

Session Title & Description	Date	# Registrants	# Attendees
<p><b>Help Shape the Regional Challenge Grant</b></p> <p>WSAC will share progress updates on the Regional Challenge Grant including highlights from the May council meeting. Participants will have an opportunity to provide feedback to inform the grant design process.</p> <p><a href="#">View the recording here.</a></p>	<p>June 16, 2022</p>	<p>114</p>	<p>81</p>
<p><b>Regional Challenge Grant: Networking Session</b></p> <p>The Regional Challenge Grant is a partnership-based grant. Whether you’re already part of an established partnership or are exploring forming a partnership in the future, we encourage you to participate in this networking opportunity to connect with others in Washington who are currently engaged in or exploring postsecondary enrollment and career pathways initiatives. This session is designed to both connect you to others doing the work in your sector and across sectors for maximum opportunity to meet future thought partners or collaborators in advance of the grant application.</p> <p><i>Because this session focused on small group conversations, it was not recorded.</i></p>	<p>July 26, 2022</p>	<p>109</p>	<p>83</p>
<p><b>Leaders Collaborating for Community Change</b></p> <p>In preparation for the upcoming Regional Challenge Grant, an opportunity for Washington to invest in place-based partnerships to increase postsecondary enrollment, WSAC, in partnership with College Promise, is hosting a virtual community of practice with organizational leaders from across the country. During this event, participants will hear panelists share their key learnings of successful community partnerships and the power of collective impact. This 1-hour panel discussion will be followed by a robust 30-minute Q&amp;A/networking session for all participants. Key topics will include: building cross, sector equitable partnerships, the power of shared goals and objectives, data sharing, program sustainability, funding models and more. The power of shared goals and objectives.</p> <p><a href="#">View the recording here.</a></p>	<p>August 24, 2022</p>	<p>164</p>	<p>118</p>

## Appendix B: Stakeholder Engagement

The following entities engaged with WSAC during the summer, whether by registering to attend public sessions or meeting with staff. Additional entities may have attended but did not indicate an affiliation when registering for the session.

828 Flow	Council of Presidents
Abl Schools	Cross Sector Impact LLC
AIMC Berkeley	Eastern Washington University
Alliance for Just Society - Communities for our Colleges	Eastside Pathways
American Federation of Teachers	Edmonds College
Asia Pacific Cultural Center	Educational Service District 105
Association of Washington School Principals	Educational Service District 112
Auburn School District	Educational Service District 123
Bellevue College	Federal Way Public Schools
Bellingham Technical College	Futures Northwest
Bethel School District	Get Schooled
Big Bend Community College	Give Something Back
Big Brothers Big Sisters/YMCA of Snohomish County	Gonzaga University
Bill Melinda Gates Foundation	Governor's Office of Indian Affairs
Blue Collar Fund	Graduate Tacoma & Foundation for Tacoma Students
Building Industry Association of WA	Grays Harbor College
Burlington-Edison School District/GEAR UP	Greater Spokane Inc.
Capital STEM Alliance @ ESD113	Green River College
Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession	Heritage University
Central Washington University	Highline College
Centralia College	Independent Colleges of Washington
Centralia Community Foundation	Innovia Foundation
Centralia School District-Centralia High School	IT3 Technology
Centro Cultural Mexicano	Just Strategy
Chehalis School District	Kent School District
Chief Leschi Schools	Kessler Elementary
Chimacum School District	Kitsap Strong
Clark College	Kittitas Environmental Education Network (KEEN)
College Possible	Lake Washington High School
College Promise Coalition	Lake Washington Institute of Instruction
College Success Foundation	Lower Columbia College
Columbia Basin College	Lummi Indian Business Council
Commission on African American Affairs	Mead School District
Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs	Meadowdale HS/Edmonds SD
Commission on Hispanic Affairs	Methow Valley School District
Communities in Schools of Federal Way - Highline	Mid-Columbia STEM
Community Catalyst Partners	Moreno & Moreno LLC
Community Center for Education Results	NCESD/Apple STEM Network
Community Colleges of Spokane	North Central Educational Service District
Compass 2 Campus (WWU)	North Seattle College
Computing For All	North Thurston Public Schools
	Northeast Community Center

## Appendix B: Stakeholder Engagement

Northeast Washington Educational Service District  
101  
Northwest Education Access  
Northwest Educational Service District 113  
Northwest Educational Service District 189  
Olympic College  
Olympic ESD 114  
Pacific Lutheran University  
Partnership for Learning  
Peninsula College  
Pierce College  
Providence Health Care  
Puget Sound Educational Service District 121  
Renton Innovation Zone Partnership  
Renton Technical College  
Riipen  
Riverside School District  
Roadtrip Nation  
Seattle Central College  
Seattle Colleges  
Seattle Colleges - Seattle Promise  
Seattle Pacific University  
SeeMore Impact Labs  
Slingshot  
Sno-Isle TECH Skills Center  
Sound View Strategies  
South Puget Sound Community College  
Spokane Community College  
STRATA9  
Tacoma Community College  
Tacoma Public Schools, CTE  
Teach for America  
The Evergreen State College  
The Museum of Flight  
The PSA Foundation  
The STEM Foundation  
The Washington State Board of Education  
Toppenish School District  
Treehouse  
United Faculty of Washington State  
United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers and Allied  
Workers apprenticeship  
United Way of Lewis County  
United Way of the Blue Mountains  
University of Puget Sound  
University of Washington

