



Regional Partnership Reapplication Recommendations to Council

May 2025

Executive Summary

WSAC's plan to achieve the 70 percent statewide attainment goal prioritizes community solutions. The Regional Challenge Grant (RCG) is a key mechanism in WSAC's broader Regional Partnership (RP) approach. This approach invests in partnerships that self-identify strategies to drive change to targeted populations in their local communities. This document includes the investment strategy that supports funding the 2025 reapplication. The recommendation made to council includes a total award of up to \$6.3 million. These funds will be awarded over a two-year period for seven partnerships across eight counties.

Reapplication Background

Tasked with systems change in its founding legislation, RCG sustains investments in partnerships to create positive shifts in their local communities that, in turn, increase postsecondary attainment. To achieve this, WSAC implements recurring two-year Regional Challenge Grant award cycles in alignment with the state biennium. This allows for consistent evaluation of the progress being made by partnerships. We are committed to making disciplined investments with regular reporting requirements. In 2025, WSAC invited the first cohort of eight partnerships to reapply for funding for a new grant award spanning July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2027.

The rigorous review process for Regional Partnership reapplications involved more than seven reviewers. Materials evaluated included their Statement of Work, Budget, Self-Assessment Tool, among other internal assessments and written memos from their WSAC portfolio manager. Reviewers also evaluated transcripts from two conversations with partnerships following trusted philanthropic reporting methods. For complete details about the reapplication, please see the [Request for Partnership Reapplication Document](#).

Recommendations to Council

WSAC is pleased to recommend funding to seven regional partnerships from the 2025 reapplication process. Partnerships have demonstrated a commitment to driving effective change in their communities from a position of trust. Partnerships include innovative, community-informed strategies that we believe will increase the state attainment goal that has remained stagnant for Washingtonians.

KEY



Geographic Scale



Rural Data Capacity Support



Framework Growth

Regional Partnerships Recommendations to Council

Cornerstone, Chehalis School District

Lewis County | Early Implementation

Partners: Chehalis School District, The Chehalis Foundation, Centralia College, United Way of Lewis County, The BERC Group, Summit Center, Bethel Church, & Boys and Girls Club of Chehalis

The Cornerstone partnership will continue the implementation of its dual generation strategy to support families in Chehalis. This work includes basic needs provisions (including emergency aid through partnership with the United Way of Lewis County and Centralia College), career exploration and enrollment support, pre-kindergarten programming, and parent education classes. Cornerstone coordinates access to many resources to build trust with families. This serves two purposes: to support students with their education and preparation for Kindergarten, K-12, and postsecondary, and to support families with access to further education and training. The partnership will continue their work from the first grant period. In the next cycle, Cornerstone aims to further develop their partnership's structure and reorganize their work under the umbrella of partnership and dual-generation strategies.

"Our community is unique... But if you tried to replicate what we're doing here [in Chehalis] and took it over to Pasco or something... they're gonna need a different strategy, you know, because their community is different... I'm really interested in finding ways that [our partnership] can just grow and be there for each other and in turn of course be there to support our community." – Rick Goble, Chehalis School District

Generating Rural Opportunity Washington (GROW) Network |



Benton County | Early Implementation

Partners: Kiona-Benton City School District, The STEM Foundation, Columbia Basin College, Washington State University Tri-Cities, Educational Service District-123, Open Doors/TC Futures, Tri-City Development Council, Tri-City Regional Chamber of Commerce, Benton-Franklin Workforce Development Council, Benton City Revitalization, Benton City Community Outreach, Mid-Columbia Libraries, Minerva Morales Education Consultant and Steward Leaders LLC, among others being recruited

The GROW-Network implements two-generation approaches in the Kiona-Benton (Ki-Be) school district to increase enrollment in college and career pathways. The partnership will mentor nearby rural BIPOC communities for further growth of partnership-related strategies. The partnership's approach includes trusted data collection through focus groups and surveys in Spanish for students and parents in the school district. GROW is the newly established partnership name, formerly titled by the lead partner entity, the STEM Foundation. Strategy implementation includes:

1. Inspire Students: Foster college and career exploration, introducing Ki-Be students to local institutions of higher education and providing compelling, hands-on, and experiential learning.
2. Equip Parents and Families: Support both students and parents with college and career pathway readiness in Spanish and English.
3. Engage Community: Leverage businesses and the community to support families in their college or career pathway for local economic opportunity.

