

## Washington College Grant – Connect (WCG-C) FAQ for Financial Aid Administrators

### 1. What is WCG-Connect?

**Updated 9/2024**

[2S HB 1835, section 5](#) passed in 2022, allows 3 specific public benefit programs to be considered meeting financial need for WCG-C funding. The goal is to help connect students to higher education and to remove barriers to paying for college. These students will be verified as meeting the income requirement for WCG without having to complete a FAFSA or WASFA. To ensure students are receiving the full aid (federal and institutional) that they are entitled to, college staff should work together with and encourage eligible students to complete a FAFSA or WASFA after they have made their initial registration.

[2SHB 2214](#) (an expansion of [HB 1835](#)) was passed during the 2023 Legislative session. It expands the demonstration of financial need for Washington College Grant eligibility to include students who participate in Washington's Basic Food Program (SNAP) or the Food Assistance Program (FAP) in the 10th, 11th, or 12th grade, beginning the **2025-26** Academic Year.

### 2. Who can qualify for WCG-Connect?

**Updated 9/2024**

To be eligible for the WCG-C, students must meet program requirements, attend an approved college or program, and must meet the following requirements a(ii) - (C):

[28B.92.200](#)

(5) To be eligible for the Washington college grant, students must meet the following requirements:

(a)(i) Demonstrate financial need under RCW 28B.92.205;

(ii) Receive one of the following types of public assistance:

(A) Aged, blind, or disabled assistance (**ABD**) benefits under chapter 74.62 RCW;

(B) Essential needs and housing support program benefits (**HEN**) under RCW 43.185C.220; or

(C) Pregnant women assistance (**PWA**) program financial grants under RCW 74.62.030; or

(iii) Be a Washington high school student in the 10th, 11th, or 12th grade whose parent or legal guardian is receiving one of the types of public assistance listed in

(a)(ii) of this subsection and have received a certificate confirming eligibility from the office in accordance with section 6 of this act.

Meet the above requirements and be in one of the other WSAC approved public benefit programs:

1. Economic Security for All (**EcSA**)

Receipt of these public benefit programs by a student or parent of a student is a demonstration of need and are considered to meet maximum grant eligibility.

### **3. How many dependents does WSAC anticipate serving in these programs?**

Per DSHS, individuals with dependents are not eligible for ABD, HEN, and PWA. Therefore, there will not be any eligible dependents at this time.

### **4. How is this different from the “SNAP pilot”? How can other programs participate?**

[2S HB 1835, section 5](#) will be the baseline for other programs such as SNAP. WSAC will review other programs that may also be appropriate in consultation with DSHS.

### **5. How does one apply for WCG-Connect?**

**Updated 9/2024**

Students will have applied for and been determined eligible for one of the DSHS programs identified or a WSAC approved program, which has been determined to have similar income criteria and considered the application that establishes their WCG-C eligibility also. WSAC has data share agreements with DSHS and ESD for EcSA, as well as built an Eligibility Checker in the WSAC Portal. Because most WCG-C students won't have a FAFSA or WASFA, schools will have to determine the best way to identify these students, such as getting lists of students who applied/enrolled and run those students through the Eligibility Checker.

### **6. How long is a student eligible to receive WCG-Connect?**

**Updated 9/2024**

Students are eligible to receive WCG-C as long as they remain eligible for one of the 3 public assistance programs outlined in [2S HB 1835, section 5](#) or other public assistance programs approved by WSAC in the future.

An eligible student may receive WCG-C for one year from the date of notification of eligibility from DSHS. However, if a student is no longer eligible under the qualifying DSHS program, they would not lose eligibility mid-year and would retain their eligibility through the remainder of the academic year.

For example, DSHS notifies us of a student's eligibility in January 2023. The student is then eligible for 12 months thru December 2023 without having to complete a FAFSA/WASFA. WSAC is then notified that the student is no longer eligible for the DSHS program in June 2023. Because the student remains eligible through December 2023 and because that would fall in the middle of an award year, the student would retain eligibility through the end of the 2023-2024 award year which may include a summer trailer.

