

# Washington Jobs Initiative

## Good Jobs Challenge



## Overview and Context

The goal of the [Good Jobs Challenge](#) (GJC) and the [Washington Jobs Initiative](#) (WJI) is to help individuals secure good jobs and prioritize reaching individuals who have been hit hardest by the pandemic. GJC is an opportunity for Washington to increase educational attainment beyond the “traditional” postsecondary pathways of academic credentials. WJI will build upon [Career Connect Washington](#) (CCW) and leverage existing efforts to ensure Washington has a skilled and educated workforce. By 2025, WJI will place at least 3,150 residents in quality jobs. WJI will invest in education and training pathways that are industry-led and demand-driven, embed paid work-based learning, and help Washington residents secure a career pathway that leads to a good job with a family-sustaining wage.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the Good Jobs Challenge?

The Good Jobs Challenge (GJC), one of EDA’s six innovative American Rescue Plan programs, made \$500 million available to help train Americans for good jobs. GJC will support the development and strengthening of regional workforce training systems and sectoral partnerships. These systems and partnerships will create and implement industry-driven training programs, connecting unemployed, underemployed, or under-skilled workers to existing and emerging job openings. These systems will equip workers with the skills they need to secure quality jobs that provide good pay, benefits, and growth opportunities.

### What is the Washington Jobs Initiative?

The Washington Jobs Initiative (WJI) is Washington’s response to the EDA’s Good Jobs Challenge (GJC). WJI will ensure that at least 5,000 Washington residents receive training and education and 3,150 are placed in a good job. WJI will leverage existing Career Connect Washington partnerships and programs to meet this goal by 2025. WJI will create competitive awards that invest in industry sector partnerships to recruit, provide training, and embed paid work-based learning. These supports will help Washington residents find a career pathway that leads to a job with a family-sustaining wage.

### How is WJI different from other CCW funding opportunities?

This funding will be competitively awarded to industry sector partnerships. The partnerships will design and implement training in collaboration with employers to meet their hiring needs. This funding is not confined to a particular program and does not have participant eligibility criteria. The funding is available for recruitment, registered apprenticeships, and other “earn and learn” training models, as well as upskilling and wraparound supports. The goal is to place 3,150 individuals into good jobs with family-sustaining wages.

## What types of activities are allowed?

WJI will competitively award grants to fund workforce development activities through industry sector partnerships. Funds will be awarded for either **Program Implementation** or **Program Design and Implementation**.

- **Program Implementation**
  - Must operate an existing program
  - Recruit underserved workers who are unemployed or underemployed to join a program
  - Deliver skills training
  - Provide wraparound supports
  - Place participants in jobs
  
- **Program Design and Implementation**
  - Employers identify hiring needs
  - Employers identify skills needed
  - Industry sectors and regional partnerships develop demand-driven strategies
  - Design training model and curriculum
  - Organize community partners for wraparound supports
  - Develop strategies for closing equity gaps
  - Implementation (above)

## What is a Sectoral Partnership?

A “**sectoral partnership**” or an “**industry sector partnership**” is a partnership of employers from the same industry who join with other strategic partners to train and place workers into high-quality jobs. These are jobs that employers need filled and intend to fill through the partnership. The strategic partners can include government, education (including community and technical colleges), training organizations, economic development organizations, workforce development organizations, unions, labor-management partnerships, industry associations, employer-serving organizations, and/or community-based organizations.

A sectoral partnership is focused on one specific industry or functional area and one or more specific roles within that industry. Sectoral partnerships are effective because:

- they are carefully built to include all necessary partners before workforce solutions are designed;
- they cut across traditional economic development, workforce, education, and social services system silos;
- they are targeted to in-demand sectors with high-quality jobs;
- and they consider the economic realities of a regional industry in assessing workforce demand and training needs.

Sectoral partnerships increase the chance of job placement after program completion given their connection to real-time employer demand. The lead entity of a sectoral partnership is called a “Backbone Organization.”

## What is a “Backbone Organization”?

A **Backbone Organization** leads and convenes one sectoral partnership. A strong Backbone Organization for each partnership is key to a successful system. An effective Backbone Organization will have some or all of the following characteristics:

- Committed support of the executive leadership from the region and buy-in from appropriate stakeholders (e.g., mayors or chief executives of a jurisdiction, chief executives of major employers, heads of labor unions, presidents of two- and four-year institutions of higher education, etc.).
- Relationships and credibility with stakeholders in the workforce system, including employers, governmental entities, state or local workforce development boards, educational institutions, labor organizations, community-based organizations, and worker-serving organizations.
- A proven track record of coordinating across sectors and driving stakeholders to successful action.
- Strong fundraising capabilities and/or connection to a system with strong fundraising capabilities.

The Backbone Organization will be the lead applicant to ESD for WJI funding.

