

Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

December 16, 2025

Advisory Board Members Attending Virtually

Collin Banister, Sienna Jarrard, Geraldine Donovan, Sarah Everitt, Carol Garza, Lilia Hueso, Sienna Jarrard, Nashua Johnley, Railey Lamb, Damien Pattenaude, Susan Rose, Alyson Rotter, Domanic Vanthom, Becky Wallace.

Governor's Office Attending Virtually

Patricia Loera

Staff Attending Virtually

Isaac Kwakye, Sarah Weiss, Natalie Alvarado, Rubi Diaz, KC Deane, Sean Moran, Rashel Wise, Rathi Sudhakara, Dan Oliver .

Welcome and Overview

Presenter: Sarah Weiss, Isaac Kwakye, Natalie Alvarado

Key points:

- Isaac welcomed everyone to the second Washington Completes FAFSA Campaign Advisory Board meeting and thanked everyone for their efforts on this important work.
- Natalie reviewed WSAC's mission, function, and Council.
- Natalie gave an overview of the Advisory Board and meeting cadence.
- Natalie reviewed WSAC and board commitments, last month's discussion, and today's topic and goals of the meeting.
- Natalie introduced discussion questions for Advisory Board members to start thinking.

Board Commitments

- Consider key questions from the kickoff
- Identify tangible examples and opportunities in your communities
- Discuss these questions with your networks ahead of Dec 16 meeting

WSAC Commitments

- Provide training and resources to WEA
 - In progress – Official kick off in January
- Explore ways to customize student communications with more specific info on aid eligibility
 - Preliminary templates in development

- Design December meeting to focus on action-oriented opportunities
 - What we'll do today!

Last Month's Discussion

- Move financial aid & post-high school planning into the school day
- Strengthen college-going culture, esp. in rural communities
- Simplify & clarify "what students get"; support WA grant and FA messaging
- Use trusted messengers and data to personalize outreach

Today's Topic

- Winter/Spring Priorities after January Dip
- High-impact, low-cost outreach & marketing

Today's Goal

- 1 – 2 winter/spring priorities
- 1 – 2 outreach/marketing approaches
- Clear ways we will move forward

2025 – 2026 Progress and Strategy Highlights

Presenter: Natalie Alvarado

Key points:

- Natalie reviewed all four campaign goals and progress toward the goals.
- Natalie reviewed strategy and highlights for Priority Schools, FAFSA Portal, OtterBot, and Regional Partnerships (RCG & GEAR UP) with what we are seeing and how we are adjusting for each one.

Campaign goal 2025 – 2026:

Increase financial aid completion for all WA high school seniors.

- Ensure 46,000 seniors complete the FAFSA or WASFA.
- Raise FRPL-eligible student completions by 6% or more in at least 150 high schools.
- Close gap in FAFSA completion between FRPL and non-FRPL students.
- Reduce disparities in FAFSA completion rates, especially among those from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups.

Progress Toward Our 2025-26 Goals:

- Class of 2026 FAFSA & WASFA completion rate as of December 15 is 28% with 42 out of 53 weeks left.
- **Goal 1:** In less than 3 months and with 24,248 FAFSA and WASFA completions, we are more than halfway to our goal of 46,000 completions.

- **Goal 2:** Over 40 high schools have already experienced a 6% increase in FAFSA completions among FRPL-eligible students. We're almost a third of the way to our goal of 150 schools.
- **Goal 3:** FAFSA completion among FRPL-eligible students is 5pp below FAFSA completion for non-FRPL students (23% vs. 28%). We are at risk of falling further behind if we do not address this disparity.
- **Goal 4:** When considered by race/ethnicity, the group with the highest FAFSA completion has a rate that is three times the group with the lowest completion rate. Without action, existing disparities in filing by race/ethnicity may worsen.

