

## Regional Challenge Grant

### Frequently Asked Questions – 2024 Request for Letters of Interest

*This living document will be continuously updated during the 2024 Request for Letters of Interest application cycle, with the last update occurring no later than February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024. This document was last updated on February 9<sup>th</sup> to incorporate the new questions: 7, 23, 26, 33, 40, and 43.*

### Application

**1. Can an organization submit multiple proposals?**

Organizations may submit multiple proposals. There is no limit on the number of times an organization may submit as a lead applicant or member of a partnership, as long as the proposed work is not duplicated.

**2. Can a partnership be comprised of more than two organizations?**

The Request for Letters of Interest includes the minimum criteria for partnership composition. Although this is the minimum criteria, we anticipate that established partnerships proposing to implement a strategy with RCG funds will include three or more cross-sector organizations in their network and will have an established history of working with one another through deep, trusted relationships.

**3. Can a partnership apply if it is located in a region where there's already an active RCG partnership?**

We will intentionally consider the region of 2024 applicants in the context of the geographic reach of the overall RCG cohort. We are interested in expanding the geographic reach of RCG in the current and subsequent application cycles. There is no exclusion of partnerships in regions already served by an RCG investment.

**4. If my organization is a partner in an existing RCG partnership, can we apply as a partner in a new application?**

If your organization is part of an existing RCG partnership but is not the lead entity and your application for proposed work is distinct from the already funded work, we will consider your application. Partnerships that fall into this category are recommended to think strategically about how this application is different from existing work and clearly indicate this difference in their application.

**5. My partnership applied in the 2022 LOI and did not receive funding. How should we think about our submission for the 2024 LOI?**

The second year of program implementation is based on continuous learning from the first year from funded partnerships, partnership applicants, and external stakeholders. As a result, the 2024 Request for Letters of Interest does not look the same as the last request. We encourage you to consider anew how

your partnership’s scope of work might dovetail with the guidance provided in the 2024 LOI. Our intention is that this application further specifies the vision of this partnership opportunity and provides additional guidance. We welcome applicant feedback on these changes.

**6. Will all applications that satisfy the criteria outlined in the Request for LOI receive funding?**

Because we have a limited amount of funding, we will not be able to fund all applications that align with this vision. The vision of this program is to support regional partnerships that have the necessary qualities to affect change to increase the state postsecondary attainment goal. As a result, applicants can have strong applications but not possess the necessary qualities that are outlined in this document.

**7. How should partner support be reflected in the LOI? Is there an opportunity to submit letters of support as attachments to the Letter of Interest Submission Form?**

We do not require letters of support at this time, and therefore there is not an established protocol for providing these documents during Phase I of the application process. That said, we do request that the submitting organization include in the Letter of Interest Submission Form the name and a point of contact for each organization involved in the partnership’s proposed work. Our expectation is that the inclusion of an organization in this form is indicative of the organization’s support for and agreement to their role in the proposed work. Organizations with whom the submitting organization has worked in the past—but who have not been included in discussions about the proposed work in the RCG LOI—should not be included in this list. Should an application advance to the discussion phase, partnership organizations may be invited to participate in a conversation to understand the partnership more deeply and hear from these parties. This will be a valuable opportunity for WSAC to engage with partnership organizations directly, and for partner support to be reflected in the review process.

## Eligibility

**8. How is a Community-Based Organization (CBO) defined?**

There are many ways to define a CBO. The University of Michigan’s National Community-Based Organization Network uses the following: “A CBO is one that is driven by community residents in all aspects of its existence, by that we mean:

- The majority of the governing body and staff consists of local residents,
- The main operating offices are in the community,
- Priority issue areas are identified and defined by residents, and
- Program design, implementation, and evaluation components have residents intimately involved, in leadership positions”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [What is a CBO? | National Community–Based Organization Network \(NCBON\) | University of Michigan School of Public Health \(umich.edu\)](#)

Organizations that operate in this way are aligned with the goals of the Grant, helping to bring community voices and important perspectives to postsecondary college and career pathways while addressing equity gaps.

