

**COVER PAGE**

WASHINGTON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL

2024 Regional Challenge Grant

**Project Title:** Building a Data Ecosystem to Accelerate College Success (The Project)

**Partnership Name:** NWESD | Northwest Data Coalition

**Partner Organizations:**

- Northwest Educational Service District 189 (K-12 partner)
- Career Connect Northwest (Career Pathways and Workforce Readiness)
- Skagit Valley College (Institution of Higher Education)
- FuturesNW (Community-Based Organization)

**Fiscal Agent:** Northwest Educational Service District 189

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## PROJECT NARRATIVE

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

Northwest Educational Service District 189 (NWESD), Career Connect NW (CCNW), Skagit Valley College (SVC), and FuturesNW (FNW) operate regionally and prioritize community-centered pathways and programs that expressly support adult learners in completing a postsecondary credential. We established this data partnership to strengthen our efforts around data sharing, data capacity, and data driven decision making with the aim of accelerating education attainment among first generation college students and other traditionally underrepresented groups.

NWESD, one of nine regional education agencies in Washington state, is committed to preparing students for college, career, and citizenship. We provide upstream support across 35 school districts and one tribal school. As fiscal agent, project partner, and host of CCNW, NWESD will provide the support and influence necessary to meet project objectives and deliverables within the project timeline. CCNW is one of nine regional career connected learning networks under the larger Career Connect Washington (CCW) organization. CCNW works as a catalyst for industry, education, and community partners to collectively meet the career development needs of Northwest Washington in an equitable and accessible way. CCNW is currently contracted by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to project manage the 2023-2025 NW CTE Dual Credit legislative proviso.

SVC is an open-access institution of higher education offering workforce certifications, associate degrees, and select baccalaureate degrees. SVC serves up to 8,000 students annually: most from a three-county service district. SVC administers programs that support this project's focal population including TRiO Student Support Service Program, College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), Veterans Education, and the Reentry Community Integration Program.

FNW is a community-based organization that supports students from under-served communities to achieve their career and college dreams. They help students and families navigate systemic barriers that challenge accessibility, persistence, and completion of a postsecondary credential.

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

The partnership structure is designed to support the collaborative scope of work envisioned. Project leads will meet monthly and be in ongoing conversations - in person, Zoom, and email - to share data, resolve challenges, and hold each other accountable for the proposed scope of work. NWESD will act as the fiscal agent, convener, and be responsible for project management. SVC and FNW will each appoint a project lead capable of influencing and institutionalizing project-related objectives and fully participating in project-related activities.

The NWESD and CCNW team will be led by Jenny Veltri, Director of NW Washington STEM and Co-Director of CCNW. Veltri will provide leadership for the project which includes participation in planning, learning, and design meetings; oversight of budget and contracts; and dissemination of lessons learned (~0.10 FTE). Dr. Britnee Harvey, NWESD Workforce Diversity and Equity Administrator, will provide project management; lead planning, learning, design meetings; and enlist staff to implement qualitative methods (~0.50 FTE) in programs that serve/support the focal population.

Dr. Gabriel Mast, SVC Associate Vice President for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, will participate in planning, learning, and design meetings; lead integration of data protocols; and hire and supervise a Data Analyst (~1.0 FTE) to contribute to data collection methods and analysis. Claire Peinado, SVC Vice President of Student Services, along with Dr. Darlene Snider, SVC Dean of Enrollment Services and Veterans Education, and Yadira Rosales, SVC Associate Vice President for Equity and Inclusion, will advise throughout the project and enlist staff to implement/facilitate qualitative data collection methods in programs that serve or support the focal population.

Megan Wingo, FNW Executive Director of Operations, will participate in planning, learning, and design meetings; hire and supervise an Outreach Coordinator (~1.0 FTE); and enlist staff to implement/facilitate qualitative methods in programs that serve or support the focal population.

**3. How 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?**

NWESD, CCNW, SVC, and FNW will share learning by regularly engaging in scheduled planning, learning, and design meetings. They will test qualitative data collection methods with service populations, share feedback and preliminary data. Partners will also participate in sessions with a Data Consultant to develop strategies and protocols for analysis, visualization, storage and sharing data.