Strategy Progress & Highlight:**Priority Schools**

- *What we're seeing:*
 - Increase in FAFSA completions after a school hosts an event
 - 25 priority schools already onboarded
 - Actively onboarding 2 tribal schools to reach 27 schools
- *How we're adjusting:* Hands-on follow-up support based on the specific needs that school staff share with WSAC leads

FAFSA Portal:

- *What we're seeing:*
 - 87% of expected HS graduates attend one of the 469 schools with at least one portal user
 - There are 485 active portal users across all schools
 - But 230 schools still have no portal user
- *How we're adjusting:*
 - Targeted outreach and training to remaining 230 schools
 - Using data to build targeted student-level follow-up

OtterBot

- *What we're seeing:*
 - 30,870: Total # of HS senior users statewide
 - 1,792: Total # of HS senior users at the 25 priority schools
 - Approx. 40,000 parents/guardians of College Bound HS seniors
- *How we're adjusting:* Adding in regular dual generation content for parents and students, with clear financial aid steps and messages that are timed to support school-day activities and events

Regional Partnerships (RCG & GEAR UP)

- *What we're seeing:*
 - Across all GEAR UP schools, the overall completion rate is 36% - nearly double what it was last January

- In Nine Mile Falls, overall completion is already above 50% - compared to 11% last December
- *How we're adjusting:*
 - Work directly with GEAR UP advisors and RCG partners to increase filing rates at schools that are underperforming
 - Uplift and share out effective practices already in use

Washington College Grant

Presenter: Sarah Weiss

Key points: Sarah shared the Washington College Grant marketing, its increased engagement, increased awareness and upcoming work.

Increasing Awareness of Financial Aid Opportunities

- Since 2023, WSAC has carried out statewide marketing to:
 - Build awareness of Washington College Grant (WA Grant) and its generous financial eligibility requirements and flexibility among low-income students & families in Washington State.
 - Drive greater financial aid completions among eligible populations.

Demonstrating Increased Engagement

- + 72% users clicking from the WSAC site to the FAFSA. January – June YOY 2025 vs. 2024.
- Washington College Grant (WA Grant) Webpage Visitors, Jan. 1 – June 30, by year
 - 2022 (No Campaign) – 25,458 total visitors
 - 2023 Year 1:
 - Spanish – 53,342
 - English – 239,333
 - Total – 239,333
 - 2024 Year 2:
 - Spanish – 101,594
 - English – 417,844
 - Total – 519,438
 - 2025 Year 3:
 - Spanish – 178,033
 - English – 487,537
 - Total – 665,570
- +2,514% over 3 years

Demonstrating Increased Awareness

- A survey of WA parents in the target income group showed over 60% were familiar with “WA Grant” a term that did not exist prior to WSAC’s marketing efforts.
- Pre- and post-campaign surveys found:*

- +10 percentage point increase in awareness of WA Grant
- +8 percentage point increase in parents reporting their children were likely to apply to college or career training after high school

*Fall 2024 vs. Summer 2025

Learning & Growing: Underway & Upcoming Work

- Regional Marketing
With Gates Foundation, testing local approach
- Storytelling Videos
New documentary-style video content
- Statewide Marketing
2026 campaign will launch in Jan.
- WA Grant Learning & Impact Resource
New research-based online content

Advisory Board Discussion

Presenter: Sarah Weiss

Discussion Questions:

- **Question 1:** Knowing that financial aid completions often begin to dip in January, what adjustments or priorities for winter/spring would make it easier for students and parents to follow through and complete their applications?
- **Question 2:** What high-impact, low-cost marketing approaches, using the governor's and students' voices, should we prioritize to reinforce these efforts and clearly show "what students get" from financial aid?

Highlights:

- Sienna shared that FAFSA and financial aid information can be hard for students and families to find on school websites. She suggested creating a clear WSAC information page that schools and districts can easily share, so families know where to go for FAFSA/WASFA help and OtterBot support. She also suggested a focused "challenge week" where schools or districts encourage students to start or complete FAFSA, possibly using friendly rivalries to build momentum. Finally, she raised the idea of giving students more personalized FAFSA completion sheets to reduce confusion and make the process feel less overwhelming.
- Carolina shared feedback from her team about making FAFSA completion data easier for schools to use. They wanted a way to identify new submissions, and Sean clarified that schools can already sort by the "Last Updated" column, though it shows the most recent change, not always the first submission date. Carolina also shared that FAFSA account

creation has become easier because the number of questions was reduced, and suggested telling students who may have felt overwhelmed before. She also recommended normalizing that many students still feel unsure after winter break and using that moment to remind them that completing financial aid can help keep their options open after graduation.