## What entities are eligible for funding and can serve as a Backbone Organization?

Eligible applicants are EDA-eligible entities for investment assistance which includes:

- District Organization;
- Indian Tribe or a consortium of Indian Tribes;
- State, county, city, or other political subdivision of a State, including a special purpose unit of a State or local government engaged in economic or infrastructure development activities, or a consortium of political subdivisions;
- Institution of higher education or a consortium of institutions of higher education; or
- Public or private non-profit organization or association, including labor unions acting in cooperation with officials of a political subdivision of a State.

Any of the entities listed above can serve as a Backbone Organization.

## What is a quality job or a good-paying job?

A quality job (or good-paying job) will be considered one that provides the minimum income needed to meet necessities such as food, housing, transportation, health care, and child services in a given area. A quality job should also include basic benefits (e.g., paid leave, health insurance, retirement/savings plan), may be unionized, and help the employee develop the skills and experiences necessary to advance along a career path. A quality job is also one that exceeds the local prevailing wage for an industry in the region; a prevailing wage is defined by the Department of Labor as “the average wage paid to similarly employed workers in a specific occupation in the area of intended employment.”

## What does equity mean in the context of WJI?

Priority and focus will be given to individuals and communities kept furthest from opportunity, including but not limited to: women, black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC); LGBTQIA2S+ individuals; individuals with disabilities; low-income individuals; and other Washingtonians disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Equity is defined in EDA's [Investment Priorities](#) as projects or programs that directly benefit:

1. one or more traditionally [underserved populations](#) (PDF), including but not limited to women; Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American, Asian American, and Pacific Islander individuals; or
2. underserved communities within geographies that have been systemically and/or systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic prosperity such as Tribal Lands, [Persistent Poverty Counties](#) (XLSX), and rural areas with demonstrated, historical underservice.

## Are funds available for designing and building new programs?

The priority for WJI funds will be to support industry sector partnerships that will recruit, train, and place individuals in jobs. Funding may also be used to support designing and/or growing current programs in conjunction with training and job placement.

## What project costs are eligible for funding under WJI?

WJI funding will support the recruitment, training, education, placement, and retention of a participant, including wraparound supports, which may include childcare, transportation, language support, access to technology, financial coaching, and career navigation. Staffing costs, equipment costs, expenses related to securing adequate space (e.g., rent, leases), and other non-construction capital expenses, may also be considered.

## What is the maximum grant award?

Award levels will be scaled to each proposal, considering the proposed industry and the jobs anticipated. The total funding currently available to sectoral partnerships is \$15.5 million.

## How long are awards granted?

Awards will be made available for up to two years.

# Additional Questions Asked by Grant Applicants

## **The solicitation identifies \$500,000 to \$2 million in available funds, but the FAQ document identified up to \$15 million. Which is correct?**

The current total amount of federal funding available statewide is \$15.5 million. This amount will support sectoral partnerships across all ten industry sectors. We estimate individual sub-awards could range from \$500,000 to \$2 million.

## **Should we work through our sector lead to apply?**

We encourage you to connect with your sector leader if you haven't done so already.

## **Would involvement with two applications be possible – with us originating one and the other signing on as a supporter?**

Involvement in multiple applications is allowed. However, as we receive and review Letters of Intent to Bid, we may identify natural opportunities for emerging sectoral partnerships to join efforts. If there are opportunities to centralize the administrative burden at a single Backbone Organization and free up more funding for programming and services, we will consider that with our partners.

## **Can funds be used to help offset salaries for individuals who are participating in the program?**

No. Employment or wage subsidies are not allowable costs under this funding.

## **What wraparound supports are allowed?**

The EDA has provided two sources of guidance and definitions on wraparound supports, both of which are linked in the Grant Solicitation on page 20 ([EDA Workforce Data Collection Instrument](#) and [EDA Workforce Data Collection Instrument Terms and Definitions](#)):

**EDA Wraparound Services Definition:** Wraparound services or “participant support costs” are important services that mitigate barriers to employment for trainees, students, and workers to help them complete workforce training activities. Examples of costs that are necessary for participation in the program include, but are not limited to, transportation, language support, financial coaching, childcare, career navigation and coaching, and access to technology. Please note costs such as work stipends or wage subsidies are not allowable under the Good Jobs Challenge.

**The Data Collection Instrument lists the following “Reportable Wraparound Services”:**

- Transportation
- Childcare
- Health Services
- Legal Services
- Counseling
- Education Services
- Clothing
- Laptops

- Wi-Fi
- Other learning equipment
- Work Supplies
- Financial and budgeting resources
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

The list is broad and there is flexibility to provide critical supports based on the needs identified by your Sectoral Partnership and your PEAR Action Plan. Services must be necessary, reasonable, and allocable to the WJI. They must also meet the definition of Participant Support Costs (i.e., comply with the Uniform Guidance and are necessary for an individual to participate in training and job placement) to be allowable activities.

### **Can an institution of higher education apply for funding as the Backbone Organization if it only has one program that is endorsed as career launch?**

Public institutions of higher education meet the eligibility requirements of a Backbone Organization (see page 9 of the [Grant Solicitation](#) for a full list of EDA-eligible entities). There is no minimum or maximum number of Career Launch programs – and allowable activities include both program building and program operation. This funding may support students if the funding provides training that leads to job placement in living-wage careers and it is in one of the high-demand industry sectors.

