

## Outline of WSAC Regional Innovation Grants Proposal

### *Challenge*

Changing the college and career going (or “career launch”) culture across Washington is more than an educational challenge. It is unfair to place this responsibility on schools and colleges alone. Gallup surveys show that both high school students and potential returning adults look to a broader array of community and workplace networks for information and advice on educational pathways.

These social networks are not very developed, rely on conventional wisdom and may create unnecessary barriers. For example, we know that many people wrongly think that financial aid programs do not support CTE programs. Washington must learn how to optimize the role of these non-traditional networks to attain our ambitious goals.

### *Opportunity*

Informal networks that high school students and potential returning adults rely on are local and regional in nature. They are loose networks with hubs (e.g. workplace, community-based nonprofit, social groups, etc.) that are not educational in nature and may have limited formal connection to the education world.

Extraordinary employer demand for a better skilled workforce has driven the emergence of local cross-sector collaborations to help people enroll in post-secondary programs, apprenticeships and other career pathways. These regional leadership partnerships range from formal and highly developed (e.g., Spokane) to informal and emerging (e.g. Wenatchee Valley). They are not well funded or deeply connected to state level activities and programs. These networks present partnership opportunities to both do the work and, learning from these innovators, how to succeed at scale.

### *Program design*

WSAC would manage an innovation grant fund with key state partners (e.g., OFM, SBCTC, OSPI, COP, WTB). The fund would provide multiyear grants to support regional work, provide technical assistance from state partners, and gain insights on how to scale successful program models. We would launch a test cohort of 3-5 regions and require local matching funds.

Applicants: multi-sector leadership collaborations including employers, K-12 and post-secondary education, local government, philanthropy and community-based nonprofits

Target populations: College Bound scholarship eligible students in 7<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grades, foster youth, adults in low wage jobs, adults in transition (prison reentry, military, workers in sectors with declining employment)

Focus: Steps along the developmental pathway that occur before the target populations actively pursue enrollment. This would strengthen, but not replace or conflict with, existing school-based counseling or campus-based enrollment activities.

Examples: Adult navigator program in Spokane, employer outreach for returning adults or to support pathways for children of employees, community-based organizations partnering with schools to increase College Bound sign-up, FAFSA completion and college applications.