

Partnership Name (if applicable): Kitsap Strong

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Fiscal Agent: Kitsap Community Resources

Applicants must submit the [Letter of Interest Submission Form](#) and upload to the form a Letter of Interest as a PDF attachment **no later than February 16, 2024 by 11:59PM Pacific Time**. To ensure formatting aligns with the below guidelines, we encourage applicants to make use of this Letter of Interest template.

A Letter of Interest must adhere to the following guidelines:

- No more than five pages in total length, excluding the cover page
- Cover page identifies:
 - o Partnership name (If applicable)
 - o Application point of contact
 - o Name of the organization that will act as fiscal agent
- All bolded questions are numbered and answered serially (see pgs. 6-8 in the Request for Letters of Interest)
- Responses are single spaced in Times New Roman 11-point font

Note: All LOIs submitted to WSAC will be publicly available on the WSAC website in advance of the recommendations made to Council (est. May 2024).

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?

[Kitsap Strong](#) is a place-based partnership of more than 110 organizations that are collectively working together, grounded in the latest research, to transform systems so that we can improve the quality of life in Kitsap County for all people. More specifically, to improve the well-being and educational attainment of Kitsap residents, through a focus on empowerment and equity, the prevention of ACEs and the building of resilience. Kitsap Strong employs the following over-arching strategies to ensure that all children and youth in our community have the capabilities, connections, and credentials they need to flourish: Empowering school and life success through equitable opportunities; Building a culture of empathy, equity, and connection; Sharing the latest brain science; Promoting nutrition and physical health; Neighbors supporting one another.

Kitsap Strong (KS) began in 2013 as a collective impact project focused on alleviating intergenerational poverty. The partnership's original effort originated with four core funders/founders -- Kitsap Community Foundation, the Suquamish Tribe, Kitsap Public Health District, and the United Way of Kitsap County. They committed \$1,000,000+ to this effort and spent a year seeking community input on how to address this complex social issue.

Our network partners serve the entire community of Kitsap County as well as North Mason County, including roughly 35,000 K12 students and their families, through the development of shared knowledge, insight, strategies, and relationships between schools and community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide equitable and trauma-informed services. The benefits of a trauma-informed community are layered, as conditions and outcomes improve for all clients/students served and for the staff/teachers providing the services. We focus on organizational culture change and on connecting the siloed services through our many network activities and shared learning experiences. To transform systems, we must change mental models guiding the rules, incentives, and outcomes. We use a framework focused on building a shared language and understanding of the latest scientific knowledge about behavior, inequity, trauma, hope, & resilience to drive insight (perspective change). Once system leaders exhibit new insights, through their questions or actions, we focus on developing new science-informed strategies, and help facilitate the adoption of new structures (policies & procedures) that institute a culture of trauma-informed and equitable services.

Our partnership is complex and multi-faceted, because building a trauma-informed community and addressing inequity in education are complex. As Michael Unger, the world's leading researcher on community resilience indicates, we must "keep solutions as complex as the problems you seek to solve." So please consider the complexity of our project as a strength, not a limitation.

2. How is or will the partnership be structured?

Kitsap Strong is modeled after the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Self-Healing Communities Model which is based on the community-level impact of the "Community Public Health and Safety Networks" in WA State from 1994-2011. This model of community engagement led to significant reductions at a population-level of top health concerns – teen pregnancy, youth substance abuse, child abuse and neglect referrals, domestic violence, child injury hospitalizations, and infant mortality – over a 10 plus year implementation. These changes require dedicated and consistent staffing and funding over an extended time to reach the desired outcomes.

Early efforts to create the infrastructure necessary for the movement saw the formation of a Leadership Committee (LC) of diverse stakeholders and initial staffing for the project. Since then, Kitsap Strong has built out the initiative facilitated through a designated backbone staff working to support the Common Agenda- to improve the well-being and educational attainment of Kitsap residents, through a focus on empowerment and equity, the prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and the building of resilience. The layered approach within the network, with partners engaging in both "systems change and transformation" efforts through Collaborative Learning Academies (CLA) and Communities of Practice (CoP) and direct service strategies focused on "future bound" efforts through programs such as, Welcome to Your Future, Career and College events, and Financial Aid and Scholarship assistance creates the conditions necessary for more equitable education outcomes.

We believe that every system is performing exactly as it was designed, and through a collective approach we can transform systems to ensure each student has the capabilities, connections, and credentials they need to flourish in our community. Fundamental to many of Kitsap Strong’s strategies is the notion of “meeting people where they are.” While we invest a lot of resources in our schools to be the “place” youth and families engage in future bound activities, for various reasons, that is not always the case. “Meeting people where they are” for services and support related to their future bound vision sometimes involves engaging the other caring adults in their lives outside of the school setting (youth development programs, faith-based centers, youth sports, other community spaces, etc.).