Vancouver Public Schools  
WA Department of Health  
WA Dept of Health - Rural Health Workforce  
WA House Democratic Caucus  
WA Senate Democratic Caucus  
WA State Building and Construction Trades Council  
WA State Cradle to Career Advocacy Network  
Walla Walla Community College  
Washington Roundtable  
Washington State Board for Community and  
Technical Colleges  
Washington State Department of Social and Health  
Services  
Washington State LGBTQ Commission  
Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public  
Instruction  
Washington State Opportunity Scholarship  
Washington State PTA  
Washington State University Everett  
Washington State University Tri-Cities  
Washington State Women's Commission  
Washington STEM  
Washington Women in Need  
West Valley School District 208  
Western Governors University  
Western Washington University  
Whatcom Community College  
Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King  
County  
Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board  
Yakima Valley Partners for Education

## Regional Challenge Grant *Council Discussion Guide*

### About the Regional Challenge Grant

The [Washington Career and College Pathways Innovation Challenge Program](#) (Regional Challenge Grant) provides competitive awards for local and regional partnerships that create cross-sector collaboration and advance postsecondary access and success. The program seeks to increase postsecondary enrollment and completion, and eliminate educational opportunity gaps for students of color, English language learners, students with disabilities, and foster and homeless youth. The program is supported by a dedicated fund with an appropriation of \$6 million in FY 2022-23. The budget forecast includes an additional \$8 million in appropriations in FY24 and FY25, for a total of \$22 million over three years.

The Regional Challenge Grant comes at a critical time in our state and marks a new approach for WSAC and our partners to advance system change through innovation by robust local partnerships to better serve Washington students. The Appendix provides additional context.

### About this Discussion Guide

The Washington Student Achievement Council, with the support of staff and an extensive outreach process, will approve a process to award grants providing technical assistance. This guide supports the discussion with the Council and other stakeholders regarding key program design choices.

### Timeline for Regional Challenge Grant Development

- May – WSAC Council provides guidance on key design questions at May 24 meeting.
- June – WSAC staff gather additional input from stakeholders, including Washington state Commissions and community partners.
- July – WSAC staff draft investment process.
- August – Program design and investment process approved by Council at August 31 meeting.

The foundational design decisions that will shape the Regional Challenge Grant investment process include:

- System Change Goal
- Priority Outcomes
- Priority Populations Served
- Defining Partnership
- Investment Portfolio
- Alignment with Existing Investments
- WSAC Partnership Role

The section below outlines key design questions for consideration. Ideas are expressed as **requirements** for partnership applicants, or elements that should be **encouraged**.

**As you read the discussion guide, ask yourself the following questions:**

1. Are these the right requirements for our Regional Challenge Grant investments? Are there elements we list as “to be encouraged” that you think should be “requirements,” or vice versa?
2. What feels unclear or requires more discussion?
3. What is missing and needs to be added?

## Design Questions for Discussion

### Regional Challenge Grant System Change Goal

**Design Question: What is the systemic change the Regional Challenge Grant is trying to impact?**

The Regional Challenge Grant seeks to advance statewide postsecondary educational attainment goals by expanding the number of local and regional partnerships that are intentionally focused on increasing postsecondary enrollment and credential completion for students of color and other low-income and underserved student groups. This systemic change will be demonstrated by:

- Investing in a diverse range of local partnerships throughout Washington state that are focused on advancing educational equity in their communities.
- New sectors and partners becoming involved in supporting improved college and career pathways.
- Increased involvement of community-based organizations with deep knowledge of target populations and how to support their success.
- Meaningful engagement of families and students in guiding the supports they receive.
- Smoother transitions for high school students and returning adults between systems (e.g., high school, postsecondary, employment).
- K-12 leaders working much more closely with their local community colleges and four-year colleges, and institutional leaders working much more closely with community-based student support providers and other civic leaders who share commitment to the goals.
- A shift in mindset and culture toward community accountability for postsecondary access and success outcomes—especially for priority student populations.

### Priority Outcomes

**Design Question: What are the core student outcomes the Regional Challenge Grant is trying to achieve?**

#### **Required:**

Partnerships must be working to eliminate opportunity gaps for students of color, low-income students, English language learners, students with disabilities, and foster and homeless youth, as well as working to do one or both of the following:

- Increase direct enrollment of high school students
- Increase enrollment of adults returning to education

**Encouraged:**

The Regional Challenge Grant also encourages partnerships to focus on increasing student credential completion, including industry-recognized credentials, certificates, two-year degrees, four-year degrees, and apprenticeships. To achieve Washington’s statewide attainment goal of 70% postsecondary completion, improvements in enrollment need to be sustained with strong persistence supports for students.

**Priority Populations Served**

**Design Question: What is the target population for Regional Challenge Grant investments?**

**Required:**

The legislation requires that partnerships work to improve outcomes and eliminate opportunity gaps for students of color, English language learners, students with disabilities, and foster and homeless youth.

**Encouraged:**

In addition to the above populations, partnerships are encouraged to serve other students that are underrepresented in postsecondary or face increased barriers to credential attainment, including but not limited to:

- Low-income students
- Opportunity Youth, youth ages 16-24 who are disconnected from school or work
- Youth or adults that did not complete high school
- First-generation college students
- Incarcerated or formerly incarcerated youth and adults
- LGBTQIA+ students

Many Washington students experience intersectional identities that can create overlapping and compounding systems of disadvantage that impact their access to postsecondary. Local communities are the experts in understanding the needs of their communities and are encouraged to identify the student populations on which they should focus.

