



Workforce Train & Educ Coord Board
2023-25 First Supplemental Budget Session
Policy Level - WM - WAVE Modernization

Agency Recommendation Summary

The Washington Award for Vocational Excellence (WAVE) scholarship celebrates top CTE students at Washington high schools and community and technical colleges. As many as 147 awardees, three from each legislative district, are selected annually to receive a two-year college scholarship. WAVE was paused in 2010 due to budget cutbacks and relaunched in 2022 at only 2/3 the needed funding level. Students submit their applications through an aging online portal that requires significant one-on-one staff support to ensure successful submission. Requested funds will allow the purchase and launch of cloud-based scholarship management software, and the full scholarship level for each WAVE awardee.

Fiscal Summary

Fiscal Summary <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2024	2025	2023-25	2026	2027	2025-27
Staffing						
FTEs	0.0	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.25
Operating Expenditures						
Fund 001 - 1	\$0	\$2,598	\$2,598	\$2,491	\$2,475	\$4,966
Total Expenditures	\$0	\$2,598	\$2,598	\$2,491	\$2,475	\$4,966

Decision Package Description

WAVE investments support Washington's economy and quality of life



The Washington Award for Vocational Excellence (WAVE) is an outstanding investment in Washington's future: It recognizes and rewards hands-on, career-focused learning and encourages career and technical education (CTE) students to continue to a postsecondary degree. Many of these students come from nontraditional and diverse backgrounds, and most find they learn better in a hands-on environment. CTE students are often discouraged from seeking a postsecondary degree because of how they learn best. WAVE reinforces and recognizes that career and technical education delivers learning pathways that lead to both higher education access and high-demand jobs. For more on the WAVE program, see <https://wtb.wa.gov/wave/>.

WAVE is administered by the Workforce Board in coordination with the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC). The Workforce Board oversees the application and selection process, while WSAC manages the distribution of scholarship funds.

WAVE was created in 1984, but during the Great Recession, this popular scholarship was shelved due to budget constraints. In 2022, the Legislature relaunched WAVE and, with limited time to reach students before graduation, the Workforce Board and its partners were able to successfully market the scholarship more than 10 years after it was suspended. WAVE scholarships were awarded to 78 students in 2022. In 2023, with more time to get the word out, WAVE scholarships were awarded to 108 students.

Those numbers are only going to grow as more students find out about this merit-based scholarship, which pays up to two years of tuition in

Washington's colleges. The award was created to recognize students throughout Washington—rural and urban—who demonstrate excellence in CTE at either the secondary or postsecondary level. The connection to CTE was the common denominator and allowed students to showcase how hands-on learning can make a difference in their lives and provide new pathways to pursue additional education leading to job opportunities in careers our state needs filled. The scholarship can be a powerful inducement for CTE students to move from high school to higher education, or for community and technical college CTE students to continue their studies and earn longer-term, career focused degrees.

The Decision Package includes proposed funding for two items:

- A new scholarship application portal to reduce barriers and increase access.
- Additional funding for the scholarship award annual appropriation to align to actual tuition costs as the law intended.

WAVE Scholarship Application Portal

The Workforce Board, as the program administrator of WAVE, seeks \$233,000 for a new scholarship application portal, with ongoing maintenance costs thereafter.

The Workforce Board seeks \$170,000 for fiscal year 2025 and \$63,000 for fiscal year 2026, for a total of \$233,000, to create a new WAVE Scholarship Application Portal. After researching a range of options, the agency is pursuing a relatively inexpensive, customizable, cloud-based, software as a service solution. Ongoing costs to maintain the portal beginning in the 2027 fiscal year are estimated at \$47,000 per year.

A new scholarship application portal will enable WAVE to move away from an older state scholarship aggregator website which wasn't designed for scholarships with multiple essay questions, certification forms, and letters of reference, as is required by WAVE. This new system will help students from across Washington, even those with more limited technical resources, successfully apply for WAVE through a user-friendly, online application system. The goal is to provide all eligible career and technical education students with a clear, streamlined, efficient application process. The older scholarship aggregator, used during the 2022 and 2023 award cycles, showed that many students started the application process but struggled to complete their applications due to technical and other issues.