Regional Partnerships Recommendations to Council

“When I'm able to talk to representatives of higher education and representatives of local industries, they share many of the same concerns. It reinforces the idea that we are all working together towards a common goal. Too often we do not get a chance to talk to each other about the issues we face. This really is the opportunity to see that we're part of a bigger picture regardless of how siloed we are. Opportunities like this don't come around a lot.” – Pete Peterson, Ki-Be Superintendent

Methow Futures |

Okanogan County | Early Implementation

Partners: Methow Valley Education Foundation, TwispWorks, Room One, Family Health Centers, Western Washington University Sustainability Pathways, Sawtooth Dental, Methow Trails, Methow Valley Elder Care Coordination Network (Jamie's Place), Classroom in Bloom, Three Rivers Hospital, Wenatchee Valley College, North Central Educational Service District, with others being recruited

Methow Futures, a Methow Valley School District (MVSD) initiative, is building on lessons learned from their initial phase of partnership formation. The partnership is implementing a four-pronged strategy that supports school district students and adult learners in their community:

1. Post High School Preparation, including dual credit and CTE offerings.
2. Real World Learning, such as internships and worksite opportunities for high school students.
3. Earn to Learn, including pre-apprenticeship pathways with the potential to register local apprenticeship pathways.
4. Re-Engaging Adult Learners through population-specific outreach and career training.

Strategy implementation is reflective of their place in the state, which is rural and geographically isolated from college and career pathways. Through Earn to Learn pathways, learners are supported within their own community and the partnership can retain young adults in their region who can enter locally in-demand career pathways. This 'Learn in Place' model can create transformative systems change in the local community for learners without the access, means, or desire to leave their hometown to attend a college or career pathway.

“We continue to value student interest and student strengths to drive our actions. We are trying to understand: who are the people in the focal population? What is it that they are inspired by? What are their strengths and how do we match those interests and strengths to the needs of our community? How do we explore opportunities that speak to the learners' strengths and interests? When we do that, when we walk that talk, that is the most inherent trust-building that we can do because we are seeing the people that we are serving and honoring the people that they are. We do this by saying what you want do is important and we're gonna help you figure out how to get there.”

- Kelleigh McMillian, MVSD Work and Education Advisor

Regional Partnerships Recommendations to Council

Mpower (LaunchNW) |

Spokane County | Progress & Early Evidence

Partners: LaunchNW – Innovia Foundation, Northeast Washington ESD 101, Spokane Public Schools, Medical Lake School District, East Valley School District, Central Valley School District, Riverside School District, Nine Mile Falls School District, Eastern Washington University, Whitworth University, Gonzaga University, Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Inland Northwest, Communities in Schools of Spokane County, Nuestras Raíces Centro Comunitario, Greater Spokane Incorporated, and Slingshot

Mpower continues its work to increase postsecondary education enrollment in Spokane County through a coordinated network of schools, community organizations, and higher education institutions. Site coordinators from community organizations manage mentorship coordination and partnership resources for their school site. They work with school staff to identify and pair 10th, 11th and 12th grade students with peer, near-peer, and adult mentors, based on the students' interests and needs. They also partner with Greater Spokane Inc. to provide career exploration and experiences and Slingshot for purpose pathway and career coaching.

In the next cycle, leveraging the investment from Ballmer Group, Mpower will scale their work with a new position, the Mpower Program Officer. The Program Officer will build continuity and coordination across Mpower schools, support site coordinators, and work with additional schools to explore this model.

“Having been in public education for 32 years, 19 years as a Superintendent, this work is just as rewarding as any work that I that I have done in a school system. And I think that it's rewarding because of the partnerships that we have created.” – Ben Small, LaunchNW

Postsecondary Student Success Network, City of Seattle |

King County | Progress & Early Evidence

Partners: City of Seattle's Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL), Seattle Public Schools, Seattle Colleges, Seattle Promise, Empowering Youth and Families Outreach (EYFO), El Centro de la Raza, Mentoring Urban Students and Teens (MUST), Brotherhood Initiative, Sisterhood Initiative, Project Baldwin, Seattle Youth Employment Program, Scholar Fund, and Right Standing Solutions

The partnership will continue their work to increase postsecondary enrollment and persistence for Seattle's BIPOC youth. They have four core strategies: (1) culturally specific and responsive (CSR) mentorship, (2) CSR professional development at two high schools, (3) career-connected learning, and (4) collective impact.

With a focus on South Seattle, BIPOC 11th graders, 12th graders, and Seattle Promise Scholars are connected to mentors through a network of community-based partners. The professional development strategy increases the career readiness capacity of two high schools (Garfield and Franklin) with the end goal of creating more systemized coordination between school staff, families, and community-based partners. Seattle Youth Employment Program provides students with paid work placement readiness training and paid internships. This work is intentionally coordinated with partners through a collective impact approach centered on leveraging student voices, building network capacity and knowledge on how to best serve students, and maximizing resources through intentional network collaboration.

