

**Partnership Name:** ELEVATE-Empowering Learners to Excel through Vocation Advancement, Training and Education

**Application Point of Contact:** Russell Dorsey and Rachel Strachan

[rdorsey@everettcc.edu](mailto:rdorsey@everettcc.edu) & [rstrachan@everettcc.edu](mailto:rstrachan@everettcc.edu)

**Fiscal Agent:** Evergreen Goodwill of Northwest Washington

[Lily.Istrate@evergreengoodwill.org](mailto:Lily.Istrate@evergreengoodwill.org)

## **1. Why are the partner organizations that are or will be included in this work the ones that came together to address educational attainment through place-based work in your region?**

Evergreen Goodwill of Northwest Washington (EG) is the 501c3 nonprofit that the Snohomish County Job Training and Education Center (SnoCo JTEC) is included within. EG will be the fiscal lead for this project. The SnoCo JTEC is one site where services are delivered throughout EG's five county territory. SnoCo JTEC and Everett Community College (EvCC) have crossed paths in the past through outreach efforts to inform SnoCo JTEC participants of educational opportunities at EvCC as well as partnership to support youth in EG's Youth Aerospace Program. Both organizations have similar goals; EG's mission is to provide quality, effective employment training and basic education to individuals experiencing significant barriers to economic opportunity. Because jobs change lives. EvCC's mission is to educate, equip, and inspire each student to achieve personal and professional goals, contribute to our diverse communities, and thrive in a global society.

Not only do our goals for education, training, and job readiness closely align, we also have some overlapping curricula as well as similar populations served. Through conversation, we found that there are great opportunities to connect existing structures and create pathways for adult learners to more easily obtain post-secondary credentials, starting with the free classes offered at the SnoCo JTEC and transitioning to obtaining post-secondary credentials at EvCC. SnoCo JTEC's Job Readiness Training, General Education Development (GED), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses routinely fill all available registration spaces within the first day of sign-ups. This shows a high need within the community for training and certification programs. Multiple courses at SnoCo JTEC align with prerequisite classes for certificate programs at EvCC within the Early Childhood Education, Healthcare and Business pathways. Further, SnoCo JTEC serves individuals with multiple barriers to economic opportunity, including unemployment, poverty, disability, language barriers, and more. A high percentage of SnoCo JTEC students are low-income, first generation college students, SNAP/TANF recipients and/or receiving unemployment benefits which would mean nearly all SnoCo JTEC students would be eligible for tuition assistance at EvCC. EvCC is working to ensure that students are able to enroll, persist and succeed in certificate and degree programs in efforts to close all 3-year completion gaps. Creating this partnership with SnoCo JTEC would be another step towards achieving that goal.

## **2. How is or will the partnership be structured?**

During the grant period, EG's SnoCo JTEC and EvCC will largely focus on enhancing current responsibilities and creating new opportunities together. Though EG will serve as the fiscal lead, all decision-making will be collaborative. We will gather perspectives from all parties, discuss as a group, and make decisions together. EG's SnoCo JTEC will continue to offer and teach its current courses on site, continuing with their current schedule which consists of five, eight-week long course sessions. EG will be the fiscal lead. Lily Istrate Hart will be the primary fiscal contact on behalf of EG. Tania Siler is the manager of SnoCo JTEC. Tania will also be on the project team and will provide oversight of any grant related support implemented at the SnoCo JTEC site. Russell Dorsey and Rachel Strachan will be the main points of contact throughout the project and will facilitate and communicate any work being done within EvCC including holding information sessions and workshops, and support navigation towards EvCC resources. EvCC will evaluate EG course content and create a Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) process for qualifying courses. Dr. Cathy Leaker, Vice President of Instruction, and Business faculty Teresa Markovitz, will support the CPL process with EvCC. Our nonprofit and industry partners will provide input and feedback regularly on the planning process.