- Domanic supported the idea of using friendly competition between schools or districts to increase financial aid completion, including visible progress trackers and small incentives like pizza parties. He suggested using the new year as a fresh campaign push, with messaging like “New Year, New Money.” He also recommended changing the language from “FAFSA workshop” or “FAFSA night” to something more student-friendly, like “FAFSA lab” or drop-in support during lunch or class time. Finally, he suggested reaching students who already plan to work or enter the trades by framing financial aid as a “just in case” option that can keep more paths open without much risk.
- Collin suggested increasing FAFSA engagement in January and February by bringing current college students into high schools. He said colleges already have student ambassadors, clubs, student government groups, and volunteer programs that could help with this outreach. These students could visit assemblies or classrooms and share how FAFSA helped them get to college. He said this could make FAFSA feel more real by showing high school students how financial aid connects to their future goals, like studying to become a doctor, engineer, or another career.
- Nashua said FAFSA can feel confusing and overwhelming for many juniors and seniors, even though it can help them access scholarships and programs like the Washington College Grant. They suggested holding FAFSA-focused meetings during the school day, especially during advisory periods, so more students can get support instead of relying on after-school, evening, or Saturday events. These sessions could explain what FAFSA is, why it matters, and help students take first steps without making them feel like they must finish everything at once. Nashua also suggested bringing in college graduates or WSAC representatives to make the information feel more relatable and less intimidating.
- Susan shared that on-site admissions have been a strong motivator for students at her school. When colleges come to the school and students get admitted, FAFSA becomes a clear next step instead of something students are asked to do without knowing why. She said this helps students feel excited and like they are moving toward life after high school. About one-third of their seniors have already received early admission to universities, which has helped build momentum.
- Susan said FAFSA and WASFA support works best when it is part of a larger post-high school planning effort, not treated as a separate task. At her school, students get support during English, AVID, advisory, and through counselors, with help from partners like Big Bend Community College, the Limitless Grant, and NCW Tech. She said these partners meet with students during the school day, talk with families, and help students connect their future plans to financial aid. She also shared that her school surveys seniors about their career goals and FAFSA/WASFA plans, then follows up with students one-on-one when there is a gap between what they want to do and whether they plan to apply for aid.

- Sienna suggested showing students that the first parts of the FAFSA are easier and faster than they may think, since they include basic information like name and date of birth. She said students could use a short class period to get started, then take home a simple checklist of documents or information to ask their family for. She also suggested making financial aid feel more real by showing examples of how much aid different students might qualify for compared to the cost of community colleges, regional colleges, or universities. Sarah added that this kind of messaging could also help educators and advocates better understand that the application process is more streamlined now.
- Geraldine shared that private schools may not talk much about FAFSA or WASFA, even though many students at those schools may still qualify for financial aid. She said schools need more resources and encouragement for students to complete financial aid applications. She also suggested using radio, social media, and student stories to reach more students, especially on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, with YouTube feeling more trustworthy to her.
- Alyson said schools still need better ways to reach parents because students can start the FAFSA on their own, but they cannot finish it without parent involvement. She suggested meeting parents where they already are, such as through workplaces, chambers of commerce, economic development groups, or unions. She said these groups could help share financial aid information and explain why the parent part of the application is important.
- Carolina suggested starting with low-pressure conversations, like inviting students for donuts or small group talks, instead of expecting them to complete FAFSA or WASFA right away. She said staff can build trust with students and families, especially when they share language or lived experience, and then explain how financial aid can support different paths like college, trades, apprenticeships, or the military.

Ask of Advisory Board members

- Between now and January 20, help drive increases in financial aid completion within your school, organization, and networks.
- Share out WSAC resources
- Share back successes, challenges, and other learning opportunities
- Help us select schools that deserve recognition for building a college-going culture
- Join or host a regional training in your area to support the work to increase filing statewide

Public Comment

Ben Mitchell (Graduate Tacoma) shared recommendations from the Foundation for Tacoma Students on how Washington can increase FAFSA and WASFA completion. He suggested setting a bold statewide completion goal, recognizing and incentivizing schools that improve, connecting

FAFSA data with the High School and Beyond Plan platform, and creating friendly completion challenges with other states. He also shared longer-term ideas, including district FAFSA/WASFA plans, a college and career readiness course, financial aid certification for adults who support students, and one clear online resource for college, career, and financial aid information.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned following closing thanks from WSAC and Governor's Office staff, with appreciation expressed to all advisory board members and partners for their contributions.