**7. Do students need to have Quarters of Eligibility Remaining (QER) to receive WCG-Connect?**

Yes, they are subject to the same QER requirements.

**8. Does WCG-Connect require students to complete a FAFSA or a WASFA?**

**Updated 9/2024**

No, a WCG-C student does not need to complete a FAFSA or WASFA to be qualified to receive WCG funding and may not be required to complete a financial aid application prior to enrolling in college or being issued an award offer. By virtue of being in one of the 3 public assistance programs outlined above or in a WSAC approved program, they have already been determined to meet the income requirements under WCG-C. Eligible students will be encouraged to complete a FAFSA or a WASFA to ensure they receive all federal, state aid such as CBS or PTC and/or institutional aid they would be eligible for.

**9. What about the student that gets SNAP (pilot program) and then later completes WASFA or FAFSA and is dependent and family income disqualifies them based on income?**

**Updated 9/2024**

Currently there are no approved SNAP Pilot programs.

**10. What schools will offer WCG-Connect?**

Students can attend any of the WSAC-approved participating schools [to](#) receive WCG-C for campus-based education or training.

Approved non-campus-based apprenticeship programs may also qualify for WCG-C funds. Check with the program sponsor for more information about WCG-C for apprenticeships.

**11. Can students receive federal financial aid such as Pell if they are receiving WCG under WCG-C?**

**Updated 9/2024**

Students who qualify under WCG-C only qualify for WCG and WA Bridge grant without completing a FAFSA. Students who qualify under WCG-C most likely qualify for Pell and other federal aid and will need to complete a FAFSA to determine eligibility.

**12. Do WCG-Connect students need to meet the state's residency requirement?**

Yes, WCG-C students will need to meet the state's residency requirement and will need to be verified by the school's residency office in the same manner as any other student.

**13. Do students have to be U.S. Citizens or can individuals without documentation also be eligible?**

**Updated 9/2024**

Individuals need to be U.S. Citizens to receive the 3 public assistance programs outlined in HB 1835. Therefore, undocumented individuals do not qualify at this time under WCG-C based on the rules of the 3 public assistance programs.

Students who qualify for WCG-C under a WSAC approved public benefit program that does not require U.S. Citizenship will need to meet the residency requirements outlined for WCG (see #12 above).

**14. Do WCG-Connect students need to meet the High School Diploma/GED/ATB requirement?**

Yes, students will need to meet the High School Diploma/GED/ATB requirement.

**15. Is CBS included in this legislation?**

This legislation is specifically for WCG.

**16. Will students in WCG-Connect qualify for the Washington Bridge Grant?**

Yes, because these students will qualify for the maximum WCG, they would be eligible to also receive the WA Bridge Grant. Note: The WA Bridge Grant is subject to continued funding beyond the 2024-25 academic year.

**17. Can WCG-Connect exceed tuition and fees? Would they be eligible for a refund to use for books, for example?**

WCG-C is another way to qualify for WCG. Award amounts are established based on tuition and fee amounts. Funds disbursed can be used for any educational costs.

**18. How will these student be reported on interim reports?**

Students will appear in the WSAC portal/CSAW and will be reported in the same manner as other WCG students.

**19. How will these students be reported on the URR?**

**Updated 9/2024**

Students would be reported in the same manner as other WCG students.

**20. Question about timing – what academic year is this going to be for?**

Awarding begins for the 2023-24 academic year.

**21. Dual enrollment questions or people who fly under the radar that don't have HS diploma/GED.**

A student must meet all program requirements for the WCG program.