**Defining Partnership**

**Design Question: What is the required composition of partnerships?**

**Required:**

At a minimum, partnerships applying to the Regional Challenge Grant are required to have two partners working together: one education partner, such as a K-12 school district or postsecondary institution, and one partner from outside the education sector.

- If a partnership focuses on direct high school enrollment, they must include a school district or high school as a partner.
- If a partnership focuses on enrollment of adults returning to education, they must include an employer, labor union, or other workforce-related organization as a partner.

Each partnership will be required to:

- Demonstrate how they will engage students, families, and community leaders, and how their voices will be incorporated into their work on an ongoing basis.

- Share their plan for how they will work together, including how they will make decisions and report their collective grant progress.
- Identify a single fiscal agent for the grant funds. Any subcontracting will be done by the fiscal agent, not by WSAC.

### **Encouraged:**

Partnerships can include a broad range of entities invested in student success:

- Higher education institutions (e.g., public/private colleges, CTCs, universities)
- Local education agencies (e.g., K-12 school districts)
- Community-based organizations, including those that serve historically underserved communities
- Nonprofit service providers, including college access providers and wraparound support providers
- Local foundations or civic organizations
- Employer, business, or workforce development groups, including industry associations, chambers of commerce, or trade unions
- Municipalities, counties, or other local government agencies
- Other local entities

This list is meant to be illustrative, not an exhaustive or limiting list. Communities may choose to have a large array of groups involved in their efforts. There is no expectation that the Regional Challenge Grant investments will fund all groups who participate in a particular community or regional project.

While only two partners are required, more competitive Regional Challenge Grant applicants will be local or regional collaborations that include partners with deep knowledge of the population(s) being served. Partnerships are encouraged to bring in new partners that haven't always been engaged in supporting student college and career pathways. This might include organizations focused on engaging or serving families of color, or employer associations and industry leaders that are invested in supporting and developing their local talent pipeline. Partnerships may also be contracting with service providers or vendors that provide a service or resource but are not engaged as project partners.

Partners should be geographically local to the populations being served, though flexibility will be considered in cases where remote services are needed to best reach or meet the needs of target students.

### **Investment Mix – A Portfolio Approach**

**Design Question: Are there going to be multiple types or tiers of investments? Should only established partnerships with a track record of success be funded, or new partnerships?**

### **Recommendation:**

The Regional Challenge Grant will take a portfolio approach and will invest in a mix of local or regional collaborations that represent a range of operating contexts, different types of partnerships, and differing levels of experience. Some investments will be made to established efforts so that they can scale their impacts and test new strategies. Other investments will be made to support start-up efforts

around the state. Taking this approach is key to achieving the system change goal. The Regional Challenge Grant will meet communities and regions where they are and help them advance their collaborative work toward the common goal and outcomes. The innovations developed through the Regional Challenge Grant create an opportunity to identify and disseminate promising practices from around the state so that WSAC and other state leaders can support their adoption and scaling.

The Regional Challenge Grant will invest in two types of partnerships:

1. Early Stage or Start-up Partnerships – to enable them to plan and get started.
2. Established Partnerships – to enable them to grow their impact through expansion or through the addition of new strategies/tactics.

Our intention is that selected partnerships represent a range of geographies and environments (urban, suburban, rural). In addition, the Regional Challenge Grant will be seeking to make investments in efforts that engage both two- and four-year postsecondary institutions, as well as partnerships that emphasize employer engagement and industry-recognized credentials.

### **Alignment with Existing Investments**

**Design Question: How will the Regional Challenge Grant increase alignment with existing investments?**

Partnerships that receive Regional Challenge Grants can serve as catalysts in their communities to improve student outcomes in the long term through systems change. The siloed nature of the formal education systems, fragmented deployment of interventions, and the lack of intentional focus on postsecondary enrollment and success for target populations are all barriers to progress. Two key ways partnerships can address these barriers are: 1. better aligning existing system resources to their most impactful strategies and efforts, and 2. helping their communities better leverage existing local and state resources. Effective alignment and deployment of existing resources will be key to long-term sustainability and reaching scale.

### **Recommendation:**

Strong Regional Challenge Grant applicants will demonstrate how their partners are committing existing funding and resources toward their work. For example, if colleges have staff and funding dedicated to enrollment, partnerships may decide to pursue strategies where these staff could be deployed in new ways that focus on their target students. This would be an example of realigning an existing resource. In addition, WSAC encourages partnerships to access and integrate state resources into their work, including: Otterbot, the Washington College Grant, Guided Pathways, and High School and Beyond Planning. Communities might identify how these resources could be improved to meet their needs or integrate them into their strategies.

### **WSAC Partnership Role**

**Design Question: How can WSAC serve as a strong partner to Regional Challenge Grant applicants and grantees?**

WSAC sees the Regional Challenge Grant as an exciting opportunity to build relationships and support the work of local communities in new ways. WSAC will be an active, engaged partner as well as an investor in the local work. This is a very different role from traditional “hands off” government



grantmaking. Strong partnerships can enable WSAC to better learn from local communities and share the learnings with the goal of scaling efforts and directing resources toward stronger statewide impact.

**Recommendation:**

WSAC will organize its internal capacity in order to provide local partnerships:

- Research on innovative strategies and promising practices.
- Technical assistance with baseline data analysis and reporting.
- A learning community to connect with and learn from other regional partnerships.
- A commitment to improving state tools and resources (e.g., Otterbot, financial aid, data sharing) based on feedback from partnerships so that they can work better for local communities.
- Continued partnership and transparent communication throughout the Regional College Grant program.
- Assistance working with other state agencies to identify resources, best practices and to get help solving local implementation problems.
- Connections to potential additional public and private resources when possible.