Each organization has a broad sphere of influence within local, regional, and/or state affiliations. During the project period, partners will have the opportunity to share what they are learning with internal and external stakeholders, getting them excited about what can be learned from prospective, current, and past student groups. An important part of shared learning is communicating with those who contribute to data dialogues and surveys. Specifically, we will invite data dialogue participants and survey respondents to share their contact information so that we can share a summative report on what we learned from them.

Learning will be incorporated into ongoing work. Partners will implement new data practices with the goal to institutionalize practices across partners and programs that support first-time college students and other traditionally underrepresented groups.

**4. Who are the focal population(s) and what assets do they bring to their educational journeys?**

The focal population for our partnership is first-generation college students and other traditionally underserved students – Black, Latinx and Indigenous students, students from low-income backgrounds, Veterans, students with designated disabilities, and formerly incarcerated adults. These populations bring diverse perspectives, lived experiences, and grit. They hold key insights about their educational journeys. Currently, their insights are heard during unstructured group or one-on-one conversations and are relayed by program-level staff. Surveys about culture, climate, and educational experiences are periodically administered. Because the methods for collecting student voice are unstructured and inconsistent, we struggle to make sense of this feedback, identify trends, and recommend improvements. This project will ensure that student voice is central to data collection and analysis and captured/produced in time to influence retention and credential/degree completion.

We will focus on current Latinx students as the first data group to (1) ensure the tool is built around student voice and (2) that the preliminary data can be acted upon to support this population through retention and completion efforts. We are prioritizing Latinx students because they are less likely to earn a postsecondary credential within eight years of high school graduation (by age 26). Table 1 is a snapshot of the percentage of Mount Vernon High School graduates who earn a postsecondary credential by age 26.

Table 1. Percent of Mount Vernon High School graduates who identify as Hispanic or Latinx of any race that earn a postsecondary credential within 8 years of high school graduation (by age of 26) (ERDC, Feb. 2023)

Population Group	No Degree	Associate/Certificate	Bachelor's or Higher
All students	54%	15%	31%
White	53%	14%	33%
Hispanic/Latinx	64%	20%	16%
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	67%	17%	16%

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

The geographic region where the focal population will be served by this investment are predominately in Skagit County. However, partners have a much broader reach. NWESD serves the largest geographic region, which includes PK-12 youth and adult caregivers in Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties. SVC serves adult learners in Island, San Juan, and Skagit counties. FuturesNW serves emerging adults in San Juan, Skagit, and Whatcom counties.

**6. What are some of the systemic barriers that learners and families encounter?**

First generation college students and other traditionally underserved students experience individual, systemic, and generational barriers that influence their educational journey. Barriers reported in academic research and relayed by program level staff are described in Table 2.

Table 2. Barriers to educational attainment

Individual Barriers	Systemic Barriers	Generational Barriers
Lower high school grad rates	Credits accrued do not transfer	No or little support for pursuing postsecondary education
No exposure to other adults with a postsecondary credential	FAFSA completion is complex	Undocumented
Family and work demands make it difficult to be as academically engaged	Remedial courses and prerequisites slow progress	Migrant, highly mobile
Lack transportation, high gas prices	Lack a learning community	
Weak math skills	Fear of taking on student debt	
Weak reading skills	Exclusionary discipline practices, disrupt academic access/success	
Non-native English speaker	High cost of living, housing	
Inadequate academic prep in high school	Struggle to obtain GED	
Low self-image of academic ability	Access to testing	
Inadequate study skills	Paperwork burdensome and confusing	
Lack of childcare	Trouble re-enrolling after a break in higher education	

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

The work we will undertake will (1) build skill sets for collecting qualitative data, (2) establish effective ways to synthesize and analyze qualitative data, (3) strengthen data-sharing practices, and (4) institutionalize use of qualitative data (student voice) in decision making to increase retention and education attainment among adults aged 25 to 44. Table 3 outlines the project timeline and activities.

