



Regional Partnership Strategic Update

June 2023

Highlights

Since the inaugural request for letters of interest closed in October 2022, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) has awarded and signed agreements with eight partnerships, the cohort has begun the early stages of their funded work, and the Washington State Legislature has added an additional \$16 million for the next biennium.

Regional Partnerships and Granting

Regional environments influence the decisions that Washington residents make when they consider a college or career pathway. Operating from place-based, regional frameworks allows partnerships to directly leverage state investments and local resources to improve student outcomes. Educational organizations cannot be expected to change the environment by themselves—college and career pathways are not confined to the classroom.

In order to meet Washington’s goal to increase postsecondary credential attainment, WSAC seeks to address historic and current structural racism by supporting partnerships that are embedded in, and reflective of, the communities they serve. We will learn from and alongside these partnerships about the most impactful strategies to support increased, and increasingly equitable, postsecondary enrollment and completion.

Our goal is to create a reflection and action cycle by listening to broad-based community partnerships and reflecting their findings in state-level policy solutions.

The Regional Partnerships strategy provides an opportunity to shape WSAC’s work across all of our programs. Grant making represents one element of this broader strategy. The investments allow us to build our understanding of best practices at the community and regional levels.

Summary of Awarded Cohort

Eight total grantees, four in each grant tier, comprise the inaugural Regional Challenge Grant (RCG) cohort. Each partnership represents unique, innovative strategies informed by their region to increase postsecondary attainment and close systemic equity gaps. The broad range of strategies, partnerships, focus student populations, and regions represented are key to achieving the systems-change goal. Grantees represent \$4.85 million in awards for work up to 1.5 years in length in eight distinct regions of the state.

Implementation Grantees

Implementation grantees represent established partnerships that are testing, expanding, or scaling their strategies and increasing postsecondary attainment for focus populations.

- **Foundation for Tacoma Students** is expanding two programs to six school districts: What's Next Senior Supports leverages Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to respond to senior student needs with navigational and case management support; and Campaign Free Aid builds community capacity for FAFSA/WAFSA support with events, completion tracking, and coordination.
- **City of Seattle's Department of Education and Early Learning** is connecting mentors from CBOs to BIPOC students in high school and in Seattle Promise, and providing professional development to high school staff on culturally-relevant college and career readiness supports.
- **Launch NW and the Innovia Foundation** are partnering with CBOs and local universities to match BIPOC students with near-peer, peer, or adult mentors, and families with family mentors to support college and career planning. Mentorship centers also provide career exploration and coaching for students in six schools within the Spokane Region.
- **Chehalis School District** is building the Cornerstone Program to connect family engagement at the beginning of the K-12 pathway for up to 250 families with intentional communications campaigns, family engagement, and coordination.

Partnership Formation Grantees

Partnership Formation grantees are in the earlier stages of retaining partners, recruiting new partners across sectors, and building deep relationships in their network. We recognize that early-stage partnership development may focus more on strategy and understanding the local context while other partnerships may be prepared to explore programmatic activities.

- **Yakima Valley Partners for Education** is educating parents on higher education in Spanish to increase access for students in the valley across six school districts.
- **United Way of the Blue Mountains** is conducting a qualitative research study to understand the growing direct enrollment gap in the greater Walla Walla region.
- **Methow Valley School District** is building capacity to increase business partnerships in nine area school districts that are regionally isolated from opportunities.
- **The STEM Foundation** is formalizing their partnership to create a two-generation approach in Benton City to increase direct enrollment from high school and support parents returning to education.

A Look Ahead

The Regional Partnership team conducted a gap analysis to better understand the broad range of regions, student populations, and strategies to drive change across the state. The lens of this analysis included regional diversity, innovative strategies, collaborative cross-sector partnerships, and student populations served, with equity embedded throughout. We have identified two priorities for future funding: strategies aimed at supporting adult learners and strategies focused on credential completion.

We will seek applications to expand the RCG cohort with a new request for Letters of Interest (LOI) in January 2024 and will make final decisions for recommendations in advance of the June 2024 Council meeting. We will provide additional details this fall.

We will emphasize deep relationship building with technical assistance and monthly check-ins to learn alongside partnerships in a partner-friendly manner. In addition, we will host a Community of Practice this fall. The cohort will come together to support the development of a statewide learning network to better understand the lessons of regional, place-based partnerships. This convening is a critical piece of the reflection and action cycle.

Convening the Regional Partnerships will deepen our collective learning and provide powerful insight beyond any individual effort.

About the Washington Student Achievement Council

The Washington Student Achievement Council is committed to increasing educational opportunities and attainment in Washington. The Council has three main functions:

- Lead statewide strategic planning to increase educational attainment.
- Administer programs that help people access and pay for college.
- Advocate for the economic, social, and civic benefits of higher education.

The Council has ten members. Four members represent each of Washington's major education sectors: four-year public baccalaureates, four-year private colleges, public community and technical colleges, and K-12 public schools. Six are citizen members, including two current students (one graduate student and one undergraduate student).

If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format, please contact the Washington Student Achievement Council at:

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