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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **NCW Equity Alliance forms to assist other organizations in region with DEI work**

### ***Community-based group will kick off its work with a learning series for nonprofits***

WENATCHEE — After nearly a year of planning and research, a group of community members has officially launched the North Central Washington Equity Alliance, an organization meant to serve as a resource and advocate on diversity, equity and inclusion issues in the region.

The NCW Equity Alliance's mission is to collaboratively support Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the region through community-based education, advocacy and reconciliation work. The NCW Equity Alliance envisions a community that is welcoming, inclusive, diverse and resilient, and that values people of all backgrounds and abilities, and provides a safe place to live, work and play.

"Governments, businesses and non-profit organizations across our community want to continue creating a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community for all," said NCW Equity Alliance co-chairs Edgar Salamanca and Penny Tobiska on behalf of the organization. "Our intent is not to duplicate any of the great work that everyone is doing but instead bring light to it and help it grow."

Over the past several months, the NCW Equity Alliance has conducted a survey of nonprofits, local governments and businesses to get a better idea of who is doing DEI work in the region and at what level. The organization then followed the survey up with in-depth interviews of 29 organizations.

From that research, the NCW Equity Alliance found a need for an organization to foster inclusiveness for all residents (race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, class, age), while proactively assisting regional organizations, institutions, and individuals in their DEI journeys.

Every organization interviewed by the NCW Equity Alliance said they want to come together with other organizations and move forward with them collectively. Many of the region's larger organizations are conducting DEI work internally now. But smaller organizations told the NCW Equity Alliance that they either lack DEI expertise internally or cannot afford to hire someone from the outside. Some organizations are seeking a more diverse board of their own, but they are not sure how to go about making that happen. Other organizations reported they aren't sure how to proceed once diversity work begins. Even the larger organizations that utilize consultants said they would like access to a local educational resource hub, NCW Equity Alliance found.

The NCW Equity Alliance's first project — a ninth-month pilot series of learning sessions for nonprofit organizations — will kick off this fall. The series is being held in partnership with the Community Foundation of NCW, the Icicle Fund, and the North Central Accountable Community of Health.

The NCW Equity Alliance traces its beginnings to a group of residents who began meeting as a working and learning group in July 2020 amid tension and divisiveness in the community and the United States over the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the presidential election. The first meeting was organized by Our Valley Our Future's One Community Working Group.

"We came together because we wanted to improve our community, and since then we've grown as individuals through study and discussion," Salamanca and Tobiska said. "We discovered there is significant interest among area non-profits, businesses, and governments who want to create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community."

The NCW Equity Alliance officially formed in January 2021 with the appointment of a Board of Directors. Founding board members (and their affiliations) include:

- Edgar Salamanca (co-chair), Communities in School of NCW
- Penny Tobiska (co-chair), retired educator
- Teresa Bendito, Parque Padrinos
- Karen Francis-McWhite, DEI facilitator and rural community development advocate
- Ellora La Shier, Wenatchee Valley College Foundation
- Clare Morrison, NCW Libraries
- Bindu Nayak, Confluence Health physician and member of Confluence Health's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee
- Karina Vega-Villa, Wenatchee Valley College's MESA program and the Immigrant & Latinx Solidarity Group
- Pat Whitfield, retired educator
- Bob Bugert (ex-officio), Chelan County
- Laura Merrill (ex-officio), City of Wenatchee
- Sasha Sleiman (ex-officio), City of East Wenatchee

The NCW Equity Alliance is in the midst of capacity building, including raising funds to carry out the organization's mission, initial work plan, and hiring of an executive director. It also is working through the steps to become a formal nonprofit organization. Our Valley Our Future is serving as its fiscal agent in the interim. People wishing to donate to the NCW Equity Alliance can do so by writing a check to Our Valley Our Future and sending it to 14 N. Wenatchee Ave., Suite 155, Wenatchee, WA 98801. Please note on the check that the donation is for the NCW Equity Alliance.

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