

## **COVER PAGE**

**Partnership Name:** Olympic Peninsula Resource CO-OP (COnections and OPportunities)

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**Fiscal Agent:** West Sound STEM Network

**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?**

In February 2023, Peninsula College (PC), with support from Olympic Community of Health, convened community-based organizations (CBOs) in Port Angeles and Sequim to brainstorm how together we can provide wraparound support for students so they can prioritize college. PC observed a significant increase in the need for basic services, such as housing, food, transportation, mental health, and childcare services, among others in the 2022-2023 academic year. During the February and subsequent May convening of local CBOs, the partners named in this application emerged as key strategic partners. In fact, almost immediately after the first convening, Serenity House of Clallam County (SHCC) began coming to the PC Port Angeles campus weekly to meet students' housing needs. After the first meeting in February, PC established a comprehensive wraparound support center in Workforce programs and this group of CBOs stepped up to add their specialty services. With legislative funding, PC added a Benefits Navigator to help students access services in a single location on the PC campus, which now also includes a mobile medical/behavioral health service sponsored by North Olympic Healthcare Network and a mobile food bank. PC convened similar gatherings of CBOs in Forks and Port Townsend to create social service partnerships in more remote regions. In addition, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) now offers weekly one-stop-shop access to social services in Port Angeles that includes several CBOs in this partnership and PC attends to provide college enrollment services.

The shared purpose of this partnership is to connect adults and foster youth aging out of the system in Clallam and Jefferson counties to workforce programs and provide wraparound support services in a central location. These "Resource Co-Ops" will provide both connections to wraparound support and exposure to opportunities in high-demand workforce and credential programs. The Co-Ops include services related to housing (SHCC), food and transportation (DSHS), childcare (YMCA), and financial aid (United Way of Clallam County, PC, and WSSN). Olympic Angels, who serve foster youth and those aging out of the system will provide support and navigation at the Resource Co-Ops for their clients. West Sound STEM Network (WSSN) provides this partnership with vital research and data related to in-demand industries, educational delivery modes, and barriers to accessing educational programs, and serves as the fiscal agent. In addition to financial aid support, United Way and WSSN will co-facilitate monthly convenings of this partnership.

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

This partnership's leadership team includes the Peninsula College President, and Executive Directors of WSSN and United Way. The leadership team will convene monthly meetings with all CBO partners to share lessons learned and iterate on the Resource Co-Op model and services provided. WSSN and United Way will co-facilitate the partnership using an approach called Liberatory Design. This approach advocates for equality and feedback grounded in participants' experiences. For example, direct service providers and those persons providing navigational support to adults and foster youth will attend monthly convenings to represent the experiences of individuals who attend Resource CO-OPs to improve the one-stop-shop model, develop a prototype, and/or advocate for changes to systems and processes. This approach reflects on feedback and participant experience using the words and lenses of the populations served, builds awareness of barriers and oppression, and allows historically vulnerable populations to voice their experiences. This approach, in addition to the navigational support model of Olympic Angels,

will build relational trust both within and outside of the partnership that we hope extends to focal populations.

**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?**

The partnership supports a one-stop-shop social services model that currently convenes in Port Angeles one day per week at DSHS. As such, the partnership is already learning how to implement the Resource CO-OP model of providing social services, financial aid support, and college enrollment services for adults in a single location. In addition to using Liberatory Design, the partnership will use Design Thinking to understand student experiences, challenge assumptions and previous ways of operating, innovate new ways of tackling barriers, and create solutions to employ and test. Design Thinking uses five key phases: 1. Empathize to understand the problem and the barriers to accessing and completing credentials for the target populations. 2. Define the core problem by establishing various personas that represent typical challenges based on different student types, ensuring the process is human centered. 3. Ideate by brainstorming new ways to tackle a problem and design innovative solutions (e.g., adding partners, shortening pathways). 4. Prototype to experiment and test new ways of providing services, reaching the target population, or onboarding additional partners to meet student needs. 5. Test to evaluate the new process, identifying insights from the participant population to refine the model. Monthly convenings of the partnership will allow for this process to unfold throughout the period of performance and beyond.

**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?**

Only 42% of adults in Clallam County and 52% in Jefferson County have an AA degree or higher, which is 10-20% behind the statewide average of 60% credential attainment and 20-30% behind the statewide goal of 70%. PC offers a robust Transitional Studies program that includes high school completion, GED, English as a Second Language (ESL) and College Preparation. Transitional Studies student demographics include 80% over the age of 20, 41% ethnic/racial minorities with 34% historically underserved students of color, and 54% receiving need-based aid. The partnership will intentionally look for ways to shorten pathways from Transitional Studies into college programs, for example through Ability to Benefit and the High School Completion Waiver to help provide students with onramps to credential attainment. As discussed below, adult learners bring many assets to the classroom that enrich both their educational experience and that of others with whom they interact.

