



Regional Challenge Grant Legislative Report on Use of General Fund Monies

December 2023

Regional Partnership Background

Through the Regional Challenge Grant (RCG), WSAC awards competitive grants to existing and new community-based career and college pathways partnerships to increase postsecondary enrollment and completion rates and close opportunity gaps. SB 5789 provides direct financial support for cross-sector, regionally based partnerships whose work contributes to achieving the state's 70% postsecondary attainment goal¹, especially for learners from populations historically underserved by higher education.

For additional information, please see our most recent Legislative Report *Establishing the Regional Challenge Grant*, available in Spanish and English: <https://wsac.wa.gov/challenge-grants>

Investing in Regional Communities

WSAC received an initial \$6 million investment in the first year and an additional \$16 million appropriation in the 2023-2025 Washington State biennial budget. Funds in this account rollover, aiding sustained investments in regional partnerships to enact systems change to meet the statewide attainment goal. The information in the table below outlines the funding commitment to current and new partnerships and additional operational costs.

The first cohort includes eight cross-sector partnerships from across the state who are forming partnerships around, or implementing strategies informed by, the communities in which they live and work. Four partnerships include established networks that are testing, expanding, or scaling strategies to increase postsecondary attainment in the Chehalis, Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane regions. In the Yakima Valley, Benton City, Walla Walla, and Methow Valley regions², four additional partnerships are in the earlier stages of their work and are retaining or recruiting new partners to build deep relationships in their communities. In total, the first cohort includes \$4.85 million in awards: \$4.35 million supports grantees in the implementation stage over a 1.5-year grant period, and \$500,000 supports grantees in the earlier stages of their partnerships over a 1-year grant period.

In early 2024, WSAC will negotiate an extension of current contracts with the first cohort of partnerships. The most recent state appropriation allows us to extend grant agreements beyond the original 12- to 18-month timeline through June 2025. By extending both the length and amount of these grants, the existing cohort will be moved to the fiscal year schedule which will mirror the grant cycle for the next cohort and

¹ Passed in 2013, Governor Jay Inslee signed into law the state achievement goal, that 70% of the state's 25- to 44-year olds should have a credential beyond high school, as proposed by WSAC to the legislature.

² Specific geographic regions for all eight regional partnerships can be found in more detail in the 2023 Legislative Report *Establishing the Regional Challenge Grant*. Some text throughout this document is drawn from the report.

will commit to our programmatic value that systems change takes time. The extension process will be negotiated with partnerships for both large and smaller investments to account for programmatic growth that reflects community needs and assets, as well as partnerships' early learning surrounding partnership formation and strategy implementation. This approach is rooted in evaluation, specifically learning *how* place-based partnerships can affect community change across the state. By investing in this way, WSAC will learn deeply from place-based interventions over time.

To increase the accessibility and equity of this regional strategy, WSAC will open a second Request for Letters of Interest to new regional partnerships working to increase post-secondary credential attainment and completion for priority populations. The Request for Letters of Interest will strategically invest in communities who understand the interventions necessary for the learners and the families that they serve. RCG grant awards are responsive to the needs, capacity, and proposed strategies of the applicants.

Projected funds for contract negotiations of the current cohort and the 2024 Request for Letters of Interest are reflected in the Sustaining Current and New Partnerships to Enable Evaluation line item of the RCG Fund. By allocating more than \$12 million directly to regional communities, WSAC will be able to award up to 6 additional partnerships, in addition to the current cohort, with the potential to sustain this work over 5 years³ contingent upon the evaluation of ongoing progress in addition to contract extensions and negotiations. The breakdown of the RCG fund below shows that approximately 80% of funds provided by the state are invested directly to support regional partnerships. Approximately 20% of funds are allocated to non-granting expenses such as staffing the program, providing technical assistance to partnerships, and hosting learning community convenings including the first Grantee Summit.

Breakdown of the RCG Fund⁴ (including committed and projected allocations)

Item	Appropriation	Allocation
Total Appropriation FY 23 – 25	\$22,000,000	
Funds to the First Cohort of Partnerships FY 23 – 24		- \$4,850,000
Sustaining Current and New Partnerships to Enable Evaluation		- \$12,750,000
Technical Assistance, Learning Community Convening, and Other Support Costs FY 23 – 25		- \$2,000,000
Staffing, Benefits, and Travel FY 23 – 25		- \$1,800,000
Operational Reserve 7.5% of an Annual Appropriation		- \$600,000
Total Remaining		\$0

Our goal is to invest directly in regional partnerships so that structural barriers no longer impede educational access and outcomes, especially for learners of color, learners of low-income backgrounds, English-language learners, learners with disabilities, learners experiencing homelessness, and learners in foster care.

³ Grant agreement terms follow a 12 to 18-month original granting period as outlined in the Request for Letters of Interest and the 2023 Legislative Report. In this fund, WSAC hopes to *sustain* funding to regional partnerships over an extended period, understanding evaluation and systems change does not occur in a 12 to 18-month time frame.

⁴ Titled the Washington Career and College Pathways Innovation Challenge Program account.

The RCG theory of change supports that by funding partnerships, communities will increase attainment and completion, and lessons learned will inform statewide policy change.

Community Investments

WSAC recognizes that our greatest chance of yielding systemic change in education requires that we center and uplift the strengths of communities in their collective efforts to improve educational outcomes for their students. The first cohort of Regional Challenge Grant partnerships know this implicitly, and their work demonstrates what can happen when states invest in communities so that they can invest in themselves. This approach supports partners by funding *new* work, that is both place-based and responsive to the community in which they live and work. Partners have long-standing ties within their community and trusted relationships with the families and learners they serve. The RCG state investment supports, not supplants, new civic infrastructure in regional communities across Washington state. Through collective learning, we can build collective understanding for what it takes to create systemic change, and through that collective understanding, we can achieve statewide progress toward our goal of 70% postsecondary attainment.

About the Washington Student Achievement Council

The Washington Student Achievement Council is committed to increasing educational opportunities and attainment in Washington. The Council has three main functions:

- Lead statewide strategic planning to increase educational attainment.
- Administer programs that help people access and pay for college.
- Advocate for the economic, social, and civic benefits of higher education.

The Council has ten members. Four members represent each of Washington's major education sectors: four-year public baccalaureates, four-year private colleges, public community and technical colleges, and K-12 public schools. Six are citizen members, including two current students (one graduate student and one undergraduate student).

If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format, please contact the Washington Student Achievement Council at:

Mail:

P.O. Box 43430

Olympia, WA 98504-3430

Phone:

360-753-7800

TTY/TDD users may dial 7-1-1 for relay services



WASHINGTON STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL
EDUCATION · OPPORTUNITY · RESULTS