Appendix A

December 16, 2025 – Advisory Board meeting Recording: [TVW Recording](#)

Appendix B

00:16:25 Rebecca Wallace: Becky Wallace, OSPI

00:16:40 Damien Pattenaude: Damien Pattenaude, Superintendent, Renton School District

00:17:10 Alyson Rotter: Alyson Rotter, Associate Dean of K12 Partnerships & Outreach, Olympic College

00:17:21 Executive Office: Here are the materials for today's meeting:

00:18:01 Carolina Garza (she/her): Carolina Garza - College Success Foundation (Yakima/Spokane)

00:18:07 Susan Rose: Susan Rose, Assistant Principal, Quincy School District

00:19:55 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Sean Moran, Washington Student Achievement Council, College Access Initiatives Data Analyst

00:20:37 Railey Lamb: Railey Lamb, junior at Kennewick High School

00:21:01 Geraldine Donovan: Geraldine Donovan, sophomore at Seattle Preparatory School

00:21:16 Lilia Hueso: Lilia Hueso Moses Lake High School Counselor

00:21:28 Domanic Vanthom: Dr. Domanic Vanthom - WSU Vancouver; Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs

00:21:56 Nashua Johnley: Nashua Johnley, senior at Toppenish HS

00:24:23 Rashel Wise: Rashel Wise, Washington Student Achievement Council, College Access Initiatives Program Specialist

- 00:41:27 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: That would be great Lilia. We do have a few folks signed up
- 00:42:12 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Really meeting people where they are and ensuring more in direct and trusted roles can be also involved
- 00:42:17 Rebecca Wallace: Happy to connect after the meeting.
- 00:42:22 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Reacted to "Happy to connect aft..." with 👍
- 00:42:41 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "Happy to connect aft..." with 👍
- 00:45:18 Alyson Rotter: This is really encouraging data!
- 00:47:43 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Reacted to "This is really encou..." with 👍
- 00:50:23 Rebecca Wallace: Sounds good- look forward to it
- 00:54:26 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "Sounds good- look fo..." with ❤️
- 00:56:46 Alyson Rotter: I had WIAA on my list as well. Explore what that partnership might look like - I know there's some league/regional info on the dashboard (although incomplete and maybe not the best matches). Using regional and/or state events as a place to "market" financial aid completion would be wise.
- 00:58:39 Alyson Rotter: Also approach WSPRA (if haven't already) about integrating a more formal communications campaign coordinated by WSAC.
- 01:01:54 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "Also approach WSPRA ..." with +
- 01:01:59 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "I had WIAA on my lis..." with 100
- 01:03:11 Alyson Rotter: Also wondering about leveraging additional "champions" in the building - our teams in schools shared it's mostly (or always) counselors that have this responsibility. I know you're working with WEA but I wonder if a more intentional ask would be to think about how teachers hear/get this campaign information. Maybe couple it with the very powerful perception data from the H2P project (students desire for college vs teacher perception). That data could be very motivating as a reason they may feel more compelled to share campaign info.
- 01:05:11 Railey Lamb: For question two, I think a way to reinforce these efforts is to talk about how you don't know what you can get from FAFSA until you apply. I know a lot of seniors who aren't using it just because they "know" they won't receive any aid. Along with real-life stories to show kids that financial aid can get you places, and you have options.
- 01:07:32 Alyson Rotter: Reacted to "For question two, I ..." with 👍
- 01:07:44 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "Also wondering about..." with 👍

01:08:52 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "For question two, I ..." with 🙌

01:08:53 Alyson Rotter: Replying to "For question two, I ..."

The notion of "I won't get anything anyhow" is a very real challenge in some communities. Trying to explain "what they get" by filing can be more challenging. I'm curious what others have in their back pocket/toolkit to motivate that population of students?

01:15:06 Rathi Sudhakara: Love how you are connecting their 'why' to 'how'

01:15:45 Alyson Rotter: Replying to "Love how you are con..."

