



BACKGROUND

Washington's State Work Study (SWS) program helps students earn money for college while gaining valuable work experience—often in jobs related to their academic and career goals.

Fifty-six institutions, including all of the state's public two-year and four-year colleges and universities, and many independent or private institutions, offer this form of financial assistance to eligible students.

"It's really hard for new graduates to get jobs if they don't have practical experience that sets them apart from all other applicants vying for limited employment opportunities.

Through my State Work Study position in the information technology area, I am developing a range of skills while in school that I believe will give me a lot more choices in my career path once I've graduated."

— SWS Student

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The state partners with nearly 1,000 Washington employers who match a portion of state funds. In 2014-15, employers contributed approximately \$5 million in student wages. Nearly 4,500 students earned about \$12.5 million in SWS wages by working up to 19 hours a week.

In recent years, student and employer demand for SWS support has exceeded program resources—especially during the economic downturn, when program funding was reduced by 66 percent.

Historically, the SWS program targeted a service level of 1 in 12 needy students. In recent years, the service level has declined to roughly 1 in 35 needy resident students.



BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

- SWS helps undergraduate and graduate students pay for part of their college costs now rather than deferring those costs in the form of added debt post-graduation.
- The program serves low-income and middle-income students and is one of the only sources of need-based aid for graduate students.
- Research indicates that students who work between 10 and 19 hours per week tend to persist in their degree programs at higher rates than other financially needy students.
- Students develop valuable career skills and job connections. Many gain experience in fields directly related to their studies.

BENEFITS TO EMPLOYERS

- Participating employers gain access to a reduced-cost, well-educated, and highly motivated pool of workers who help them operate more productively and profitably.
- Employers often hire SWS students after graduation. Seattle Biomedical Research Institute and GreenCupboards.com in Spokane are examples of employers who have hired dozens of former student employees for full-time positions.
- Participating employers help institutions align classroom learning with the real-world skills employers require to grow Washington's economy going forward.

"Without State Work Study, our business would not have made nearly the progress, or been able to sustain the level of growth, especially in this difficult economic environment.

Many of the students we've helped train over the years have been hired as full-time employees after graduation. SWS is a win-win for both employers and students."

— SWS Employer, Web Design



BENEFITS TO THE STATE

- Annual employer contributions help the state leverage its financial aid resources to cover a greater number of needy students. This in turn contributes to rising levels of educational attainment statewide.
- In 2014-15, approximately \$5 million in additional student aid was generated through employer matching contributions, representing a 40 percent return on the SWS investment made by Washington taxpayers, and enabling service to nearly 1,800 additional needy resident students.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

The SWS program continues to adjust to new funding realities brought on during the Great Recession:

- Program funding is roughly one third the size it was five years ago. The 2015-16 appropriation is \$7.8 million, enabling an estimated 4,500 students to earn SWS wages this year.
- Stakeholder demand routinely exceeds available program resources. However, limited funding coupled with recently increased employer matching requirements present challenges to program participation rates and growth.

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Washington's student financial aid programs are known collectively as Opportunity Pathways.

The Washington Student Achievement Council administers these programs, helping tens of thousands of students earn college certificates and degrees annually.