Together, these robust supports can help accelerate the work of local and regional partnerships beyond the funding alone.

### **Looking Ahead**

Once the key design elements outlined above are clarified, then work can proceed on other Regional Challenge Grant design and implementation considerations.

**The next set of design choices include:**

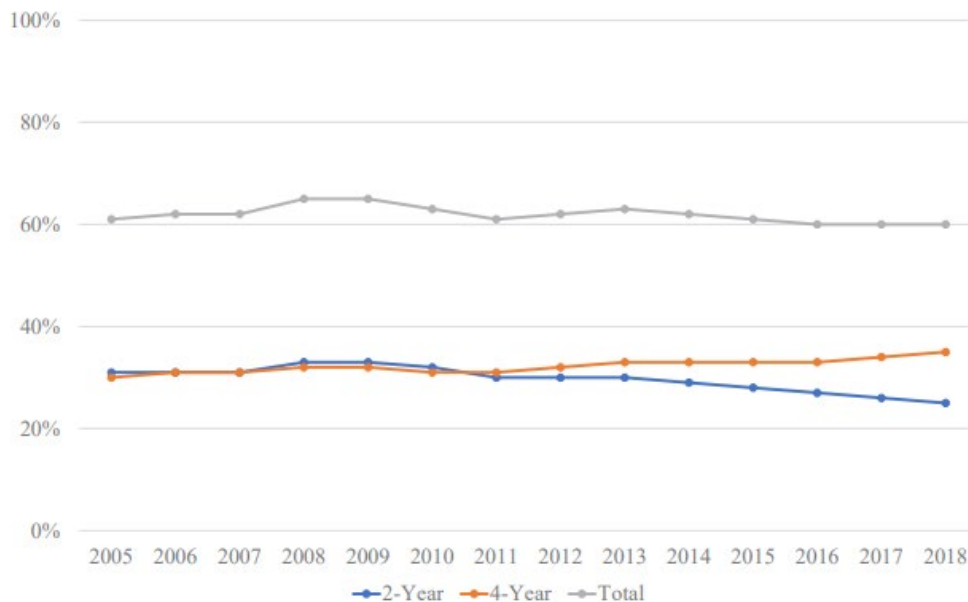
- Procurement process options and preferred investment approach.
- Investment ranges for the varying types of investments.
- Match opportunities.
- Duration of awards (the creation of a fund enables multi-year grant-making).
- Baseline data required of applicants and WSAC ability to assist with initial data.
- Form and structure of investments of varying types (e.g., upfront investment vs. cost reimbursable vs. milestone payment points, etc.).
- Eligible uses of funds.
- Reporting requirements, including metrics of success and data collection (quantitative and qualitative) and WSAC ability to assist.
- Mechanisms for sharing learning and supporting progress.

## Additional Regional Challenge Grant Background

### Current Postsecondary Outcomes

Over the past 20 years, Washington has had a surprisingly low and stagnant rate of enrollment by high school seniors within a year of graduation (Figure 1). Our state average of 60 percent is around 9 percentage points below the national average and far behind states with similar competitive economies such as Massachusetts (75%) and Virginia (67%). Among the west coast states, Washington’s direct enrollment rate lags behind Oregon (62%) and California (64%) ([Link](#), p 8).

**Figure 1: Direct Postsecondary Enrollment Rate from High School**



Source: Education Research and Data Center (ERDC), Washington postsecondary enrollment during first year after graduation, 2005-2018 graduates, by sector.

Most recently, Washington’s colleges are experiencing steep and unprecedented enrollment declines during the COVID-19 pandemic ([Link](#)) as students face new barriers in their efforts to plan for and pursue post-high school credentials, or decide to forgo additional education or training to enter the workforce in a tight labor market. Between Fall 2019 and Fall 2021, roughly 60,000 fewer students enrolled in Washington’s public 2-year and 4-year colleges with greater enrollment declines for first-year students and Pell-eligible students ([Link](#)). Beyond the new challenges presented by COVID, deep inequities by race and ethnicity have persisted throughout Washington’s education system, particularly when it comes to postsecondary completion ([Link](#)).

### Statewide Investments in College Access & Success

In recent years, Washington state has made significant investments expanding access to financial aid and now, with the Washington College Grant, has the most comprehensive state policy on affordability in the nation. The State has focused on improving FAFSA and WASFA filing rates and on improving access to Running Start and College in the High School. New investments have been made to bolster the funding for high school counselors. SBCTC policy has increasingly emphasized the importance of using

multiple measures for determining college course placement and the community college system has invested in Guided Pathways—both intended to improve rates of student success once enrolled. All of these efforts are important, helpful building blocks for postsecondary access and success. But thus far, taken together, they have not resulted in significant system improvement. Low rates of enrollment and completion persist, and racial, ethnic, and income-based gaps continue and have been further exacerbated during the pandemic.

### **Need for a Partnership-Based Approach**

A notable exception to the frustrating lack of system progress can be seen in communities in Washington and nationally where there is intentional work focused on improving the rates of enrollment and completion for students of color and other low-income students. In these places, local leaders in K-12 and Higher Education along with college access nonprofits, community-based organizations, and leaders from other sectors are partnering and working to knit together an effective system of support for college going and college success. They are listening closely to their students and families as they design new models of collaboration and innovation. They are leveraging the existing programs and resources so that they function well as a coherent system. Local and regional partnerships, like the ones that the Council heard from in November ([Link](#)), bring tremendous value by galvanizing community behind shared ownership and action on postsecondary enrollment and completion outcomes. These successful partnerships center the needs and aspirations of students and families and ensure coordinated action, good use of resources, and implementation of best practices.