Our partnership will collaborate through regular, bi-weekly, planning and development meetings and will work together to outreach to additional community partners throughout the first year. Partners we hope to engage include Volunteers of America Western Washington (VOAWW), Keep Dreams Alive, Ventures - Snohomish, LETI, Madres, and Tulalip Tribes, among others. VOAWW provides community supportive services. Keep Dreams Alive focuses on increasing the rate of postsecondary attainment for Hispanic students, including support with financial aid and scholarship applications. Ventures supports entrepreneurship through microloans, business assistance, and provides services in Spanish. LETI serves

first- and second- generation Latinos to realize their full educational and employment potential despite the overwhelming disparities and inequities experienced daily. MADRES empowers the Hispanic community through education and community service. The Tulalip Tribes serve more than 5,100 tribal members and assist with obtaining access to education, housing, and healthcare. While we already have several partners we hope to be able to engage, we will take time to outreach widely in our community to ensure we can bring in all the partners and community members that would make the greatest impact to our shared postsecondary attainment goals. We will aim to serve individuals with multilingual assets, who are legally involved, first generation adult learners, individuals experiencing low-income, unemployment, or are refugees or asylees.

Funds will be used to support EG staff hours spent doing this work. We intend to either hire, or pay the hourly rate for, advising/counseling from EvCC faculty as well as faculty or staff to evaluate SnoCo JTEC courses for CPL as well as spend time teaching SnoCo JTEC staff how to evaluate transcripts as assist with college readiness and application navigation.

### **3. How have or will the partner organizations learn from each other and the communities served, and how does or will the partnership incorporate this learning into ongoing work?**

In efforts to learn about the community as well as to learn about educational and industry training needs, SnoCo JTEC and EvCC will coordinate efforts with current work taking place at EvCC that has been collecting similar data, including but not limited to Title III, Worker Retraining Advisory Committee (WRAC) and the Perkins/Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA) team. We will also use data and feedback from EvCC's Adult Learners Task Force (ALTF) to ensure we have awareness of adult learners' needs and current supports on EvCC's campus. In addition to assessing needs within EvCC, these existing teams collect data and engage local industry partners to assess hiring trends, desired skills and other workforce needs.

EG's Community Needs Assessment (CNA) includes interviews with both community members participating in the program as well as community industry partners and describes what needs remain unmet in our communities, and how labor market trends can guide the design of our work to increase economic prosperity for all members of our communities. SnoCo JTEC staff will also provide qualitative and quantitative data on experience from the instruction, case management, and employment support perspective.

In efforts to continue to learn directly from the communities we serve, we will integrate several focus groups with current and/or prior students of both institutions. We will conduct these focus groups with the intent of gaining an understanding of what opportunities we need to focus on in order to improve educational services and create a smooth transition to EvCC programs. We will seek to reduce their barriers to participation in focus groups (for example, support with transportation, childcare, or food, if possible). Current anticipated areas of focus include certificates from the Business Technology department, Healthcare/Health Sciences, and Early Childhood Education. These programs are being discussed as options as they are all linked to jobs that are in high demand in Snohomish County, all are eligible for tuition funding at EvCC and all include prerequisites that align with courses already being taught at SnoCo JTEC. All of these certificate programs would be strong options for students with multilingual assets specifically.

The information learned through collaboration with existing teams as well as through focus groups will guide our decision-making throughout the entirety of this project. We plan to adjust our supports to meet the needs mentioned by previous and current students. Before making decisions, we intend to focus at least one meeting, if not more, prior to each decision solely on assessing data and feedback. Decisions guided by students might include things such as hours that advising is available, modality that advising is provided, modality that content is taught, supplies purchased for physical spaces, methods of transportation provided, etc.

### **4. Who are the focal population(s) in your partnership's work, and what assets do learners and families in these populations bring to their educational journeys?**

The focal population in our partnership's work will include adult learners, individuals with multilingual assets, and/or who are experiencing unemployment, poverty, or other systemic barriers. Individuals who speak two or more languages or are improving their English skills have an incredible asset that would benefit many employers. Individuals with multilingual assets can provide interpretation and translation to multilingual customers, which enhances an organization's ability to serve diverse communities effectively. This is why we are seeking to explore pathways for careers that would benefit from multilingual employees.

EG serves individuals facing significant systemic barriers and helps them access the training and wraparound support services that help to reduce barriers and improve access to economic opportunity. Among the individuals served last year, 10% reported that they were experiencing homelessness and 70% were unemployed. While we serve students ranging in age from 16-80+, the average student is about 42 years old. Additionally, 77% are people of color, 35% have less than a high school diploma, 6% reported having one or more disabilities, and 4% are justice-involved. Approximately 70% of our students lacked adequate access to broadband speeds for internet-intensive activities. Seventy-five percent (75%) of students lived below the federal poverty line and earned an average annual individual income of \$7,249, and have an average household size of three. A majority of students are female (57%) and 48% of our students have a native language other than English. Approximately two-thirds of our students are immigrants or refugees.

