



Regional Partnerships Update

January 2024

Background

In 2022, the Regional Challenge Grant (RCG) was created with an initial appropriation of \$6 million to award competitive grants to place-based regional partnerships that are committed to increasing educational attainment in their communities. An additional \$16 million was appropriated in the biennial budget for 2023-2025. The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) believes that RCG's emphasis on regional investment can shape the environment in which a learner lives, works, or studies and, through meaningful systems change in this local context, can enable the state to reach its attainment goal. More information about the inaugural year of RCG can be found in the [2023 Legislative Report: Establishing the Regional Challenge Grant](#) and the [Program Framework](#).

Legislative Report on Use of General Fund Monies

In the first year of program implementation, RCG invested \$4.85 million in 8 regional partnerships from across the state. Now, 1 in 5 residents in Washington State live in a region with an active RCG partnership, including 29 school districts and 1 tribal school belonging to RCG service districts.

Additional funding from the state allows WSAC's RCG investments to grow. WSAC plans to award up to six new partnerships in the 2024 Request for Letters of Interest and will sustain existing investments by extending the contract period and award through June 2025. Please see [the 2023 Legislative Report on Use of General Fund Monies](#) for a complete breakdown of committed and projected allocations.

Understanding Partnership Investment Results

WSAC is in ongoing communication with partnerships in the form of check-in calls to learn more deeply about the partnership's funded activities that support their respective learner community. Additional reporting requirements reflect the investment size; implementation grantees have evaluation requirements to define and measure short-term outcomes that are directly aligned with their funded work and reflective of the larger financial investment.

The RCG model intends to shift the local context for Washingtonians to make change in how learners and families make decisions about their education. As this shift occurs in localized regional investments, the effects are felt across the region and lead to increased postsecondary attainment statewide. WSAC evaluates the RCG investment in the following ways:

- Lead with evidence-based strategies that center students and families.
- Invite communities to partner in the research process.
- Design grant administration with implementation reporting in mind.
- Identify short-term outcomes that capture each partnerships' collective impact.
- Maintain focus on systemic change by monitoring population-level outcomes.

- Learn alongside partners in real time through a community of practice.
- Sow the seeds of evaluation research to quantify the impact of regional work.

For complete details about evaluating the regional investment impact, please refer to the [2023 Legislative Report](#) section ‘How will we know that RCG’s investments work?’

Sustaining Investments with Existing Partnerships

The most recent state appropriation allows us to negotiate an extension of existing partnership contracts through June 2025 in alignment with the end of the fiscal year. 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 learnings.

Negotiations will begin with existing partnerships this month. Recommendations for significant funding changes to partnerships will be brought to the Council during the May or August meeting. WSAC intends to provide seamless funding to regional partnerships from the original contract execution date through the extension period. Contract extensions will be awarded based on an evaluation of how their funded work in the next phase builds from the work completed during the initial granting period. To successfully negotiate a contract extension, partnerships must demonstrate evidence of the following criteria:

- The partnership is making progress toward their goals alongside their local community and based on their ongoing learning.
- The partnership’s approach to their work is aligned with the vision of WSAC’s Regional Challenge Grant.¹
- The partnership is spending state funds as approved and outlined in the grant agreement.

After this extension period, partnerships will be invited to apply for continued funding as part of the 2025 Request for Letters of Interest. WSAC sees itself as a community partner and subsequently, we respond to the needs and assets of the communities served by our regional partnership cohort within our grant administration processes.

New Partnerships and the 2024 Request for Letters of Interest

On January 8th, WSAC announced the 2024 Request of Letters of Interest (LOI) to fund up to six regional partnerships that are innovatively engaging with their local community to drive change in their region. The 2024 LOI reflects continuous learning from partners, applicants, and external stakeholders from the first year of program implementation. Selected partnerships will be recommended to Council for a vote at the May or August Council meeting. Complete details can be found in the [2024 Request for Letters of Interest](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions document](#).

¹ For more information about the Regional Challenge Grant vision, please read the 2023 Legislative Report