



# Regional Partnerships Legislative Budget Report

December 2025

## Executive Summary

Regional Partnerships support local strategies that help more people in Washington earn college and career credentials. These efforts aim to improve economic mobility for learners who currently complete education and training at the lowest rates. This work is critical because economic mobility between generations has not improved in nearly forty years.<sup>1</sup>

As 2025 ends, no new private or public funding is available for WSAC’s Regional Partnerships. However, economic mobility progress is possible. Investing in local partnerships that improve the local communities where learners live, work, and study makes education and training opportunities for learners a reality. Regional Partnerships can reverse the historic and systemic trend of low wages and limited social mobility by increasing the state attainment goal.

To make this possible, WSAC seeks \$1.25 million in the 2026 supplemental operating budget to fund Regional Partnerships.



**Regional Partnerships invest in local communities, increase educational attainment, and grow access to economic mobility.**

## Introduction

Washington communities face a shared challenge: not enough learners are completing education or training beyond high school. Rather than implementing top-down strategies, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) invests in place-based, cross-sector regional partnerships. Local partners self-identify strategies to drive change in their own communities. Beyond just programs and services, partnerships seek to build regional cultures that value education and improve economic prospects for all residents. Achieving this goal is necessary so that all Washingtonians can access more learning opportunities that improve their economic opportunity. Since SB 5789 passed in 2022, WSAC has awarded more than \$16 million across 18 counties in the state.

More information on the program, partnerships, and indicators can be found in the 2025 companion report, *Regional Partnerships: Legislative Report on Program Implementation*.<sup>2</sup>

## Regional Partnerships Implementation

### **RP Impact: Increased Retention for BIPOC Seattle Students**

The City of Seattle Postsecondary Success Network is improving retention for BIPOC students. The network uses culturally responsive mentors, career-connected learning, and coordinated support across schools and community organizations. In its first year of RCG-funded work, *mentored Seattle Promise scholars had a 71 percent retention rate—17 percentage points higher than their non-mentored peers.*

Partnerships implement strategies from a position of deep community knowledge and trust. As written in RCW 28B.120.060, Regional Partnerships' (RP) purpose is to "meet statewide attainment goals by developing regional partnerships that foster innovations to:

1. Increase postsecondary enrollment and completion for students enrolling directly from high school and adults returning to education; and
2. Eliminate educational opportunity gaps for students of color, English language learners, students with disabilities, and foster and homeless youth."

Regional Partnerships is an agency approach to regionalization that also includes investing in partnerships through the Regional Challenge Grant (RCG). Each partnership consists of several member organizations, including a fiscal agent and lead entity.

Across 12 regional partnerships, this includes 71 community-based organizations, 24 K-12 entities, and 20 colleges.

### **Program Funding**

The Legislature's 2025-27 biennial operating budget eliminated all carryforward level funding (\$16 million) to the Regional Challenge Grant (RCG). As of this report, there is no additional funding to support place-based partnerships in Washington State.

Grant awards currently support 12 partnerships in two cohorts. The first cohort includes seven partnerships that implement direct-enrollment strategies to increase college and career pathway enrollment after high school graduation. The second cohort includes five partnerships, with a focus on increasing the completion rates of learners in their pathways of choice, including adult learners. Together, Regional Partnerships represents 12 unique hypotheses informed by their local community of learners to shift postsecondary culture in communities.

*"RCG increased capacity for our community. We couldn't have leveraged CTE without it. Support from the state to create innovative, place-based strategies is incredibly transformative. Systems change takes time. RCG support is hard to put into words. It is so helpful." - Dr. Grant Storey, Superintendent, Methow Valley School District*

**Figure 1. All Public Appropriations and Private Funding to Date, Totaling \$23.5 Million**

Public – WEIA and GF-S <sup>3</sup>	\$22,000,000.00
Private – Ballmer Group	\$1,500,000.00
Revenue Total	\$23,500,000.00

Figure 1 includes all public appropriations and private funding to date. RCG has received \$23.5 million from public and private sources since being established in 2022, including \$6 million from GF-S in FY2025. WSAC received \$6 million for FY 23, \$16 million for FY 24 and 25, and \$0 for FY 26 and 27.