**22. Student is awarded under WCG-C then later files FAFSA – but is determined dependent?**

Students will remain eligible under WCG-C for the first year they are approved for WCG-C. If a student files a FAFSA/WASFA within the same year, the student will continue to receive maximum funding under WCG-C for the first year and may also be eligible for other federal aid. A student would not lose WCG-C eligibility the first year if they filed a FAFSA/WASFA.

**23. What about the student that gets SNAP and then later completes WASFA/FAFSA and is dependent and family income disqualifies them based on income?**

See question #9

**24. What happens to future disbursement and prior disbursements?**

Eligibility will be determined for the academic year.

**25. Are there any issues with summer enrollment? Are the students eligible for a third term in the award year?**

Summer awards would also be available for students qualifying under WCG-C.

**26. Will there be a checker functionality to check eligibility?**

Yes, there is a WCG-Connect Eligibility Checker currently available in the WSAC Portal.

**27. What will the reporting requirements be?**

Reporting requirements will be the same as WCG. This includes interim reports, disbursements, unit record reporting, etc. but edits will be different.

**28. Will WCG-Connect be funded through the same account as WCG, for bookkeeping purposes?**

Yes, this is WCG funding. Students will be identifiable in the WSAC Portal.

**29. Also, if a student happens to be “eligible” for CBS but is set to receive WCG-C, would they be able to receive Bridge?**

No, all the same rules for WA Bridge grant apply.

- If a student is CBS eligible in the eligibility checker, but did not complete a FAFSA/WASFA, they are not eligible for CBS at this time; however, they can be awarded the Washington Bridge Grant under the WCG-C eligibility.
- Once a CBS student completes the FAFSA/WASFA and they are determined to meet CBS income eligibility, then the student should be awarded CBS. The financial aid offices would be required to return the Bridge grant and award the student CBS.

**30. Is there a chance that CBS could be made available?**

To allow CBS, it would require a statutory change.

Anyone that is eligible for CBS that qualifies under WCG-C and then files a FAFSA/WASFA and meets the 65% MFI requirement would be eligible for CBS. However, if they did not file a FAFSA/WASFA, they would be Bridge eligible.

**31. Add a projected number of participants in each of the three programs. It would help to know the total number of the current recipients in the state, knowing that not all will apply for college or forego federal aid.**

**Updated 9/2024**

We can provide the number of enrollments in the programs but caution that we do not know the number interested in enrolling in college.

In 2021, there were 35,784 clients served. Clients can only apply for ABD, not the HEN referral program. HEN referral is part of the ABD program. If the client is eligible for ABD, they will also receive a referral for HEN (Housing and Essential Needs). If the client is determined incapacitated (unable to work between 90 days and 12 months), they will receive HEN referral only. There were no clients served in the PWA (Pregnant Women Assistance) program.

EcSA enrolls around 2,400 participants annually, statewide. They anticipate approximately 500 clients that will have a career plan that could include training that qualifies for WCG funds on an annual basis

**32. Will students need to be retroactively awarded for WCG if they were enrolled prior to showing eligibility under WCG-C?**

**Updated 9/2024**

Students that are on the DSHS or other approved program file received by WSAC by May 1, should be retroactively awarded back to July of the current academic year.

Students that appear on the DSHS or other approved program file received by WSAC after May 1 will be awarded from this point moving forward. They would not be retroactively awarded.

**33. What are the reporting expectations out to legislature, etc? Do we need to distinguish WCG-Connect from regular WCG?**

Colleges don't need to distinguish or report WCG-C students separately. WSAC will have the ability to identify and report as needed.

**34. How will schools be able to verify if a student is WCG-C eligible if they do not appear in the Eligibility Checker? Can the school verify with a DSHS or other program approved by WSAC's award letter?**

**Updated 9/2024**

If a student does not appear in the WCG-Connect Eligibility Checker, the student can provide the FAO (financial aid office) a copy of their DSHS or other program approved by WSAC's acceptance letter. The FAO will provide WSAC information based on the collected documentation, to add the student to the Eligibility Checker (see question #36). The school must keep the documentation in the student file.

