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

Search for answers

- **Searches begin with awareness.** Social media, community events, and workplace 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 simplicity of websites are needed.** State-wide website valued and desired. Should include:
  - Filtering capabilities for programs of interest, delivery methods, schedule, and cost.
  - 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.