Navigating systemic barriers creates significant strengths, including resilience, adaptability, determination, leadership, creativity, and resourcefulness. Participants coming from diverse cultural or linguistic backgrounds also enrich educational and employment settings through sharing their diverse perspectives.

EvCC also recognizes the many assets of adult learners and multilingual individuals. Headcounts from the 2022-2023 academic year showed that 38% of EvCC students were over the age of 25. If you excluded Running Start, College in the High School and our Continuing & Corporate Education Center, that percentage rose to 47%. Through qualitative analysis, EvCC knows that adult learners report strong levels of motivation and have years of prior experience navigating systems and managing schedules; all assets not only in education but in the workforce as well. Faculty members report that students frequently demonstrate that they want to be at school and they want to learn. This desire to show up and learn is a huge asset and gets our students to graduation all while working, sometimes multiple jobs, and caring for themselves and/or their families.

SnoCo JTEC has engaged our focal population to build an understanding of these assets through our instructors, case manager, and employment specialist building strong relationships with our students, encouraging self-reflection, highlighting strengths and areas of growth through supportive feedback, and celebrating our students' successes. We also engage our community members through interviews for our regular CNA to understand how they are able to use their many assets to navigate systemic barriers in their educational journeys and how we can improve systems to reduce barriers.

EvCC has multiple departments that directly engage our community to build an understanding of their assets. The Workforce Funding department (represented in this group by Rachel Strachan) does a lot of focused work to support adult learners and provide funding to students who lack access to basic needs. Together, this partnership will continue to engage our learners to fully understand their assets and most effectively leverage their strengths and resources to support them in their educational and employment journeys.

## **5. What is the geographic region where the focal population(s) that would be served by this investment live?**

Put simply, the geographic location where the focal population will be served is throughout Snohomish County, though most students will likely be from Everett, Lynnwood, Marysville, Bothell, Monroe, Snohomish, Tulalip Bay, and Arlington.

However, in addressing the geographic region where the focal populations live, it is important to recognize the diverse nature of Snohomish County. The region encompasses a mix of rural, urban, and

suburban areas, reflecting a wide range of pre-existing boundaries and geographical considerations. This includes not only the distinct municipalities within the county but also variations in landscapes, neighborhoods, and cultural boundaries including Tribal Land.

## **6. What are some of the systemic barriers that learners and families in your focal population(s) encounter?**

Through direct outreach and data collection conducted during the CNA as well as data collected from Workforce Funding applications at EvCC, we have learned that learners in our local population encounter socioeconomic disparities, structural racism, language and cultural barriers, and lack of equitable access to critical resources like education, employment, healthcare, housing, and more. Within the region where our students live, there is a large variation of wealth represented. Downtown Everett has a range of million-dollar historical homes to low-income apartment housing all within a five-minute drive of each other. This theme can be observed in much of our region. While not unique to Snohomish County, many of our students face barriers related to the cost of stable and safe housing. Close proximity to social services means we work with many folks who need more support but who are waiting for understaffed and underfunded programs to have capacity to help them. Oftentimes, folks are on waiting lists for months or years before receiving access to housing or other support programs.

Further, our more rural learners are impacted by a lack of resources in their community, as well as insufficient access to public transportation to urban areas with more resources. Nearly all of our learners are impacted by the digital divide. Lack of access to high-speed internet, quality computers, and foundational digital literacy skills greatly impacts our focal population's ability to navigate resources. This further exacerbates existing inequalities as digital skills are critical to navigating our digital world in education, employment, and meeting basic needs like housing and healthcare.