Table 3. Project Timeline and Activities

2024 July - September	2024 October - December	2025 January - March	2025 April - June
Convene planning and design meetings monthly	Convene planning and design meetings monthly	Convene planning and design meetings monthly	Convene planning and design meetings monthly
Formalize data sharing agreements	Research and review best practices for facilitating data dialogues	Refine data collection tools and protocols	Institutionalize data protocols  Produce a “how to” manual and make it publicly available
Hire Data Analyst  Contract with data consultant  Identify quant data points	Visualize data  Create qual data collection protocols	Synthesize and analyze qualitative data  Produce and share preliminary data findings	Synthesize and analyze qualitative data  Present data - visually and digitally
Identify staff to facilitate data dialogues  Hire Outreach Coord  Create facilitator training	Provide facilitator training  Facilitate data dialogues with current and prospective students	Provide facilitator training  Facilitate data dialogues with current and prospective students	Provide facilitator training  Facilitate data dialogues with current and prospective students
Share project objectives with key stakeholders	Share project progress with stakeholders	Share project progress with stakeholders  Share preliminary report	Share final product – data protocols, tools and methods, lessons learned  Share summative report

A proven strategy for collecting rich qualitative data (student voice) is Data Dialogues (Murray, Falkenburger, Saxena, 2015<sup>1</sup>). Data Dialogues are an interactive way to engage stakeholders - such as prospective and current students and families - in a facilitated dialogue about quantitative data (e.g., retention and credential/degree completion rates) to elicit and capture qualitative data (e.g., educational journeys and barriers students experience). Students share their ideas and respond to targeted questions in small groups and surveys. Then groups synthesize the information through facilitated discussion. The facilitator records and reports information, connecting qualitative data to quantitative data. The objectives for Data Dialogues are to:

- Share key quantitative data and findings with students and families who are intended to benefit

<sup>1</sup> [Data Walks](#): An Innovative Way to Share Data with Communities (Murray et. Al, 2015)

- Ensure a more robust analysis and understanding of the data and capture qualitative data
- Inform programming and policies to address needs and support strengths of students
- Inspire individual and collective action among community agents

To do this work well, the project team will generate data sets, prepare and visualize data, and provide facilitator training prior to Data Dialogues. The project team will also identify ways to archive and utilize the data and ensure data is protected, yet accessible, across sectors.

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

There is a disconnect between how we support first time college students and traditionally underrepresented groups and what they actually need. There is a lack of reliable, relevant, and shared data to mobilize cross-sector partners in ways that accelerates educational attainment. We know that degree completion improves access to meaningful work that provides a family-sustaining wage. The Project is designed to increase the educational attainment specifically for the focal population by:

- Catalyzing a data ecosystem that enables timely and systemic adaptations to current practices within learning institutions and community-based organizations closest to the population we wish to serve.
- Elevating student voice and increasing data access and transparency leading to a deep awareness of when adult learners leave college (early warning indicators), why they leave (persistent and emerging barriers), and (c) where they go (options and trajectories).
- Training program leaders and staff to facilitate effective data dialogues, leveraging the skills, strengths, and relationships across sectors.
- Empowering decision makers to utilize quantitative and qualitative findings to adapt, scale, and/or suspend current programs/services/strategies in ways that create measurable improvement in the number of adults who attain a postsecondary credential.
- Creating opportunities for students and families to address the community’s education challenges together.

The resulting *Implementing Data Dialogues* manual produced will expand capacity for cross-sector data collection and utilization, specifically creating opportunities for localized learning that is responsive to the community’s changing needs. The manual will help institutionalize (sustain) data practices that garner valuable insights into the focal populations’ experiences, circumstances, and perceptions that promote and/or interfere with post-secondary education attainment.

The infrastructure created will be sustained beyond the project period through planned IHE investment in a Data Analyst focused on student success and by growing the number of professionals equipped to implement and institutionalize data practices. In the short-term, the project will be scaled within organizations. For example, data analysts have data collection skills but do not interface with students daily. Front line student services staff interface with students but may not be trained to systematically collect data. This project will provide training to front-facing staff at the SVC and CBO partners to ensure that those personnel working with the focal population have the training to collect meaningful qualitative data. Further, this project can be replicated at other CBOs and community colleges to increase the amount of data collected and enhance the impact on the focal population across the Northwest region.

Many more local, regional, and state partners will benefit. The Project will result in formal practices and protocols that build capacity and capability to elevate student voice across community-based organizations, institutions of higher education, tribal communities, P-12 public education, business, and industry partners. The Project partners are well positioned to translate data practices and protocols across their networks.