

### Background

In the spring of 2017, the Washington Student Achievement Council contracted with Western Washington University to conduct focus groups of Washington citizens between the ages of 25-44. The primary goal of this project was to understand the participants' needs and decision making processes regarding postsecondary education.

## Motivations and perceived value of education

Desire to increase earnings (economic need, realization more education = more opportunities)

Example to children

Encouraged by family, friends and counselors

## Barriers to postsecondary education

### Financial

- Paying loans from an earlier attempt returning to school.
- Unqualified due to spousal or family income.
- Debt unrelated to education.

#### Family/Work-life balance

#### Discouragement

• High school teachers/counselors interfered with students' pursuits.

# Preferred learning format

| Face-to-face  | Online   | Hybrid   |
|---|--|--|
| Real-time interaction<br>and feedback<br>valued, though<br>impractical due to<br>family and work<br>schedule demands. | Flexibility and<br>opportunity to self-<br>pace valued, though<br>lagged response<br>time is problematic.<br>Ideal model for<br>those described as<br>"self-starters." | Acceptable by all;<br>offers best of both<br>worlds. |

# Search for answers

| Searches begin with<br>awareness.                            | Social media, community events, and work place presentations valued.  |
|--|---|
| Initial searches for all programs were internet-based.       | Participants endorsed internet searches and/or telephone calls followed by visits to geographically convenient schools. |
| Greater clarity and<br>simplicity of websites<br>are needed. | State-wide website valued and desired. Should include:  |

• Practice entry exams.

• Financial aid information and loan calculator.

• Guidance regarding previous credits.

•Virtual mentor program (connect prospective returning students w/those currently enrolled or completed).

• Budgeting and financial knowledge workshops (in-person or virtual).

• Simplified scholarship system.

• Available child care options/facilities.