By nature, the Kitsap Strong place-based partnership is focused on local community with multi-sector representation across the initiative. Historically, the multi-sector representation and model of operation of creating a trauma informed/resilient community focused primarily on organizational capacity building related to shifting mindsets, policies, practices, using science to guide the initiative. Over time, the initiative has evolved to a more intentional focus on “shifting power” referenced in the community engagement spectrum (adapted from the International Association for Public Participation) where there is intentional inclusion of informal community leaders and community members with lived experiences (including youth and parents) to convene and strategize with agency heads and formal leaders to lean in on the notion of “local” problem solving to approach complex community challenges.

Research indicates that trauma-informed approaches can significantly improve outcomes for all students, and more importantly reduce inequities for low-income, special education, and BIPOC students. To disrupt inequities, we must acknowledge that systems (e.g., education, healthcare, housing, employment) are not broken, but are performing exactly as designed. To address this, we facilitate crucial conversations and learning among network partners and focus on the leverage points and solutions that can improve outcomes. We help facilitate innovative thinking to transform systems and outcomes through a new understanding of problems, the development of new services, and creation of new connections between existing resources. As a funder and convenor, we acknowledge that we play a role in maintaining the status quo through how we make funding decisions and facilitate conversations. We aim to invest in the learning, relationship-building, and organizational transformation that is required to improve equity in our community.

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?

A primary focus of the network is sharing the innovative brain science with leadership teams, and to inspire bold actions. To this end, Kitsap Strong has organized and facilitated five cohorts (264 individuals representing over 50 schools/orgs in Kitsap and North Mason) to participate in a year-long Collaborative Learning Academy (CLA). Each CLA brings organizations and school teams together (10+ times over the course of a year) to focus on: (1) learning the NEAR (neuroscience, epigenetics, ACEs and resilience) sciences and inspiring changes to their org's culture, policies, services, etc. to be trauma-informed and (2) promoting collaboration between teams in the CLA. Kitsap Strong has provided training in brain science and resiliency to over 8,000 individuals and facilitated the training of 26 trauma-informed care trainers (train the trainer model). We estimate that over 260,000 individuals have interacted with organizations engaged in learning this science and participants routinely indicate how the science has changed their lives in profound ways, impacting how they provide services and even how they parent.

To date, over 110 nonprofits, social service agencies, faith groups, government agencies, and schools are actively involved in the collective movement of Kitsap Strong working collaboratively to improve educational attainment for both youth and adults, share the latest science on human behavior and brain development, the Science of Hope as a strategy to develop resilience, and improve the physical and behavioral health of all Kitsap residents. Through regular network meetings, CLAs, Community of Practice’s (CoPs), community trainings, and leadership opportunities, these community leaders take a deep dive into the science and share what they have learned with their colleagues, thereby changing the way these organizations operate at a core level to become more trauma-informed and hope-centered.

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 scope of the Kitsap Strong partnership region includes 6 school districts, 1 sovereign tribal school, a K-9 charter school, and a primary institution of higher education (CTC). Enrollment within those entities has steadily decreased in recent years with dramatic drops across the districts during the Covid pandemic (from approx. 39,000 in 20/21 to 37,000 in 21/22). The region's free and reduced lunch percent is 39%, with one district as low as 9% (Bainbridge Island) and 1 district as high as 69% (Bremerton). The region is predominantly white (61%), with most districts in the mid-60's range and the most diverse district, Bremerton, reporting 47% white. As a region the highest non-white racial demographic is Hispanic (16%) with two districts reporting roughly 25% Hispanic (Bremerton and North Mason). ELL students in the region make up about 5% and students with disabilities about 16%.

The 2022 graduation rate for the region was roughly 86% with ranges from a low of 65% (Bremerton) to a high of 92% (Bainbridge). Disparities for graduation rates occur for most subpopulations, with some more prominent than others. For example, the 2021 graduation rate for free and reduced lunch students for the region was only 70% compared to the overall rate of 82%. We see similar gaps with regard to racial demographics across the region.

Class of 2023 financial aid filing rates for the region vary between districts with a high of 61% (Bainbridge) and a low of 32% (North Mason). The regional rate for Kitsap was 48.4%. We saw significant increases from prior year filing rates where targeted assistance efforts occurred with 5 schools exceeding the state filing rate (51%). When examining disparities between racial demographic groups as a region we see gaps with Hispanic (3%) and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island (13%), however, some districts have very little or no gaps between the overall filing rate for the district and specific racial demographic groups.