**35. When you say a student must be awarded maximum WCG even if MFI is over 65%, does that mean the maximum for the MFI in which they fall under?**

Colleges will need to award students the maximum WCG (at 65%) regardless of what their WASFA/FAFSA income or MFI shows. Being eligible under WCG-Connect means the student is eligible for maximum WCG, regardless of income or MFI.

**36. How can schools generate a list of students if there isn't a WASFA/FAFSA on file?**

**Updated 9/2024**

Schools may need to work with their admissions office or other campus offices to receive SSN information for their students and run them through the WCG-C Checker. A student can also self-identify that they are WCG-C eligible and provide documentation of their eligibility to the financial aid office. The FAO will need to provide WSAC with the following information through a [secure message](#) sent in the portal:

- SSN
- Client ID
- Name
- DOB
- Address
- Program (ABD, HEN, PWA, EcSA)
- Start Date in Program

WSAC will then add the student to the Eligibility Checker.

**37. We have a student who may qualify for WCG-C. How soon can we have access to the Eligibility Checker?**



The WCG-C Eligibility Checker is currently live in the WSAC Portal in CSAW. It's available to those who have 'Institution Staff' access under Washington College Grant in the WSAC Portal. If staff don't have access, your director should be able to grant you access.

**38. What is the lag time between when a student submits their WASFA/FAFSA vs. when it may show up in the checker?**

The Checker is updated on a monthly basis to reflect students who qualify for WCG through WCG-Connect. The Checker is only looking to see if a person is in an eligible DSHS or EcSA program that qualifies them under WCG-Connect and does not reflect WASFA/FAFSA filing status.

**39. Will ctLink have a new WCG-C page, the way we currently have access to a WCG and CBS page? Will you speak more to this topic, please.**

Since ctLink is something that is managed by your institution's system administrator and/or SBCTC, this isn't something we can speak to. Rest assured though, that SBCTC is aware of this program and should be able to provide some guidance.

**40. If a student didn't file a FAFSA/WASFA, could they still show up in the Eligibility Checker as an edit for us? Or will we need to find them another way?**

Yes, the student will show up in the Eligibility Checker and would be eligible for maximum WCG and WA Bridge without filing a WASFA or FAFSA. If a school doesn't award the full WCG award amount and/or WA Bridge grant at the time of awarding in the portal, there will be an edit to resolve.

**41. Will students be eligible for WCG-C if they are in repayment?**

Students who qualify for WCG through WCG-Connect are subject to all WCG eligibility rules. If they owe a state aid repayment, they are not eligible for additional state aid. Federal repayments do not prohibit receipt of state aid.

**42. Are there ways to see if students are accessing these funds at another school before we place them at our institution?**

WCG-C is WCG. There is no separate funding. You would identify students who are awarded at other institutions in the same way you identify your WCG students. You will receive an edit, or you can also review in the "Dual-Enrolled Report" in CSAW Reports.

**43. In order to receive a list of WCG-C eligible students, does a list first have to be uploaded into the Eligibility Checker?**

Correct. To identify which students are eligible under the WCG-C program, you will need to upload a list of all of your student's SSNs into the Eligibility Checker first.

**44. Will there be a separate WCG-C program manual, or will it be embedded in the WCG/CBS Program Manual?**

We have guidance in our [WCG/CBS Program Manual](#), as well as the "Washington College Grant – Connect (WCG-C)" recorded webinar on our FAA Resources page at <https://wsac.wa.gov/FAA-resources>. There is not a separate manual for WCG-C.

**45. What about students that do not file a WASFA/FAFSA and attend a school in the private sector? Do they have to determine residency in another way?**

Yes, private schools will need to determine residency, even if there isn't a WASFA/FAFSA on file. Residency determinations at private colleges and universities are determined by the financial aid office and guidance can be found at <https://wsac.wa.gov/student-residency>.