The Regional Challenge Grant is a powerful system change opportunity. Using the new Regional Challenge Grant investments, WSAC can support a major increase in the number of communities and regions who share the commitment to improve postsecondary enrollment and student success. These investments can also help existing partnerships grow their scale and impact. By working locally and regionally, WSAC will be able to scale up impact, move the needle and reach the statewide goals.

# REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTEREST

## REGIONAL CHALLENGE GRANT

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: OCTOBER 21, 2022, 11:59PM



## The Regional Challenge Grant

Regional Challenge Grants seek to advance statewide postsecondary attainment goals<sup>1</sup> by expanding the number of community and regional partnerships—and supporting the further development of existing community and regional partnerships—that are focused on increasing postsecondary enrollment and credential completion (inclusive of certificates and degrees) for students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English language learners, students with disabilities, and foster and homeless youth by doing one or more of the following:

- Increase direct enrollment of high school students.<sup>2</sup>
- Increase enrollment of adults returning to education.
- Increase the completion rate of students' postsecondary credentials.<sup>3</sup>

The Regional Challenge Grant will support partnerships to create an opportunity for powerful systems change. Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) prioritizes racial equity as a necessary part of Washington's goal to increase student postsecondary credential attainment to 70 percent and seeks to address historic and current structural racism in part by supporting partnerships that are embedded in the communities they serve.

Using the new Regional Challenge Grant investments, WSAC will support a major increase in the number of communities and regions who share the commitment to improve postsecondary enrollment, completion, and student success. By investing locally and regionally, Washington State will be able to scale up impact and make progress that will ultimately enable us to reach the statewide goal.

## The Strategy Underlying the Work

After decades of continuous growth in the second half of the 20th century, college and career going patterns have been stagnant in Washington and nationally for the past 15 years and more. While Washington has made significant investments expanding access to financial aid, focusing on improving financial aid application (FAFSA and WASFA) filing rates, improving access to dual credit programs like Running Start and College in the High School, bolstering funding for high school counselors, utilizing High School and Beyond Plans, and emphasizing the use of multiple measures for college course placement and guided pathways in career and technical colleges, taken together, these efforts have not resulted in significant system improvement. Low rates of enrollment and completion persist, and racial, ethnic, and income-based gaps continue and have been further exacerbated during the pandemic.

WSAC recognizes that changing settled patterns of individual and organizational behavior is complex work and requires not only the investment of resources but also time. This grant program is intended as a long-term initiative to help communities and the state better understand these patterns of behavior and identify what strategies, programs, and action-oriented collaborations work best to create opportunity for all Washington residents.

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<sup>1</sup> Postsecondary refers to education beyond high school; includes but is not limited to colleges, universities, trade, and vocational programs.

<sup>2</sup> Students are considered direct enrollees who have an enrollment record at a postsecondary institution at some point in the academic year following high school graduation, which is defined as the summer term immediately following graduation through spring term of the next calendar year.

<sup>3</sup> Credential refers to a degree or certificate; includes but is not limited to apprenticeship programs, two-year and four-year degrees, and industry-recognized credentials.

## Why community or regional?

Local and regional environments have tremendous influence over the decisions that most Washington residents make when they consider starting and continuing a college or career pathway. Investing in pathways that are deeply aligned with communities' needs reflects a place-based approach that may contribute to additional students pursuing college and career pathways. Operating from place-based, regional frameworks provides the opportunity for partnerships to directly leverage state investments and local resources to help shape student outcomes from a position of deep community knowledge, trust, and needs.

## Why partnerships?

Environments shape people's decisions and extend far beyond a school or college campus. People's views on college and career pathways are multifaceted, influenced by family members, neighbors, employers, unions, faith communities, community-based nonprofits, local media, leaders from all sectors, and more. Educational organizations cannot be expected to change the environment by themselves; simply put, college and career pathways are not confined to the classroom.

Successful and supportive college and career pathways improve residents' lives, strengthen the economy, expand community engagement, and deliver a wide range of benefits to individuals, families, and their communities while also actively working toward closing the opportunity gap for students furthest from the attainment goal.

## Why innovation?

College and career going patterns have been stagnant for many years in Washington. Once settled in place, the forces that drive these patterns are not likely to be affected by modest changes or even continuous improvement strategies alone. Success requires bolder innovation that can launch new models of how communities support pathways to postsecondary opportunities. The state seeks to fund such innovation by supporting partnerships to understand what works and how to evolve and adapt the work to achieve more success at scale. WSAC recognizes that local leaders are the experts in knowing their communities' needs and should therefore take the lead in shaping innovative approaches that are deeply aligned with local needs, with assistance from WSAC to understand research, best practices, and promising innovations elsewhere around the state and country.

## The Strategy Underlying the Grant Process

Given that innovation and learning are essential to Washington's long-term success, WSAC seeks to maximize the flexibility for partnerships to shape the proposed work for two tiers of grants: one focused on partnership formation and one focused on program implementation. This means that our application process is not grounded in many prescriptive standards on what an eligible partnership or program might look like.

The statute ([SB 5789](#), [RCW 28B.120.060](#)) creating the grant fund appropriated \$6 million in Fiscal Year 2022-23 and states that a purpose of the Regional Challenge Grant program is to eliminate educational opportunity gaps for students of color, English language learners, students with disabilities, and foster and homeless youth. Partnerships will be required to address that purpose in their work, and WSAC considers this to be a mandatory element for all applicants.

