

The Integration of WREN  
(aka WREN Joins the Big Boys & Girls)

By  
[Dr. Paul Smith](#)



I became WREN Director in July 2006. After rising from the ashes due to the skills and efforts of [Jon Temte](#), I inherited an organization that was poised to make the leap to the next level of practice-based research. The Director position funded 20% of my time and between the 2 part-time staff, they were just under 100% of 1 person.

Jon Temte had started a conversation with [Maureen Smith, MD](#) at the [UW Department of Population Health Sciences](#) about WREN involvement in the UW 5 year multi-million dollar application for the new [Clinical and Translational Science Awards](#) program. I met with Maureen and we talked about practice-based research, my vision for the future of WREN and the need for infrastructure funding to hire staff to work toward that vision. I was dreaming of receiving \$50,000/year to get us going. Maureen saw the potential for WREN and invited me to a meeting in October 2006 with her and [Marc Drezner, MD](#), the leader of the grant writing effort. Marc also saw the potential for WREN and he already had secured some funding from several sources to get the nascent [UW Institute for Clinical and Translational Research \(ICTR\)](#) up and going. The grant application was due in March 2007. In mid-December I got a phone call from Maureen. She essentially said that they expected to have their first grant application rejected and Marc wanted WREN to get started growing in research capacity so it would be stronger when they reapplied in 2008. They had \$160,000 for WREN to spend in 2007 and if I could send her a budget in the next few days I could start spending money on January 1 – in 2 weeks.

After I picked myself up off the floor, my head was spinning about what to do and how to get started. I didn't get much of a Christmas break that year. I jumped into hiring staff, looking for research projects to work on, and setting up Steering and Advisory committees among many other tasks. Then much to our joyful surprise, the UW grant application was funded. By the fall of 2007, Maureen and Marc were so happy with what we had been able to accomplish that they increased our budget to \$206,000. They started to half-jokingly talk about WREN on steroids about then. WREN continued to grow in number of collaborators, members, projects, staff and budget with some ups and downs over the next 4 years. When I resigned the Director position, I spent 60% of my time doing WREN work, had a budget of about \$300,000/year and 7 full and part-time staff.

Standing on the shoulders of the giants before me, I feel blessed by all the help and support from a huge number of people that got WREN to where it was when I left and where it is today.