

RCW 28B.145.100 Rural jobs program. (1)(a) The rural county high employer demand jobs program is created to meet the workforce needs of business and industry in rural counties by assisting students in earning certificates, associate degrees, or other industry-recognized credentials necessary for employment in high employer demand fields.

(b) Subject to the requirements of this section, the rural jobs program provides selected students scholarship funds and support services, as determined by the board, to help students meet their eligible expenses when they enroll in a community or technical college program that prepares them for high employer demand fields.

(c) The source of funds for the rural jobs program shall be a combination of private donations, grants, and contributions and state matching funds.

(d) The state match must be based on donations and pledges received as of the date each official state caseload forecast is submitted by the caseload forecast council to the legislative fiscal committees as provided under RCW 43.88C.020. The purpose of this subsection (1)(d) is to ensure the predictable treatment of the program in the budget process by clarifying the calculation process of the state match required by this section and to ensure the program is budgeted at maintenance level.

(2) The program administrator has the duties and responsibilities provided under this section, including but not limited to:

(a) Publicize the rural jobs program and conducting outreach to eligible counties;

(b) In consultation with the state board for community and technical colleges, any interested community or technical college located in an eligible county, and the county's workforce development council, identify high employer demand fields within the eligible counties. When identifying high employer demand fields, the board must consider:

(i) County-specific employer demand reports issued by the employment security department or the list of statewide high-demand programs for secondary career and technical education established under RCW 28A.700.020; and

(ii) The ability and capacity of the community and technical college to meet the needs of qualifying students and industry in the eligible county;

(c) Develop and implement an application, selection, and notification process for awarding rural jobs program scholarship funds. In making determinations on scholarship recipients, the board shall use county-specific employer high-demand data;

(d) Determine the annual scholarship fund amounts to be awarded to selected students;

(e) Distribute funds to selected students;

(f) Notify institutions of higher education of the rural jobs program recipients who will attend their institutions of higher education and inform them of the scholarship fund amounts and terms of the awards; and

(g) Establish and manage an account as provided under RCW 28B.145.110 to receive donations, grants, contributions from private sources, and state matching funds, and from which to disburse scholarship funds to selected students.

(3) To be eligible for scholarship funds under the rural jobs program, a student must:

(a) Either:

(i) Be a resident of an eligible county;
(ii) Have attended and graduated from a school in an eligible school district; or
(iii) Be enrolled in either a community or technical college established under chapter 28B.50 RCW located in an eligible county or participating in an eligible registered apprenticeship program under chapter 28B.92 RCW in an eligible county;

(b) Be a resident student as defined in the Washington college grant program in RCW 28B.92.200(5)(c);

(c) Be in a certificate, degree, or other industry-recognized credential or training program that has been identified by the board as a program that prepares students for a high employer demand field;

(d) Have a family income that does not exceed seventy percent of the state median family income adjusted for family size; and

(e) Demonstrate financial need according to the free application for federal student aid or the Washington application for state financial aid.

(4) To remain eligible for scholarship funds under the rural jobs program, the student must meet satisfactory academic progress toward completion of an eligible program as established by the program. Rural jobs program eligibility may not extend beyond five years or 125 percent of the published length of the program in which the student is enrolled or the credit or clock-hour equivalent.

(5) A scholarship award under the rural jobs program may not result in a reduction of any gift aid. Nothing in this section creates any right or entitlement. [2022 c 211 § 3; 2021 c 133 § 3; 2018 c 254 § 4.]

Findings—Intent—2021 c 133: See note following RCW 28B.145.010.

Findings—Intent—2018 c 254: "(1) The legislature recognizes that:

(a) According to research from Georgetown University, by the year 2020, seventy percent of jobs in Washington state will require at least some education and training beyond high school, which aligns with Washington's educational attainment goals established under RCW 28B.77.020; and

(b) Research by the state board for community and technical colleges and other entities has found that attending college for at least one year and earning a credential results in a substantial boost in earnings for adults who enter a community college with a high school diploma or less.

(2) In addition, the legislature finds that:

(a) Rural counties face unique challenges to achieving full economic and community development in the face of societal trends that concentrate job and population growth in larger metropolitan areas. For example, seventy-five percent of the job growth in Washington by 2018 is projected to be confined to just five large counties. In addition, two-thirds of the state's recent population growth has occurred in the three largest counties and seven counties have actually lost population in recent years.

(b) One barrier to economic growth and investment in many rural counties is the lack of a trained, qualified workforce for the opportunities present in rural areas, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and health care fields of study. These opportunities often require specialized skills

tailored for specific, regional employer needs. In many cases, employment opportunities are available in rural communities; however, some assistance is needed to help local residents acquire the skills necessary to access the opportunities in their own backyards.

(3) The legislature declares that opportunity, community vitality, quality of life, and prosperity are essential for all Washington communities. Therefore, the legislature intends to create a program to assist rural communities in growing the workforce the community needs to meet its specific industry sector demands." [2018 c 254 § 1.]