**9. Is my partnership eligible to apply?**

Please read the 'Application Eligibility Criteria' section of the 2024 Request for Letters of Interest. Additional eligibility can be found outlined in [SB 5693, Section 609 \(23\)](#) on page 745 pertinent to CBO's that already receive state funding in subsection 18 of the section of this act.

**10. Can state agencies receive funding from the Regional Challenge Grant?**

No, however, state agencies are welcome to be members of a partnership.

**11. Does a local Workforce Development Board qualify as a Community-Based Organization?**

Workforce Development Boards are welcome to be a member of a partnership. In most cases, Workforce Development Boards are not likely to be considered Community-Based Organizations.

**12. Would an organization with various hubs across Washington be considered a Community-Based Organization?**

No, however, local sites are welcome to be members of a partnership. If an organization that includes various hubs across Washington is a significant partner in the work, we recommend you include additional information about how the proposed work will be place-based and informed by the specific geographic region of focus.

**13. Is there a Washington residency requirement for the students to be served by the activities of this grant?**

There is no residency requirement, however the geographic region for the proposed work must be within Washington state.

**14. Is the Regional Challenge Grant appropriate for graduate programs?**

The Regional Challenge Grant supports the statewide attainment goal which is based on early stage credentials up to the baccalaureate degree. It does not currently include graduate degrees of any kind.

**15. Would a faith-based organization be eligible for funding as part of our partnership?**

Yes, a faith-based organization is eligible to be a member of a partnership and receive funding. Funds could not support religious programming or materials, nor could religious activities be required. Consistent with the goals of the grant, the funds must serve a population identified in the Request of Letters of Interest.

## Strategy

### 16. How does WSAC define “region”?

Partnerships are expected and encouraged to define a region within the context of their proposal. Regional Challenge Grant does not provide a prescriptive definition or requirement to how a local community defines their region. We understand that this can look like pre-existing boundaries that exist in our daily life, such as counties, school districts, or city boundaries. We also understand that other geographic considerations can be included, such as mountain passes, neighborhoods, or cultural boundaries.

### 17. How does WSAC define “place-based”?

WSAC defines place-based as reflective of a shared geographic space, wherein community members and organizations come together around shared goals to improve learners’ experiences. Place-based is not limited to the classroom, but encompasses the environment that surrounds a learner. Community leaders are those that are best equipped to understand their local community’s assets, strengths and needs. As a result, we seek to fund applications that are proposing work that is informed with, by, and/or alongside their community.

### 18. How does WSAC define completion strategies?

Completion is specific to the completion of post-high school pathways, inclusive of certificates, degrees and credentials. It is necessary that Washingtonians are able to not just enroll in a postsecondary degree, but are able to persist to earn their credential. This persistence is especially critical for first-generation students, low-income students, and students of color. For more information about completion, please visit [the WSAC 2024 Strategic Action Plan](#).

#### a. Would supporting students to complete microcredentials be considered credential completion work?

Yes. Microcredentials are an opportunity to engage students with postsecondary education in alignment with their professional pursuits.

### 19. Will middle school or early learning proposals that focus on college or career pathways be considered for funding?

Yes. We believe that increasing postsecondary access is not exclusive to one population age. As a result, the RCG current cohort is representative of a wide range of student populations.

#### a. Is this RCG opportunity only targeted to learners 25-44?

No. We are interested in investing in partnerships whose anticipated work seeks to serve adult learners, as defined below, but this priority does not exclude consideration of partnerships proposing anticipated work in support of other focal populations.

### 20. How does WSAC define adult learners?

RCG defines adult learners broadly to include any individuals who did not enter or complete postsecondary education directly after high school graduation. Although this definition generally encompasses the population reflected in our agency’s Strategic Action Plan (aged 25 and older), we are

also attentive to young adults, especially those who graduated high school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**21. My application does not include focal population(s) outlined in the 2024 Request for Letters of Interest (adult learners or completion). Will my application be considered?**

All applications that meet the eligibility criteria and vision for RCG will be considered. The emphasis does not exclude consideration of applications with anticipated work in other areas.