Post-secondary enrollment rates direct from high school for the class of 2021 (ERDC) overall for the region was 48%, with ranges as low as 43% (North Mason) and as high as 78% (Bainbridge). The Post-secondary completion rate in the region for the class of 2014 (8-year lag in data on public ERDC data with last update in September of 2022) was 44% with ranges as low as 26% (Bremerton) and as high as 71% (Bainbridge).

Data from the latest administration of the Healthy Youth Survey (2021) demonstrates moderate levels of hope for youth in Kitsap County. Hope is the belief that the future can be better than the past, and that you play a role in making it so. Hope is a cognitive skill that can be modeled, developed, and practiced. The three components of hope are goals, pathways (waypower), and agency (willpower). Four questions from the research validated Children's Hope Scale were included in the HYS to measure levels of hope for youth in Washington State. Because hope can be taught and is connected to academic achievements, well-being, and positive life outcomes monitoring levels of hope as an indicator of the future bound success of youth should be a critical piece of the college and career support structure that students experience. In 2021, 43% of 10th grade students in Kitsap County reported being "highly hopeful," with 23% reporting "slightly hopeful" and 7% with "little or no hope." 10th grade students in Kitsap County have slightly lower levels of hope than 10th grade students in all of Washington and since 2018 (first time it was administered in HYS) we've seen slight decreases in levels of hope- which is somewhat expected with implications of the pandemic on youth.

Agencies involved in the partnership continue to develop and align institutional approaches, but community driven/designed strategies are emerging through intentional efforts to shift power. In Kitsap County there are many very small nonprofits providing culturally relevant services to youth and families and often struggle to make connections with and/or navigate educational institutions. Kitsap Strong is often in a position of bridging, convening, and/or introducing relationship building opportunities.

An additional example of intentional efforts related to the Kitsap Strong partnership's work aligned with the concept of "shifting power" involves a youth voice initiative that launched over the summer 2022. The goal of this initiative is to engage youth in identifying barriers to their future bound plans and for youth to develop/design strategies for support to address those barriers. Through the deep connections with community partners- particularly BIPOC led organizations providing culturally relevant services and support to youth and families, we administered surveys to provide quantitative data as well as conducted listening sessions to add to the richness of the data through a qualitative approach. The findings of both

mediums were analyzed (in part) by youth serving on a Future Bound Youth Council. The youth leadership group used the data/findings to present to policymakers and agency leads in Kitsap to inform new youth-led and designed supports for future bound activities. That work resulted in an interest from a local state legislator to co-develop policy recommendations to advocate for during the current legislative session. The primary strategy included in this proposal (through the Science of Hope) will impact both K12 youth, as well as adults, through the direct impact of equipping pivotal adults involved in helping design future bound goals for both youth and adults, with the science and tools related to hope, ultimately resulting in higher rates of post-secondary enrollment and completion.

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

The geographic scope of the Kitsap Strong partnership region includes 6 school districts, 1 sovereign tribal school, a K-9 charter school, and a primary institution of higher education (CTC) located within Kitsap and North Mason counties.

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

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are associated with a host of behavioral health issues that are detrimental to the community, both economically and in terms of quality of life. ACEs have a greater than 60% correlation with IV drug use, homelessness, mental illness, alcoholism, suicide ideation, and incarceration. As noted above, 37% of Kitsap County residents report having three or more ACEs. However, the effects of childhood trauma can be dramatically mitigated through resilience building and a trauma-informed, hope-centered approach. Research indicates that a trauma-informed, hope-centered approach has shown significant benefits in education (reductions in behavioral referrals 31%, expulsions 40%, and suspensions 83%), child welfare (reductions in foster care reentry 18%, reunification time 33%, and child mental health symptoms 43%), behavioral health (reductions in psychiatric hospitalizations 29%, seclusion/restraint 32%, staff turnover 35%, PTSD symptoms 65%, and substance abuse 86%), and criminal justice (reductions in inmate-on-inmate assault 54%, inmate suicide attempts 62%, and inmate-on-staff assault 65%) (CTIPP - Campaign for Trauma Informed Policy and Practice).