## Program Expenses

WSAC defines program expenses as the cost to fund, support, and evaluate Regional Partnerships. Grant awards are the most significant expense; these funds are invested directly in local partnerships. Grant awards are disbursed in twice-annual payments following necessary reporting requirements. Non-grant expenses include staffing, operational costs, travel to site visits, technical assistance to partnerships, among other non-grant award costs.<sup>4</sup> Figure 2 reports on complete spending in year three of program implementation.

**Figure 2. Complete Regional Partnerships Expenses in FY25**

Grant awards	\$3,627,179.00
Non-grant expenses	\$659,220.07
FY25 Expenses Total	\$4,286,399.07

Regional Challenge Grants occur on a two-year award cycle allowing for consistent evaluation of the partnerships. WSAC uses a rigorous, multi-level process to evaluate partnerships seeking renewal. Program staff review evidence, such as existing progress reports, short-term outcomes, facilitated discussions, and self-assessment tools. Figure 3 includes grant awards by partnership.

**Figure 3. Grant Awards to Date by Partnership**

Partnership	Total Award Amount	Cohort	Fiscal Years
Centro Cultural Mexicano	\$500K	Two	2024 - 2026
Cornerstone	\$2.06M	One	2023 - 2027
ELEVATE	\$577K	Two	2024 - 2026
Foundation for Tacoma Students	\$1.67M	One	2023 - 2025
Kitsap Strong	\$640K	Two	2024 - 2026
Methow Futures	\$863K	One	2023 - 2027
Mpower	\$2.78M	One	2023 - 2027
Olympic Peninsula Resource CO-OP	\$896K	Two	2024 - 2026
City of Seattle Postsecondary Success Network	\$3.49M	One	2023 - 2027
GROW-Net	\$843K	One	2023 - 2027
United Way of the Blue Mountains	\$608K	One	2023 - 2027
WSU Native American Health Sciences	\$495K	Two	2024 - 2026
Yakima Valley Partners for Education	\$1.26M	One	2023 - 2027
Total	\$16,676,219		

## Economic Mobility is Possible

Restoring funding for the Regional Challenge Grant (RCG) will create measurable progress for Washington learners. After years of stagnation, progress toward the state’s attainment goal increased by one percentage point each year since RCG’s inception. By meeting communities where they are and shaping local conditions in their community, we have the power to influence local student outcomes from a position of deep community knowledge, trust, and needs.

### National Recognition

Washington was among the first to invest in place-based partnerships. WSAC participates in a national community of practice with Harvard Ed Redesign Lab and StriveTogether. When the group first began in 2024, Washington was alongside just two other states that had secured public funding for regional partnerships. Now, with a total of seven states, WSAC provides leadership through expertise on high-quality evaluation and renewal processes. With continued state investment, Washington can remain a national leader in this innovative space.

### WSAC’s Role

Regional Partnerships is a place-based approach. As a state agency, WSAC acts as an intermediary between the educational sectors represented on its Council and regional partnerships in their local communities. Further, when paired with the nation’s most generous state financial aid program, WSAC can increase the impact of partnerships in communities by pairing affordability with trusted messengers.<sup>5</sup>

### Responsible Stewardship of Public Dollars

WSAC maintains regular oversight of funds disbursed to regional partnerships. This includes reviewing expense reports and meeting regularly with partnerships for relationship building and technical assistance. Further, WSAC evaluates partnerships in four domain areas:

- Responsible stewardship of public dollars
- Responsiveness to the community
- Evaluation and adaptation
- Partnership structure

### RP Impact: Direct Enrollment Increases in the Columbia Basin

Generating Rural Opportunity Washington (GROW) Network implements STEM strategies for families in the rural Kiona-Benton school district. *The partnership increased the number of students who enrolled from Ki-Be to Washington State University Tri-Cities from one to seven in just two years*, due to RCG investment. Known for its rich agriculture and proximity to STEM careers, more than half of the students in the school district identify as Hispanic or Latino, and 72 percent receive FRPL (in AY 23-24).

