



Regional Partnerships

Legislative Report on Program Implementation

Appendix A: Programmatic Updates

Strategic Investment

In December 2024, WSAC received a \$1.5 million investment from Ballmer Group to enhance the capacity and impact of its regional partnership work, including the Regional Challenge Grant.¹ RCG aligns with multiple levers of change employed across Ballmer Group's priorities, including: strengthening and developing local partnerships, partnering with government, investing in systems change, and scaling data capacity. Ballmer Group's financial contribution enables WSAC to amplify RCG's impact in three ways:

- Supporting and enhancing the data capabilities of smaller, rural RCG partnerships to carry out robust measurement, evaluation, and process improvement efforts.
- Pursuing opportunities to grow existing partnerships and/or scale strategies.
- Developing regional strategies aimed at increasing retention and degree completion.

Long-Term Outlook based on the 2025 Biennial State Budget

During the 2025 legislative session, funding for the Regional Challenge Grant was eliminated from \$16 million considered maintenance level each biennium. Without any new funding, the partners in which WSAC's Regional Challenge Grant program has invested will have had no more than four academic years of funding to change the educational culture in their communities.

In advance of the 2026 legislative session, WSAC submitted a \$1.25 million Decision Package, which would be used to reinvest in regional partnerships.

Upcoming Report on Regional Partnership Outcomes for the 2024-25 Academic Year

In January 2026, all twelve regional partnerships actively receiving a Regional Challenge Grant will report on short-term outcomes for the 2024-25 academic year, the third academic year during which RCG-funded work occurred. The annual *What We Know* brief will be published by WSAC shortly thereafter.

Reapplication and Investment Renewal

Partnerships seeking reapplication are evaluated through a rigorous, multi-level evaluation process. This process includes assessing several forms of evidence, such as existing progress reporting, short-term outcomes, facilitated discussions with partnerships, and self-assessment tools. Final recommendations are brought to the WSAC Council for formal approval prior to implementation (see Appendix E for details).

- *Spring 2024:* The Regional Partnerships team renewed grant agreements through June 30, 2027 for seven partnerships in the first cohort.
- *Spring 2025:* Partnerships in the second cohort will apply for a new two-year cycle of funding through June 30, 2028. Final decisions will be shared after WSAC's May 2026 Council Meeting.

¹ Ballmer Group awarded WSAC a \$3 million grant. WSAC received the first payment of \$1.5 million in December 2024. The second payment was contingent upon the state maintaining its funding level for regional partnerships in the 2025-27 budget. Due to RCG budget elimination, WSAC will not receive this second payment.