to propose new initiatives. Again, the specifics of action will vary

from state, but a compendium of policy audit results would provide a database regarding regulatory requirements that should be changed to create a more hospitable environment for stewardship of place initiatives. While the focus of this paper has been on state policy, the conduct of a policy audit at the institutional level is perhaps even more important. More often than not, the brakes on pursuit of a stewardship agenda are applied more at the institutional level—through promotion and tenure policies, criteria in the hiring process, etc.—than by anything imposed at the state level.

VI. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Stewardship of place is an idea whose time has come. Much of the improvement in economic opportunity and quality of life sought by policymakers for the citizens of their states depends on the acceptance by universities (especially metropolitan universities) of a leadership role in their communities. But university leadership cannot marshal the forces within their institutions without a supportive state policy environment. At this point in time, development of the necessary policy frameworks is a work in progress; there is no conventional wisdom as to what really works in this regard. This paper suggest the elements of such policy. Further development of these ideas, with all the variations necessary to make them work in diverse state and local settings, is the challenge and the imperative.