<b>Educational Attainment</b>	<b>Clallam County</b>	<b>Jefferson County</b>
High School or Less	32%	25%
Some College	26%	23%
AA Degree or Higher	42%	52%

Source: Lightcast

In addition to a focus on engaging adult learners, this partnership will focus on youth aging out of foster care as this population is particularly vulnerable and would benefit greatly from comprehensive wraparound support and guidance related to academic and career training options. Olympic Angels, a

local foster care nonprofit dedicated to changing the life outcomes for youth from the foster community, is a vested partner. Olympic Angels is predicated on the belief that every child in the foster community should reach their fullest potential. And we know that currently, we are failing foster youth spectacularly when it comes to educational outcomes and subsequent ability to earn a family-sustaining wage. Outcomes for foster youth are bleak with fewer than half reaching high school graduation, only 3% completing a college degree, and 60% falling below the poverty line as adults. The Olympic Peninsula foster system doesn't suffer from a fundamental lack of resources – it mostly lacks a mechanism for coordinating resources in service of foster families and youth. Olympic Angels matches committed volunteers in the community to walk alongside young people as they exit the foster care system and help them move beyond crisis mode. This partnership presents as an amazing opportunity for volunteers to connect with CBOs and help foster youth unlock the resources for housing, tangible support, financial aid, educational advising and other critical support available through the community partners. Volunteers from Olympic Angels will attend CO-OPs with foster youth to connect them with educational opportunities and wraparound support.

The target populations this partnership will focus on bring many strengths and assets to their educational journeys. Adult learners bring previous work experience, life experience, and maturity, which provides guidance for younger students and enriches the classroom. English Language Learners bring the strength of speaking multiple languages as well as rich cultural heritages to share with others. Transitional Studies students bring a wealth of experiences, challenges, and resiliency, creating opportunities for friendship with people from different age groups and life circumstances which enhances the worldview and growth of all involved in the classroom. Career mature students typically perform well academically, which can serve as a model for younger students in addition to being examples of positive risk-taking in being willing to change careers later in life.

Youth who are about to age out of foster care have access to funding for postsecondary education, which is an asset along with the opportunity to develop relationships with adult learners. Youth in foster care have had many opportunities to practice resiliency and often inspire others towards the same. Some who experience trauma develop a keen ability to scan their environments which is an asset in some professions.

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

The focal populations served by this partnership live in Clallam and Jefferson counties. However, within these counties, the partnership seeks to focus on residents in more remote and underserved microregions. Specifically, in West Clallam & West Jefferson counties, Forks, Neah Bay, Hoh Valley, Clallam Bay, and La Push represent areas with less access to education and technology that enables degree completion. In East Jefferson County, Brinnon, Chimacum, and Quilcene are underserved when it comes to access to training and in-demand jobs. As part of the federal RECOMPETE application process, WSSN is currently conducting a study that will help inform the partnership of needs, barriers and in-demands skills specifically in these microregions. By extending the one-stop-shop Resource CO-OP model to Forks and Port Townsend areas, the partnership aims to reach historically underserved populations and those with less access to educational opportunities due to remote geography.

### **K-12 to Post-Secondary Enrollment Rates by School District (2021):**

Cape Flattery	Chimacum	Crescent	Port Angeles	Port Townsend	Quilcene	Quillayute Valley	Sequim
35%	38%	44%	39%	50%	49%	44%	46%

Data Source: [High School Graduate Outcomes | Washington State Education Research and Data Center](#)

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

Our focal populations experience systemic barriers related to geography, financial barriers, family commitments, and time. Geographic barriers include living in remote regions with less access to educational opportunities and increased barriers related to the cost and availability of transportation, access to technology, including reliable internet, hotspots, and laptops, and availability of childcare and other wraparound supports that enable one to enroll and persist in college. According to 2023 research on disengaged learners, over two-thirds of participants cited tuition or cost of the degree as a key factor when considering degree completion ([StraighterLine, UPCEA, October 2023](#)). Financial reasons were also cited as a key factor when leaving previous programs/institutions, with 41% citing this as a key factor for disengaging. In September 2022, WSAC released a [research brief](#) exploring challenges to post-secondary access, which found that “Perceptions about the FAFSA or WASFA application process are a meaningful barrier to recent high school graduates’ decision to apply for aid.” They also found that “Many students and adult learners lack reliable information about eligibility for financial aid and whether it requires repayment.” These barriers to funding opportunities decrease the likelihood of college attainment.

