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Before founding ScienceWorks, Dr. Olsen served over 20 years in the federal government in a variety of scientific leadership positions, including the Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer of the National Science Foundation (NSF); Associate Director and Deputy Director for Science in the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) in the Executive Office of the President; and Chief Scientist for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Acting Associate Administrator for NASA's Biological and Physical Research Enterprise. She also was the Vice President, International Programs at the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), a non-profit organization.

Dr. Olsen earned a B.S. in Biology and Psychology with honors from Chatham College and Ph.D. in Biology (Neuroscience) from the University of California, Irvine. Her Postdoctoral Fellowship was in the Department of Neuroscience at Children's Hospital of Harvard Medical School. At various times in her early professional career, Dr. Olsen also served as a Research Scientist at the State University of New York – Stony Brook's Long Island Research Institute and Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science at the Medical School, as well as Adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of Microbiology at the George Washington University. Her research on neural and genetic mechanisms underlying development and expression of behavior was supported by the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Olsen holds numerous awards from foreign entities, including the Norwegian Royal Order of Merit; government agencies, institutions, and scientific societies. She is an elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Association for Women in Science, and an elected member of the Explorers Club and Cosmos Club. She has been awarded four honorary doctoral degrees.