## **7. What work do you propose undertaking during the granting period?**

Our goal is to connect students who already are pursuing training at SnoCo JTEC to related post secondary credentials at EvCC. We anticipate focusing on partnership and program formation as well as engaging additional localized nonprofit organizations and industry partners to better serve the clients/students that we work with. We will create a cohort of students from SnoCo JTEC for each of the selected programs that work within both of our organizations and create a structure for the cohort that allows them to transition smoothly from SnoCo JTEC classes all the way to credential completion at EvCC. Students will have the option to pursue certifications or continue into 2-year degree programs. This will require building a scaffold between SnoCo JTEC classes and EvCC college classes with individualized one-on-one support throughout the transition with trusted community instructors and certificate/degree programs at EvCC.

The partnership will assess SnoCo JTEC Digital Skills and Job Readiness courses to find alignment with EvCC prerequisites and will create a process to award CPL to folks who complete qualifying Evergreen Goodwill courses. We know through data collected by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) that students who are awarded CPL for skills learned outside of a college setting are 17% more likely to complete post secondary certification programs than those who aren't.

Our first year will be primarily focused on assessment and development. We will begin with implementation as soon as structures fall into place, likely in the latter half of the year. Timelines are flexible and once evaluated, we can start awarding CPL as soon as SnoCo JTEC courses are approved. Since we already have an idea of which programs at EvCC align with courses offered at SnoCo JTEC, we can begin transitioning students to EvCC before identifying and assigning cohorts if the students so wish.

We will focus on short-term credentials like childhood education, business technology, and medical assisting, all of which are in high demand in the Snohomish County job market. Students with multilingual assets are priority populations for this work and language skills are an incredible asset to both of these industries. We will also explore partnerships to expand entrepreneurship opportunities so individuals can, for example, pursue owning their own childcare business.

We will engage with current SnoCo JTEC students to learn what their goals for education are and how we can support them in achieving those goals. We acknowledge that students are the most acutely aware of their own needs and we will use focus groups and collect qualitative data to guide what supports we provide to students. Our ultimate goals are to increase enrollment of adults returning to education, to increase postsecondary credential completion rates, and to help connect individuals to employment in a career pathway tied to their postsecondary credentials. Action items we anticipate focusing on include increasing access to FAFSA/WASFA applications specialists who are multilingual at locations that students already gather at, assisting students through the college application process, assisting students with accessing grant funding for college classes/supplies, and providing additional support and advising for students who are navigating the college system often for the first time.

Finally, in efforts to respond to the need for a sense of belonging for “non-traditional” learners, EvCC will create a space on campus where adult learners can go to destress, complete homework, cultivate relationships with other adult learners and gain access to resources tailored to them. In this space, we will provide laptops, hotspots and other supplies (as identified in focus groups with students) to create a lending library and/or lab space for adult learners while they are pursuing postsecondary credentials. We will work to make this a welcoming space where adult learners and families feel welcome. Ideally, the space will have comfortable seating, art, a kids corner, charging stations and more. If needed, we will also provide these supplies at the SnoCo JTEC site. We have learned through qualitative data that in order for adult learners to want to attend a college, we have to make the college a space that clearly welcomes and supports them.

#### **8. How will this proposed work contribute to increasing educational attainment for the focal population(s) in your region?**

This proposed work will develop a clear on-ramp for adults in Snohomish County experiencing barriers to educational access and economic opportunity to enroll, persist, and succeed at earning postsecondary credentials at EvCC. We will use the majority of the first grant year to thoroughly learn and understand the current barriers experienced by SnoCo JTEC students and other community members to postsecondary success, and create a detailed plan to reduce barriers and meet individuals where they are to ease their transition into college.

Our partnership will have EvCC faculty evaluate the SnoCo JTEC courses to approve and award CPL. In addition, trusted instructors with whom students have already built a relationship with through their prior training at SnoCo JTEC will create and teach a new course called "Introduction to College" which will teach based college preparation skills. We will explore the possibility of using Goodwill's Digital Equity Bus in more rural areas for students who can't access the SnoCo JTEC. These classes will review FAFSA and WAFSA and cover a variety of college readiness curriculum. Awarding CPL and assisting students as they navigate through the application and pre-college process is key in increasing educational attainment for the community. CPL saves students time and money and is shown to increase retention and completion rates.

Another critical component of the first year will be measuring progress towards our goals, measuring leadership and engagement of the community, measuring our ability to reach students furthest from opportunity, and the impact achieved. We will complete this work with an equity and antiracist lens throughout the entire project at every level. We will also ensure that community voice is embedded into the proposed work every step of the way.