Regional Partnerships Recommendations to Council

While the City of Seattle’s Department of Education and Early Learning leads this coordination, all partners contribute to the Network’s strategy and decision-making.

... through the [reapplication] process, the power dynamic shifted... We want the experience of our network to be co-led by our partners. Our strategic approach enabled them to step into that leadership role.” - Amelia Moore, City of Seattle DEEL

United Way of the Blue Mountains |

Walla Walla and Columbia Counties | Incubation Partnerships

Partners: Elevate, Walla Walla Community College, Dayton School District, Columbia Burbank School District, Touchet School District, Prescott School District, College Place School District, Walla Walla School District, Waitsburg School District, Dixie Elementary and Starbuck Elementary

The United Way of the Blue Mountains (UWBM), a Collective Impact partnership, is establishing student and family advisory groups to build community trust in the Blue Mountains region. Their community includes Walla Walla and College Place, in addition to rural school districts outside of the city, including Touchet, Prescott, Starbuck, Waitsburg, and Dayton school districts. The advisory groups are led by a trusted Community Advocate and will inform greater development of the partnership to provide an opportunity to share information about all postsecondary opportunities through their Elevate education initiative. This strategy is informed by their first year of RCG funding. The partnership conducted a qualitative research study to better understand why individuals in the region choose to forgo postsecondary education.

“Elevate isn't owned by the United Way. Elevate is owned by the community. It raises the community voice up to lead our work and to drive our work forward. It is holding us accountable to drive the work forward the way we are now. It has always been a vision that community voice would be at the table. It has always been a vision that our work would be driven by student and family advisory groups. We haven't had the capacity to do that. Without WSAC and the Community Advocate, we wouldn't be able to do this.”

– Christy Lieuallen, Executive Director of United Way Blue Mountains

Yakima Valley Partners for Education |

Yakima County | Early Implementation

Partners: The College Success Foundation, Catholic Charities Housing, Communities for Colleges, Communities in Schools, Eastern Washington University, El Conquistador, ESD 105, Fred Hutch Center, Granger High School, Heritage University, HU Adelante STEM Program, HU High School Equivalency Program (HEP), OSPI-Office of Native Education, KDNA Radio, Mount Adams School District, Northwest Harvest, Nuestra Casa, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Safe Haven, Yakima Valley Farmworkers Clinic-Parents as Teachers, Self Help Bank, Silvias Taxes, StriveTogether, Sunnyside School District, Taxes Y Mas, United Family Center, the University of Washington GEAR UP, West Valley School District, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Yakima Neighborhood Health, and Yakima Valley College

Yakima Valley Partners for Education (YVPE) implements community-responsive strategies focusing on Spanish language access in the middle and lower areas of the Yakima Valley. Woven within all work includes a commitment to basic needs supports and, in the reapplication, that includes a growth of their

Regional Partnerships Recommendations to Council

strategies to support local families on housing assistance through the Catholic Charities Housing partner. In addition, the partnership will be serving more local Indigenous students, adding the Mount Adams School District as a partner in the 2025 -27 grant period, and creating a data dashboard with Eastern Washington University to serve the Yakama Nation by tribal council approval.

Through data collection, the partnership finds that community members are interested in postsecondary pathways but are unsure 'how' to make that possible. All implemented strategies support families from this perspective:

1. Trusted Tax Approaches, providing local, Spanish-speaking tax preparers to support families filing their income tax before applying for financial aid.
2. Community Conversations, where students and families are greeted with a warm meal and learn about postsecondary pathway resources.
3. School-Based Approaches, providing direct school district support through financial aid events, resources, and college campus visits.

"What makes me proud to be a part of the partnership is that while it has developed and shifted, the mission stays at our core. We haven't seen this type of work in the community in probably decades. YVPE has been able to bring in the necessary, much-needed resources to our communities. What I love about it is that this is not cookie cutter, we go into these spaces where the communities show us what the need is, we get the feedback for what needs to change, and we implement it."

– Dina Ibarra, Director of GEAR UP at the University of Washington

Approximate Funding Levels

WSAC staff are offering recommendations to the council with approximate amounts. Our partnerships will need additional time to create cuts to their proposed budgets and receive support through technical assistance. We anticipate funding levels per partnership may adjust by a difference +/- \$1,000 from this recommendation as revisions are made to their Budget and Statement of Work documents.

PARTNERSHIP	APPROXIMATE LEVEL
Cornerstone, Chehalis School District	\$863,000
Generating Rural Opportunity Washington (GROW) Network	\$552,000
Methow Futures	\$586,000
MPower (LaunchNW)	\$1,401,000
Postsecondary Student Success Network, City of Seattle	\$1,706,000
United Way of the Blue Mountains	\$323,000
Yakima Valley Partners for Education	\$767,000