**22. My partnership is an established partnership that is currently implementing strategies in my region. Will my application be considered?**

All applications that meet the eligibility criteria and vision for RCG will be considered. The emphasis on emerging or forming partnerships does not exclude consideration of more established partnerships.

**23. Is there a strong preference for new partnerships? What about re-envisioning of existing partnerships?**

The emphasis on partnership formation does not exclude existing partnerships, including those that may be re-envisioning their structure.

**24. Has WSAC seen emerging strategies in the inaugural RCG cohort that they want to build on in this LOI cycle and leverage the learnings from?**

We have begun to observe some convergence around certain strategies. However, in each case, the partnership's chosen emphasis reflects the needs and assets of the communities served. RCG does not start or end its work with one statewide solution, and thus does not treat convergence as a decision to center on only select strategies in this next funding opportunity. The learning that we are leveraging from the first year of program implementation relates to how to administer and structure the program in alignment with its founding values.

**25. The first cohort looks to have a rural focus. Is this the intention or are urban areas encouraged to apply as well?**

The first cohort spans a broad range of geographic settings. For the regional boundaries of each partnership's service regions, see the 2023 Legislative Report. We believe in the importance of a targeted regional focus across the many different areas of our state, and therefore there is no explicit direction to prioritize any one regional type.

**26. Is statewide partnership work eligible, or are funds exclusively used for specifically defined regions?**

We recommend that partnerships or organizations who work statewide indicate their region of focus for this work in their LOI and why the specific region is the focus, following the RCG vision that partnerships are place-based and responsive to their given region. For more details, please see questions 16 and 17 on region and place-based definitions.

## Roles

**27. Who can be the single point of contact?**

Single point of contact is the contact that WSAC will consistently communicate with throughout the application process. It is up to the partnership to decide whether this contact is also the project lead or backbone organization.

**28. Is there a specific role or function that each partner should play within a partnership based on the organization's sector?**

No. Each organization's role in their partnership will depend on how the partnership collectively chooses to define the division of responsibilities across organizations.

## Funding

**29. Will a fiscal guidelines document be released to help guide appropriate costs and expenditures?**

No. For more details, see question below.

**30. What costs or expenditures are allowable under the grant?**

In general, grants should focus on work that broadens and strengthens the partnership, expands community voices, and/or brings new community voices into the work. Grants considering to implement strategies should focus on direct services for the intended focus population.

The Regional Challenge Grant is using a flexible approach intended to identify strong existing or potential partnerships to who can advance the mission and goals of the Regional Challenge Grant. Funding is intended to be flexible if it helps a partnership be better positioned to drive change; applicants who are invited to participate in discussions after review of the Letter of Interest will engage in conversations with WSAC to maximize the potential impact of the grant.

**31. For emerging or forming partnerships, what are some activities that the funds can be used for?**

Grant funds should be used for activities that are directly related to the partnerships' development and/or planning; the application should demonstrate how this development or planning will ultimately lead to closing equity gaps for postsecondary enrollment and attainment in the proposed region.

**32. Could funding for student scholarships (as participation incentives) be included in the budget?**

No, Regional Challenge Grant funds cannot be used for student scholarships.

**33. Can you provide a stipend to anyone participating and if so, how much (for example, a stipend to a small non-profit for their expertise that aligns with the awarded grant)?**

Should an LOI advance to the discussion phase, partnerships will be required to submit a draft budget with detailed projected expenditures, including the estimated distribution of funds across partnership organizations. Budgets will be responsive to the unique context of the partnership and community; if a

stipend is included in a partnership's process, this will include noting the purpose of the stipend and the anticipated amount. See Question 30 above for allowable expenses.

**34. Does the Fiscal Agent have to be a 501c3?**

The fiscal agent can be a tax-exempt entity; local government agencies and community-based organizations are eligible to be fiscal agents. WSAC will consider proposals for other types of entities if appropriate.

**35. Can a University be the fiscal agent? Or can a University Foundation be a fiscal agent?**

Yes.

**36. Can an ESD be a fiscal agent?**

Yes.