The statute also describes Regional Challenge Grant recipients as local and regional partnerships that represent cross-sector collaborations inclusive of, and beyond, education institutions. It also includes other factors to be considered, such as the engagement of community-based organizations, providing support beyond tuition and fees, and expanding integrated work-based learning. In the interest of flexibility, this application process intentionally creates opportunity for applicants to interpret these elements. WSAC encourages applicants to apply their own understanding and knowledge to interpret and define key elements within the context of their community.

## Regional Challenge Grant Priorities

WSAC will prioritize and invest in regional partnerships that:

1. Develop community-informed, student-centered goals and strategies;
2. Engage in equitable decision-making within and across the partnership;
3. Share data and invest in learning processes; and
4. Involve new sectors and entities in improving student access to and success in postsecondary pathways.

WSAC will prioritize and invest in coordinated action plans that:

1. Address historic inequities and close opportunity gaps through approaches that demonstrate cultural competency and community knowledge;
2. Map community assets and identify systemic barriers;
3. Test innovative approaches to improve student outcomes specific to the regional needs of students;
4. Measure results by establishing baseline and intermediate data, working with WSAC to evaluate progress specific to the strategies implemented, and demonstrate the ability to adapt strategies based on data-informed practice; and
5. Effectively utilize grant funds, including leveraging existing investments and state resources.

## Focus Populations

The Regional Challenge Grant requires that partnerships work to improve outcomes and eliminate opportunity gaps for the following student groups: students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English language learners, students with disabilities, and foster and homeless youth in Washington State.

Partnerships are encouraged to consider other students who are underrepresented in postsecondary or who face increased barriers to credential attainment, including but not limited to:

- Family caregivers
- First-generation college students
- Incarcerated or formerly incarcerated youth and adults
- LGBTQIA+ students
- Low wage earners
- Military veterans
- Opportunity Youth, youth ages 16-24 who are disconnected from school or work
- Single parents
- Undocumented students
- Youth or adults who did not complete high school

For more information about existing populations' progress toward postsecondary attainment goals, applicants are encouraged to view [WSAC's reports and publications](#), including a [2020 report focusing on opportunity gaps for students in Washington](#).

## Types of Grants

WSAC will invest in two types of grants.

### Tier One: Partnership Formation

Grants will be awarded to a group of entities focusing on building a strong partnership, ideally supporting an early-stage partnership who will work to create or solidify a plan aimed at improving postsecondary attainment and career pathways for focus populations.

Tier One grants will be up to one year in length, and up to \$125,000. No indirect costs will be allowed. These grants are intended to serve as the building blocks for new, strong regional partnerships investing in increasing postsecondary attainment. Upon the successful development of a strong partnership, awardees should be well positioned to apply for a Tier Two grant and/or identify other sources to support the partnership in the future. Tier One grantees are not guaranteed a Tier Two grant.

Partnerships require at least two organizations, with at least one based in the region.

- a. Must include at least one Community-Based Organization.
- b. Must include at least one educational entity, such as K-12 (school, district, etc.) or higher education institution.
- c. Other entities could include, but are not limited to, employers, local government, workforce, local/regional economic development entity, or labor unions.

### Tier Two: Implementation

Grants will be awarded to already established partnerships working to increase postsecondary attainment for focus populations that are ready to test new strategies, expand efforts, or scale up the number of students they can impact with their collaborative actions.

Tier Two Grants will be up to 2.5 years in length, with an estimated average investment of \$750,000 per year. Indirect costs are not allowed for K-12 entities or institutions of higher education. Grant length and amount funded will be dependent upon the needs of partnerships and may vary based upon their potential scale and impact. Tier Two Grants are required to identify existing investments (e.g., financial aid supports, FAFSA completion, guided pathways, etc.) and demonstrate alignment in leveraging other state resources.

Partnerships require at least three organizations, with at least two based in the region.

- a. Must include a Community-Based Organization.
- b. Must include at least one educational entity, such as K-12 (school, district, etc.) or higher education institution.
- c. Other entities could include, but are not limited to, employers, local government, workforce, local/regional economic development entity, or labor unions.



## Roles

WSAC highly encourages partnerships to identify and define clear roles that will bolster the partnership's efficiency and success above and beyond the requirements to identify a single fiscal agent and a single point of contact. Potential roles may include partnership conveners, implementation leads, project managers, data leads, and more.

### Single Point of Contact

All partnerships must designate a **single point of contact** during the application phase. Applications should state if the partnership has identified one partner as the convener or host organization to coordinate the roles, responsibilities, and work of the partnership. If so, the application should explain why that partner was chosen and how that partner will enable the partnership to set its agenda and chart the course for the partnership while balancing the interests of all partners in a mutually equitable manner.

### Fiscal Agent

Partnerships are required to identify a **single fiscal agent** to receive and manage the grant funds. The fiscal agent will be responsible for expense reporting, receipt of funds, and the disbursement of funds to appropriate entities. It is important that the fiscal agent have the capacity to manage funds and maintain fiscal records.

The fiscal agent can be a tax-exempt entity; local government agencies and community-based organizations are eligible to be fiscal agents. WSAC will consider proposals for other types of entities if appropriate. The fiscal agent may also serve as the single point of contact but does not need to be a direct service provider.