The StraighterLine Report also found that family commitments can be a major barrier to disengaging from degree programs, with older students slightly more likely to cite family reasons. Providing childcare and other forms of financial/family support and flexibility in how programs are delivered (e.g., asynchronous, online) are likely important options for engaging/re-engaging students. When considering a degree completion program, 56% of participants cited the “speed at which they can complete their degree” as a key factor in decision-making. Thus, offering flexible programming may be a key to success in re-engaging students. For example, offering micro credentials based on specific skills that can stack towards larger credentials may increase likelihood of pursuing and completing a degree. In the study of disengaged learners, 76% indicated that stackable micro credentials would increase their interest in pursuing a degree. The research currently being conducted by WSSN will also identify prosperity jobs and associated training across Clallam and Jefferson counties, which will inform new instructional programming for PC. For youth in foster care, a lack of consistency, normalcy, and stability are often impediments to educational attainment. Olympic Angels’ model of relationship and connection-based intervention is of value to this project because it can be tailor-made per student and is grounded in trust.

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

During the grant period, we propose to pilot, and then expand, a model that brings CBOs together in a single location weekly to simplify students’ ability to access wraparound services and enter college. These weekly Resource CO-Ops – connections and opportunities – offer potential students the ability to access support for housing, childcare, transportation, financial aid, as well as college enrollment and advising in a one-stop shop location. The CO-OP will be offered weekly at the same location, starting with a pilot at the Port Angeles DSHS offices and two locations in Forks and Port Townsend soon to follow. The

Resource CO-Ops are intended to serve as onramps to training in high-demand fields and simultaneously remove barriers to retention and completion (e.g., housing, childcare, financial support). During the first three months, the partnership will pilot this model of offering an array of services in a single location on a specific day of the week and will convene monthly to offer feedback on the model, its implementation, and areas for improvement. Based on feedback and the readiness of various CBOs, the partnership will expand the model to Forks and Port Townsend to serve other high-need areas within Clallam/Jefferson counties (e.g., Forks, Brinnon, Chimacum). Activities during the project period include recruiting learners from the focal populations into high-demand programs, advising students throughout their academic career, supporting students through to completion, providing wraparound support and navigation assistance, and a focus on digital equity inside and outside of the classroom with PC's technology lending program and adding technical support in the classroom.

Weekly Resource CO-OPs at three locations will provide housing resources, financial aid support, childcare resource navigation, food, transportation, and healthcare support by this network of CBOs and PC's Workforce Program Navigators. PC Outreach Specialists and FAFSA Outreach Coordinators, along with United Way FAFSA support in Forks, will attend weekly CO-OPs to assist learners in enrolling in workforce programs. Importantly, through this grant, PC will add a full time Advisor at the Forks and Port Townsend campuses to support learners through credential completion. Mentors from Olympic Angels will support foster youth in Clallam and Jefferson counties, attending Resource CO-OPs with clients to encourage enrollment and better understand the resources available to learners as they are ready.

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

A qualitative study performed by WSSN during Winter 2024 will inform the partnership on where the good jobs are (interviews with regional employers) and what skills are needed to qualify for these jobs. The study will collect qualitative data from CBOs (including those in this partnership) to identify the challenges their clients face in pursuing education/degree programs and will talk with clients and those who are un/under-employed to understand barriers to accessing training programs. Based on these data, and the expertise of the partnership, we will develop or expand workforce programs to meet the skills training needs of regional employers, providing credential and degree pathways for students that includes outreach, wraparound support through to completion, advising and ongoing academic support. The partnership will develop pathways that address the known barriers to successful degree completion.

Our theory of change is based upon the following: 1. By addressing known factors that prevent adults, especially those furthest from opportunity, from pursuing/ re-engaging in degree programs, we can enable completion (e.g., tuition, childcare). 2. By identifying the in-demand, "good jobs" in the target regions, we can design and make accessible training programs that result in credentials for these good jobs. 3. By understanding the factors that facilitate degree completion, such as flexible training delivery, location, schedule (e.g., night classes) we can design education programs to meet the needs of students. 4. By offering support services in a single location, students are more likely to access services needed to complete credential and degree programs. 5. The partnership will incorporate design thinking to integrate lessons learned from student experiences and other evolving factors. For example, if House Bill 2214 passes, the partnership will execute a data sharing agreement with SNAP to facilitate easy access to grants/financial aid for eligible students.