**37. What indirect rates are permissible?**

Applicants who are invited to participate in discussions after the review of the Letter of Interest will engage in conversations with WSAC to determine partnership-specific needs and concerns regarding the overall costs and expenditures, which may include indirect rates. Regional Challenge Grants are geared towards utilizing funds to maximize impact on communities and students. We understand that certain organizations could include indirect rate requirements. Indirect rates for K-12 and Higher Education Institutions are unlikely to be considered.

**38. If a partnership has received funding under Career Connect Washington for a Career Launch program, is there the ability to still apply for funding under the Regional Challenge Grants?**

Yes, partnerships can still apply to the Regional Challenge Grants. Partnerships will need to provide clear delineation from the Career Launch program funds and explain how they will be used to build or expand the program specific to the Regional Challenge Grant's goal of increasing postsecondary attainment. Funds cannot be used for the same purpose, but could be complementary.

**39. For funded partnerships, how are funds disbursed during the granting period? Are partnerships reimbursed?**

WSAC administers award disbursements to partnerships in a payment schedule outlined in the grant agreement. The first payment is within 30 days of the initial execution of the grant agreement and funds are disbursed evenly throughout the granting period contingent upon timely reports and progress made. Because of this, reimbursement to partnerships is not needed.

**40. Should we consider funding sustainability in our application, such as asking for 1 - 2 years of funding within a single grant?**

We recommend applicants consider funding for one year within your LOI. Should a partnership be awarded, RCG meets monthly with partnerships to learn more about their work and be in partnership with you. In these meetings, we keep partnerships up to date with any future contract extensions or negotiations and aim to be sustainable and user-friendly in this process.

## Data and Metrics

**41. Are there standard or traditional short-term outcomes or metrics that WSAC will look for organizations to measure and improve?**

No. Although there are standard, population-level, long-term outcomes outlined in the legislation that WSAC reports on for all regions served by an RCG partnership, there are not standard short-term outcomes for localized work. Please see question #33 for more details.

**42. Is there opportunity for applicants to design non-traditional outcomes/metrics that are based on localized work?**

Yes, there is opportunity for applicants to design metrics based on the work at the local level. Notably, the outcomes must ultimately do one or more of the following:

- Increase direct postsecondary enrollment among high school students
- Increase enrollment of adults returning to education
- Increase postsecondary credential completion rates

**43. Does WSAC include data other than race, including gender, refugee/immigrant status, etc.? Has it broken down broad categories, such as Asian or multiracial, into more nuanced categories?**

In the 2023 Legislative report, reporting on population-level demographics and outcomes relied on publicly available data sources with limited demographic information (inclusive of gender and the federally defined categories for race/ethnicity, but exclusive of refugee/immigrant status). This limitation is indicative of a larger challenge with administrative data: Even at its best, it cannot capture the multitude of experiences and identities present within individuals and across communities, and the need to ensure privacy leads to data suppression that further limits what can be reported. The result is often aggregate categorizations—such as Asian or multiracial—that cannot demonstrate the diversity of lived experiences that are embedded in these categories.

As our program evolves, we will continue to consider critically how best to gather and share outward the rich experiences, assets, and strengths of the learners and communities we support. How this looks—and for whom—will vary based on the partnership’s work, the communities a partnership serves, and the context in which their work occurs. The predetermined structure of and suppression within existing data sources may continue to shape our ability to provide demographic nuance within population-level outcomes, but this will not prevent us from affirming individuals’ and communities’ identities as we work alongside our partners to surface evidence of change resulting from the work of RCG partnerships.

## Miscellaneous

**44. My organization may not be able to meet the deadline to submit a grant. Will there be other opportunities to apply for the Regional Challenge Grant in the future?**

The Regional Challenge Grant plans to open a Request for Letters of Interest annually in January.



**45. Where can I go to learn more about the Regional Challenge Grant?**

Questions can be emailed to [RegionalChallengeGrant@wsac.wa.gov](mailto:RegionalChallengeGrant@wsac.wa.gov), and all information linked here can be found on WSAC's Regional Challenge Grant [webpage](#). Two information sessions will also be offered.