## Application Process

The grant process has two steps. First, interested applicants will submit a letter of interest that addresses the requirements for the type of grant they seek. Second, WSAC will select a limited number of both Tier One and Tier Two applicants to advance for further review and discussion. Applicants selected for further review will participate in discussions with the agency that allow for engaged conversation between WSAC and the applicant. Applicants may be asked to submit additional documents and information and will be able to ask questions. Selected finalists will negotiate final grant agreements. This process is intended to meet the goal of flexibility in this process without overburdening applicants.

Applicants who are invited to engage in discussions should be prepared to elaborate upon additional components of their plan. Additional information will vary for each type of grant, which may include but is not limited to:

- A full budget spreadsheet with detailed expenditures.
- Workplans that delineate key tasks, timelines, and action plans for implementation.
- Detailed explanation of the lead staff for the partnership, including why they are well-suited to lead the effort.
- Strategies to utilize existing investments to maximize college and career going efforts.
- A detailed plan for data and analysis including methods of evaluation, measures of success, and research used to inform the proposed strategy.

WSAC encourages applicants to work with the agency to discuss components of the application where they may have additional questions or need support. Throughout the review and selection process, WSAC reserves the right to seek clarification through discussion or writing. WSAC may ask applicants to elaborate upon materials, submit additional information, or modify proposals. Applicants who are not responsive to discussion and engagement requests will not be considered.

For applicant planning purposes, additional information requests are anticipated to occur from November 10 through December 9, 2022.

## Key Information for Applicants

Letters of Interest must be submitted to WSAC no later than October 21, 2022, at 11:59pm.

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Date</b>
Request for Letters of Interest issued	September 8, 2022
Last date to submit questions for FAQ	September 16, 2022
FAQ responses posted & FAQ webinar	September 22, 2022
Letters of interest due — online submission	October 21, 2022 by 11:59 PM
Selected applicants invited to engage in additional discussion and/or submit additional information. During this time, selected applicants may also begin contract negotiations.	November 10 – December 9 *
Ideal contract start date	January 3, 2023

*\* Dates provided for planning purposes and are subject to change.*

## Evaluation Factors

The evaluation process will include a review of the applicant’s letter of interest, in addition to discussions with the applicants advanced for further review. Components such as budgets, workplans, data, implementation, etc., may be considered and amended as part of the discussion process. Evaluation factors provided represent components of applications that are likely to promote successful investments while providing flexibility for an eligible partnership or their program. Evaluation factors should be used as a guiding principle for determining priorities, not as a singular model of the “right” approach. WSAC does not expect applicants to include every factor and encourages applicants to indicate areas where they may need additional support within their letter of interest.

WSAC recognizes that regions have different needs with respect to their college and career pathways. For all grant applications, WSAC maintains the right to apply additional considerations when making the final decisions for investments. This could include factors such as regional representation across all applicants, the diversity of focus populations served, statewide needs, or more.

WSAC staff will review applications and may solicit additional input from [key stakeholders representing cross-sector perspectives](#) within the state.

Tier One Partnership Formation Grants will be evaluated using the following factors:

**Partnership Development**

- Focus on building partnerships with demonstrated community engagement and authentic collaboration.
- Evidence of healthy, deep community relationships, knowledge, and trust.
- Representation including new entities who have not previously engaged in postsecondary college and career pathways.
- Commitment to create a strategic plan of action to address postsecondary attainment for focus populations including:
  - Demonstrated understanding of student needs, access, and success.
  - Demonstrated understanding of assets and systemic barriers facing students in your region.
  - Demonstrated evidence of assessment and innovation in past initiatives, if applicable.
  - Intentional planning to obtain data: high school graduation rates, postsecondary enrollment rates for overall population and for the focus population.
- Evidence of resourcing and strategic investments that will actively contribute to the future implementation of action-oriented strategies and long-term sustainability.
- Decision-making is shared with partners in a mutually equitable way.
- Commitment to shared learning across and within the partnership.

Tier Two Implementation Grants will be evaluated using the following factors:

**Strong regional partnerships**

- Evidence of healthy, deep community relationships, knowledge and trust that reflect focus populations and communities including community engagement and authentic collaboration.
- Representation in the partnership that includes new entities who have not previously engaged in postsecondary college and career pathways; representation from multiple education entities across sectors (e.g., Higher Education *and* K-12) including evidence of substantial institutional commitments.
- Demonstrated understanding of assets and systemic barriers facing students, using an equity lens in your region.
- Identification of the landscape of college and career development in the region, including evidence of past examples that demonstrate understanding and commitment to student needs, access, and success by focus population. This could include specific data related to graduation and enrollment rates, in addition to other factors determined by the partnership.
- Ability to operate with a deep knowledge of the nuanced needs, hopes, challenges, and dreams for students and their communities.
- Demonstrated use of culturally appropriate strategies and application of equitable approaches across and within the partnership.
- Evidence of continual evaluation, evolution, and improvement, not only related to strategies that support students, but also for the partnership itself.

- Demonstrated ability to navigate complex, student-centric decision-making as a collective.
- Demonstrated collaboration for sharing resources, including but not limited to data.
- Evidence of alignment across the partnership including established structures and staffing.