### **How do we navigate this RFA to find partners and opportunities?**

Contact the [Regional Networks](#) to align with emerging projects in the region(s) in which you operate. We also encourage you to contact [Sector Leaders](#), and review their sector strategies, if there are any specific industry-based programs or employer partnerships you wish to further explore or develop. As we receive and review Letters of Intent to Bid, we will provide technical assistance and offer partnership opportunities to emerging Sectoral Partnerships. You can also contact [careerpathways@washingtonstem.org](mailto:careerpathways@washingtonstem.org) for assistance.

### **Is the \$45/hr average wage expected to be across the entire State for the placement outcome, or for each individual application/proposal for funding? If it is for the State, how will this be accounted for in the proposal scoring/investment strategy across the multiple proposals?**

The \$45 per hour wage is a statewide target for the Washington Jobs Initiative (WJI). Applicable federal guidance defines a “Good Job” (the job placement outcome) as “a job that exceeds the local prevailing wage for an industry in the region, includes basic benefits (e.g., paid leave, health insurance, retirement/savings plan), and/or is unionized, and helps the employee develop the skills and experiences necessary to advance along a career path.” This guidance defines “Prevailing Wage” per USDOL as “the average wage paid to similarly employed workers in a specific occupation in the area of intended employment.”

In addition to carrying forward the federal guidance regarding good jobs and prevailing wages, our goal is to build and operate demand-driven career-connected learning programs that prepare students kept furthest from opportunity for direct placement into living-wage careers. Our decision-making process will be centered on industry demand and on equity – for underserved populations, across regions, and

across industries. The review committee will consider proposals in light of the \$45/hr overall goal and will consider additional factors as well.

### **Is a for-profit entity eligible to be a funded partner based on the requirements?**

Based on federal guidance, Backbone Organizations could contract with training and job placement providers in the same way as a WIOA provider. If for-profit organizations are under contract, the Backbone Organization will be responsible for all oversight and reporting, as with a WIOA. But this entity cannot be named on an application to ESD. Either a new procurement will be required or it must be demonstrated that the additional services provided under the WJI funds are allowable with the scope of the initial procurement.

### **What counts as a job placement? For example, would training for an individual in a lower wage job to enter a higher wage job within the same organization count as a placement?**

Training a lower wage job to enter a higher wage job could meet the federal minimum requirements of a job placement. The purpose of the WJI is to build and operate demand-driven training programs, like Career Launch and Registered Apprenticeships, that prepare individuals for jobs with family-sustaining wages. Our review committee has the right to prioritize funding programs that align with this purpose.

[Applicable federal guidance](#) defines a “Good Job” (the job placement outcome) as “a job that exceeds the local prevailing wage for an industry in the region, includes basic benefits (e.g., paid leave, health insurance, retirement/savings plan), and/or is unionized, and helps the employee develop the skills and experiences necessary to advance along a career path.” This guidance defines “Prevailing Wage” per USDOL as “the average wage paid to similarly employed workers in a specific occupation in the area of intended employment.”

### **How many placements are you expecting each project to provide?**

We do not have a set number of placements per project. Our grant solicitation suggests that between \$500,000 and \$2 million could be the initial planning range. Our goal is to place 3,150 individuals into good jobs, and we have \$15.5 million to award, which come out to a little less than \$5,000 per job placement. Of course, actual service costs will vary significantly, and members of a Sectoral Partnership should consider leveraging resources. But \$5,000 per placement may be a good planning benchmark.

### **Are the PEAR steps listed for WA State government agencies only? Or will these steps be required for selected sub-awardees?**

The guidance and resources offered by the State Office of Equity are excellent – but optional. Requirements of Sectoral Partnership PEAR Action Plans are detailed in the [Grant Solicitation](#)’s Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Action Plan section on pages 5 and 6.

The PEAR Action Plan must identify:

- 1) target populations to be served; and
- 2) the actions to be taken by the Sectoral Partnership to ensure those populations have equitable access to, and outcomes from, programs and services.

We also require a five-step process modeled on the Office of Equity's best practices. This five-step process is required so that we ensure our community has real opportunities for ongoing co-design.

A Sectoral Partnership is free to use their preferred models for pro-equity anti-racist work, provided that the model and resulting Action Plan meets the requirements outlined in the Grant Solicitation. They're welcome to adapt Office of Equity resources, just as we did, if those meet the needs of their community. They're also welcome to explore other models.

### **Are capital expenses are allowed?**

Wraparound Support Services included under these guidelines allows for purchases of transportation, resources, and services.

This federal award does allow non-construction capital costs, but construction costs are not. For example, "Equipment costs, expenses related to securing adequate space (e.g., rent, leases), and other non-construction capital expenses are allowable expenses under this program. Building-based construction projects (i.e., any activity that disturbs the ground or modifies a structure) are not eligible under this NOFO." [2CFR-FrequentlyAskedQuestions\\_2021050321.pdf \(cfo.gov\)](#)