YES! We use the language "what is your vision for your future" and financial aid then becomes part of their "how"

01:16:03 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Reacted to "Love how you are con..." with 👍

01:16:04 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "YES! We use the lan..." with +

01:16:16 Rathi Sudhakara: Reacted to "YES! We use the lan..." with ❤️

01:17:51 Rathi Sudhakara: @Susan Rose - if you have that study handy, can you share the link here? Thank you

01:18:59 Alyson Rotter: And sadly school counselors and teachers are some of the worst offenders perpetuating that "myth" about how long/terrible the "form" is. :(

01:19:39 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Replying to "For question two, I ..."

Hi Alyson, one of the things I have done when talking with students is being honest that you may not get state aid or Pell. Yet, the difference in interest rates for loans is huge. You can even see \$500-\$1000 just by doing a FAFSA. Thus, you are taking 1 hour and potentially securing that much money eventually. I like the idea of making things more real rather than abstract. Student loans may not be great, but they are still a reality for quite a few people.

01:19:45 Alyson Rotter: It's really quite shocking for some "old-timers" in the system to see how FAST the FAFSA can be done currently.

01:20:10 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Reacted to "@Susan Rose - if you..." with 👍

01:20:18 Rathi Sudhakara: Reacted to "It's really quite sh..." with 👍

01:20:23 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "It's really quite sh..." with +

01:21:10 Alyson Rotter: Replying to "For question two, I ..."

Thanks - agree this can be effective. I was more wondering about messaging "what you get" to students that don't want/need or desire loans.

01:21:18 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Reacted to "It's really quite sh..." with 👍

01:21:22 Alyson Rotter: Reacted to "Hi Alyson, one of th..." with 👍

01:22:09 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Reacted to "Thanks - agree this ..." with 👍

01:25:13 Susan Rose: Here is the link to the work in Yakima I was referencing:
https://washingtonstem.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/High-School-to-Postsecondary_Toolkit-FINAL-2022.pdf

01:25:26 Rathi Sudhakara: Reacted to "Here is the link to ..." with 👍

01:25:47 Sienna Jarrard: Replying to "For question two, I ..."

From my experience being a high school student who knew they wouldn't be eligible for state aid and didn't want/need subsidized loans, I still filled out the FAFSA because it was a requirement for eligibility to any scholarship (merit or need-based) for one of the private schools I had applied to. I think there is a lack of understanding as well with college scholarships and how beneficial those can be for students with a much larger variety of income then just those eligible for need-based aid.

01:26:02 Rathi Sudhakara: Replying to "Here is the link to ..."

Ah! Part of the H2P work. Thanks for sharing.

01:26:29 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Replying to "For question two, I ..."

Agreed Alyson-it is good to see where each person/family is at and figuring out how to acknowledge each population with what would be beneficial but still honest to their circumstances. Appreciate you also bringing that up


01:26:54 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Reacted to "From my experience b..." with 👍


01:27:04 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Reacted to "Here is the link to ..." with 👍

01:27:45 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Reacted to "Ah! Part of the H2P ..." with 👍

01:31:15 Railey Lamb: I think authority figures are a way to reach students, like a teacher they trust to push them in the right direction and to guide them. If a student doesn't know when, why, or how to do it, they won't. Making it as easy as possible, with someone they trust who knows how it works, is very important.

01:31:33 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: Reacted to "I think authority fi..." with 

01:31:41 Rashel Wise: Reacted to "I think authority fi..." with 

01:31:53 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Reacted to "I think authority fi..." with 

01:49:55 Sarah Weiss | she, her | WSAC: I will be sharing with the Board post-meeting!

01:56:33 Natalie Alvarado: Washington Completes FAFSA Campaign - Advisory Board | WSAC


01:56:41 Sean Moran (WSAC) he/him: Reacted to "Washington Completes..." with 

01:57:25 Rashel Wise: Reacted to "Washington Completes..." with 

01:57:59 Patricia Loera: Happy Holidays! Stay safe.

01:58:03 Rashel Wise: Thank you!!

01:58:08 Rashel Wise: Reacted to "Happy Holidays! Stay..." with 

01:58:10 Railey Lamb: Reacted to "Happy Holidays! Stay..." with 

01:58:14 Lilia Hueso: Thank you Happy holidays