**Action-oriented strategies that close opportunity gaps and serve focus populations**

- Focus populations:
  - BIPOC, low-income, English language learners, students with disabilities, foster or homeless youth, and additional populations or intersections of students underrepresented in postsecondary or who face increased barriers to credential attainment, including but not limited to opportunity youth, youth or adults who did not complete high school, first-generation college students, LGBTQIA+ students, military veterans, incarcerated or formerly incarcerated youth and adults, undocumented students, single parents, and family caregivers.
  - Populations who are furthest from the state’s postsecondary attainment goals with limited existing strategies in place.
  - Populations who are historically marginalized and underserved where strategies have not yet been effective or don’t yet exist.
- Strategies that are data-informed, student-centered, culturally appropriate, and address historic inequities to close the opportunity gap:
  - Ability to identify systemic barriers and propose strategies that can disrupt the system or reduce barriers to students.
  - Innovative or new strategies that have not been tried or applied to focus populations in the regional area of grant service.
  - Testing multiple approaches within the grant period.
- Resources:
  - Demonstrated ability to share data within and across the partnership to evaluate program outcomes and outputs.
  - Established track record demonstrating both a willingness for using data for improvement and evidence of using data for improvement.
  - Experience using data to measure, evaluate, and make decisions.
  - Clear plan for strategic investments and collaboration to continue the strategy and partnership after the initial grant period. This should include exploring additional funding sources for long-term sustainability.
  - Commitment to exploring strategies that promote the utilization of other investments. This could include, but is not limited to, traditional in-kind or monetary matches. Partnerships who do not propose a match will still be considered.

**Program evaluation, data, and analysis**

Tier two grantees will be expected to discuss plans for program evaluation as part of the additional discussions if advanced for further review. While this level of detail is not expected in the letter of interest, applicants should anticipate engaging with WSAC in a results-driven analysis of their program that includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Identifying method(s) of evaluation for the chosen strategy.
- Developing output measures (e.g., the number of unduplicated students or families served, or the number of hours of services provided, such as training or mentoring).
- Developing outcome-based success measures (e.g., increasing the percent of students applying to college).

Grant recipients can expect WSAC to serve as an active partner for analysis and evaluation.

## Writing your Letter of Interest

Applicants must submit a letter of interest addressing the questions below. Requirements differ for Tier One and Tier Two. Additional information including how to submit the application, along with what to include in a cover page, page limits and more, is found online at <https://wsac.wa.gov/challenge-grants>.

### Requirements for Tier One: Partnership Formation Grant

1. Share applicants' single point of contact for WSAC, including the name, organization/entity name, email, and phone number.
2. List all partnership entities by name. For each entity, include a brief mission statement and any links to resources, websites, or information that describes their work. Include potential roles and responsibilities of entities within the partnership, including the rationale for working together.
3. What is the total amount of money are you requesting?
4. Describe any prior history of the proposed partners working together, if applicable.
5. Describe who you wish to serve and why.
  - a. Clearly identify your geographic region as well as your student population(s).
  - b. Include a description of the current landscape for college going and career development in your region. Discuss measures of access and student success specific to the region, as well as access and student success by focus populations (e.g., students of color; a specific list can be found on page 3). Identify educational opportunity gaps within those measures by subpopulations.
  - c. Describe the assets and systemic barriers that may impact your region.
6. Describe your vision for the partnership in the next 12 months.
  - a. Clearly identify your main goals and what you will accomplish during the grant period. Include a description of the main activities you anticipate completing.
  - b. Describe what you hope to accomplish in terms of partnership development and growth and why you think the grant can assist in accelerating progress.
  - c. Describe how your vision is representative of the community including how connections help build the partnership over time.
  - d. Explain your approach to working together, including how you will make decisions and report your progress.
  - e. Share your commitment to an innovation-focused learning agenda and participation in a statewide learning community.
  - f. Share how you intend to use the requested funding.

7. Describe the vision for your partnership and community impact in the next 5-10 years.
  - a. Describe the growth in the partnership that you hope to achieve.
  - b. Describe the outcomes you hope to achieve for students in your region.
8. Provide a brief description of key personnel who will lead this effort now and into the future.

### Requirements for Tier Two: Implementation Grant

1. Share applicants' single point of contact for WSAC, including the name, organization/entity name, email, and phone number.
2. List all partnership entities by name. For each entity, include a brief mission statement and any links to resources, websites, or information that describes their work. Include the roles and responsibilities of various entities within the partnership and the rationale for working together.
3. What is the total amount of money requested?
4. Describe the partnership in terms of its:
  - a. Length of time the partnership has been in place. Include prior accomplishments to date and why you think the grant can assist in accelerating progress.
  - b. Connections to the local community and how those connections will help the partnership over time.
  - c. Ability to effectively serve different populations in your geographic region.
  - d. Commitment to an innovation-focused learning agenda to shape the work and participation in a statewide learning community.
  - e. Approach to working together, including how your partnership will make decisions, use data, share responsibility, report on progress.
5. Include a description of the current landscape for college going and career development in your region. Discuss measures of access and student success specific to the region overall, as well as access and student success by high priority focus sub-populations (e.g., students of color; a specific list can be found on page 3). Identify educational opportunity gaps within those measures by subpopulations.
6. Describe the strategy you hope to implement and launch.
  - a. Describe the anticipated outcomes and goal(s) of the strategy.
  - b. Identify the geographic region, focus population, direct service provider(s).
  - c. Include a description of the direct service(s) provided, the intended results, and metrics that will indicate measures of success.
  - d. Share the rationale and research (if applicable) used to design the strategy.
  - e. Include a description of your partnership's capacity and prior experience related to using data to measure outputs and outcomes.
  - f. Share how you intend to use the requested funding. Show how the work will be aligned with existing investment(s) and how existing state investments will be leveraged including, if applicable, other revenue streams that support this work.
7. Describe the vision for both your partnership and the strategy in the next 5-10 years.
8. Provide a brief description of key personnel who will lead this effort now and into the future.

## 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 nine 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. Five are citizen members, including one current 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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