WSAC reserves the right to halt or alter payments if necessary or prudent to ensure the successful monitoring of state funds.

### Ballmer Group

In December 2024, Ballmer Group awarded WSAC a \$3 million grant for Regional Partnerships. Funds were awarded to support retention and completion strategies, rural data capacity building among

partners, and intentional geographic or strategic scaling. WSAC received the first \$1.5 million in December 2024. The second payment of \$1.5 million was contingent upon the Legislature maintaining funding for regional partnerships in the 2025-27 biennial operating budget. Because carryforward funding was eliminated, WSAC will not receive the second payment from Ballmer Group.

### **Conclusion**

WSAC has requested \$1.25 million for Regional Partnerships in the 2026 supplemental operating budget. With this investment, WSAC can continue to shape the local environment to increase college and career enrollment and completion. This funding does not only fulfill our state's commitment to equity and educational opportunity but returns on the state's investment by increasing economic mobility for Washingtonians.

Washington must invest in strong regional partnerships so that we can create an education system where all learners feel that college and career training opportunities are meant for and built for them. Shifting local mental models is not possible in a four-year period. Instead, the RP long-term investment strategy is intentional, allowing time to change systems, so that more Washingtonians can follow the path from education and training to better jobs and improved economic opportunity. Although the 2025-27 biennial operating budget eroded funding for Regional Partnerships, it did not erode our shared commitment to increasing economic mobility for learners from rural, urban, and suburban areas of Washington State.

### **Purpose**

As stated in the enacted 2023-25 Washington State biennial budget (in special appropriations, page 628 section 724): "The appropriations in this section are subject to the following conditions and limitations: The appropriations are provided solely for expenditure into the Washington career and college pathways innovation challenge program account created in RCW 28B.120.040 to implement RCW 28B.120.060. The student achievement council must report to the governor and appropriate committees of the legislature on the uses of the general fund moneys deposited in the account by December 1 of each fiscal year of the biennium." [5187-S.PL.pdf](#)

## About the Washington Student Achievement Council

The Washington Student Achievement Council is committed to increasing educational opportunities and attainment in Washington. The Council has three main functions:

- Lead statewide strategic planning to increase educational attainment.
- Administer programs that help people access and pay for college.
- Advocate for the economic, social, and civic benefits of higher education.

The Council has ten members. Four members represent each of Washington’s major education sectors: four-year public baccalaureates, four-year private colleges, public community and technical colleges, and K-12 public schools. Six are citizen members, including two current students (one graduate student and one undergraduate student).

If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format, please contact the Washington Student Achievement Council at:

Mail:

P.O. Box 43430

Olympia, WA 98504-3430

Phone:

360-753-7800

TTY/TDD users may dial 7-1-1 for relay services

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<sup>1</sup> Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Kline, P., Saez, E., & Turner, N. (2014). Is the United States Still a Land of Opportunity? Recent Trends in Intergenerational Mobility. NBER Working Paper 19844.

<sup>2</sup> Additional information on WSAC’s \$1.25 million request can be found in the 2026 Supplemental Decision Package.

<sup>3</sup> Of the total \$22M in state funds, \$4M is from WEIA and \$18M is from the General Fund.

<sup>4</sup> Travel for site visits following Former Governor Inslee’s freeze effective December 2024.

<sup>5</sup> The Education Trust. “Equity-Focused ‘Free College’ Movement Picks Up Steam.” Press Room, 21 Oct. 2020.



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