Our community challenges are complex and interconnected, so our efforts focus on developing complex solutions that address the most critical needs in our area. Building trauma-informed care policies and practices, increasing behavioral health support for children and their parents, developing healthy regulation and stress coping behaviors, etc. Kitsap County has a critical shortage of mental health providers, so we are working to build the capacity of natural helpers – grandmas, aunties, coaches, teachers, mentors, faith leaders – to notice and intervene to help all children flourish. The environments we create and the experiences we provide for young children and their families affect not just the developing brain, but also many other physiological systems. Poor health outcomes are not inevitable, but they are more likely if we do not adequately support children and families experiencing persistent hardships or challenges.

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

Prior success among our partners with specific program components has resulted in a desire to expand and/or scale the programs in addition to piloting some new aspects to existing efforts. Our proposal will center on the prior systems change work we've done through [Collaborative Learning Academies](#), as well as a statewide Science of Hope [Community of Practice pilot with OSPI](#). Specifically, the following programs are what this grant opportunity will scale in the region:

- Science of Hope integration via *Hope Navigator Training* (initial two-day training) for all interested K12 districts (target population is secondary counselors/career and college staff/CTE Directors) **{ENROLLMENT FOCUS for high school students}**
- Science of Hope integration via *Hope Navigator Training* (initial two-day training) for Olympic College (target population is all general and department advising staff, OC Promise, and “outreach staff”) **{ENROLLMENT & RETENTION FOCUS for incoming and current college students}**

- Science of Hope integration via *Hope Navigator Training* (initial two-day training) for relevant partner CBO's (target population is direct service staff providing culturally relevant support to youth and adults related to their future bound goals) **{ENROLLMENT & RETENTION FOCUS for high school and incoming and current college students}**
- Science of Hope *Community of Practice for Hope Navigators* to develop implementation and integration plans (once a month for all trained Navigators in K12, Higher Ed and CBOs) **{ENROLLMENT & RETENTION FOCUS for high school and college students}**
- Two-week "*Future Focused Summer Academy*" (target population is incoming 6th grade students) **{ENROLLMENT FOCUS}**
- Design and Implementation of pilot summer bridge programming at Olympic College for targeted student populations (EL, 1st gen, "undecided" students, etc.) **{ENROLLMENT & RETENTION FOCUS for incoming college students}**

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

The anticipated outcome(s) of the multi-faceted strategies of the Kitsap Strong collective impact movement is to increase the overall wellbeing and educational attainment of Kitsap residents. More specifically, increasing post-secondary enrollment and completion rates that are necessary for family wage careers for both youth and adults within Kitsap County while reducing gaps between demographic groups that have historically been underrepresented in those data. The goals of the multi-faceted strategy are to: 1) continue to strengthen and deepen the commitment to "trauma informed, hope-centered systems change" work within the cradle to career movement in Kitsap County and North Mason, 2) increase financial aid filing rates for graduating seniors in Kitsap County 3) increase the "direct from high school" post-secondary enrollment rates for youth in Kitsap County, 4) increase the post-secondary completion rates for youth and adults in Kitsap County, 5) increase levels of hope (a cognitive skill) among 6th grade students that participate in a summer program focused on career and college pathways.

Kitsap Strong's goal is to prevent ACEs in the next generation and mitigate the effects of ACEs in today's adults by building individual and community resilience while also supporting agencies and organizations to adopt a trauma-informed and hope-centered approach (understanding and recognizing that many of the people they serve experienced childhood trauma.) Kitsap Strong serves all of Kitsap and North Mason Counties, including areas with 46% of families receiving public assistance. The largest city in our region has been identified as one of the "locales with the consistently highest rates of child maltreatment" in Washington State. 37% of Kitsap residents reported having 3 or more ACEs. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are associated with a myriad of social and health problems including chronic health conditions (diabetes, asthma, heart disease, obesity), mental health challenges (depression, anxiety, PTSD, ADHD) and social conditions (unemployment or underemployment, homelessness, intergenerational poverty, poor academic performance, criminal activity, incarceration).

The Science of Hope research indicates that hope is a cognitive skill that can be taught and is connected to academic achievements, well-being, and positive life outcomes. In addition, (Gallagher et.al 2016) examined the "role of hope in predicting the achievement and retention of college students while controlling for educational history and two other psychological constructs, academic self-efficacy and engagement. Hope, self-efficacy, engagement were all correlated with both the number of semesters enrolled and cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) for the first 4 years of college. Hope was the only factor that had unique effects when examining predictors simultaneously and controlling for academic history. Hope uniquely predicted the number of enrolled semesters, whether students returned for the 2nd semester of college, whether students graduated in 4 years, and students' GPAs across 4 years of college. Results therefore indicate that hope was the most robust predictor of academic achievement in college after controlling for educational history. These findings point to a need to help students develop the capacity to initiate and sustain movement toward goals in the pursuit of higher academic achievement."