This appropriation will support ongoing licensure and agency staffing for the development aspects, and quality assurance monitoring in addition to the initial software purchase. The agency views this request as an urgent business need that can help many more qualified career and technical education students from throughout the state successfully apply for tuition assistance through the WAVE scholarship, while also greatly improving staff efficiency and overall customer service. A well-designed application portal will make the scholarship more accessible and equitable for all Washington CTE students.

The current WAVE application portal is a temporary solution, requiring at least 1.5 FTE of combined program manager and administrative support, double or more FTE-time than will be needed with the new software. The current application portal is a significantly older website designed to facilitate general applications for traditional needs-based scholarship programs. It was not designed to process the complexity and volume of WAVE applications, which include multiple essays, certification forms, transcripts, and more. The WAVE statute requires external reviewers to score the applications. To ensure student privacy with the current system, staff must manually redact and move application materials out of the system and transmit those materials via email to reviewers located throughout the state—a process that takes many hours of administrative work, application by application.

The current system, with its aging architecture, also requires numerous labor-intensive business processes for both scholarship applicants and staff, such as manually processing reference letters and certification forms. Staff also troubleshoot a wide range of issues that arise from inefficient logic structures and workflows. For example, current estimates show roughly six interactions—phone calls or emails—between every scholarship applicant and agency staff. Agency data also shows roughly 12 interactions between volunteer reviewers and agency staff. A cloud-based software as a service solution customized for scholarship management is expected to significantly cut these interactions. The staff time devoted to current troubleshooting is anticipated to decrease by at least 50 percent if not more.

The consequences of not funding the new scholarship application portal means:

1. A less accessible and difficult to navigate scholarship program. This reduces equitable access to substantial tuition assistance from a state scholarship that rewards Washington's top career and technical education (CTE) students during a severe skilled worker shortage.
2. Ongoing and increased agency staff time. WAVE applications are expected to continue increasing, and current business practices are already strained as staff manually handle large data loads, troubleshoot a wide range of technical issues, and provide one-on-one

communications with applicants, in addition to partner staff at WSAC, and with volunteer scholarship application reviewers, among others.

A new, customized application portal can also improve access to key data points about applicants, including readily tallying the number who apply from each of the state's 49 legislative districts, the percentage applying from diverse, rural, and under-resourced school districts, and other demographic details, including future study plans along with the schools and colleges they plan to attend.

Streamlined business practices will also allow the agency to invest additional resources in marketing and outreach, especially to areas of the state where there are fewer applicants or less awareness of the scholarship and other postsecondary opportunities.

In summary, this new scholarship portal will meet business needs by eliminating manual processes; save significant time for both applicants and staff; provide access to key data points; and create a more accessible and equitable scholarship opportunity for CTE students in all communities.

WAVE Scholarship Award Funds—More is needed to keep pace with tuition costs

Right now, the WAVE scholarship fund falls short of the actual cost of public postsecondary education in Washington. The majority of WAVE awardees have traditionally used their scholarships at four-year institutions. However, WAVE awards may also be used at other postsecondary education and training institutions in Washington.

WSAC estimates the cost of four-year public tuition at just under \$12,000 per year. The first cohort of 78 WAVE scholars in 2022 received up to \$11,700 per year (\$23,400 total) in scholarship funds out of the base appropriation. In 2023, 108 scholars were selected, but the appropriation only allowed for each awardee to receive about half that amount—or \$5,200 in scholarship funds per year, over two years. In the upcoming cycle, if we were to award 147 students, as the law intends, the scholarship funds offered could decrease further to roughly \$4,000 per year, over two years. The financial support of our state's top career and technical education students will only decline further if additional dollars are not added to the scholarship pool to support actual education expenses.

Each scholar is allowed three years to start using their scholarship, and three years from first use to fully expend their funds. In any given year, there may be scholars from six different WAVE cohorts accessing scholarship funds. Given the 10-year hiatus, and recent restart of the scholarship in 2022, there will only be scholars from 1 to 3 cohorts next year. To fully fund all existing scholarships and 147 new scholarships from the 2023-24 school year cohort, \$2.428 million must be added next year to WSAC's WAVE appropriation for the scholarship fund pool. The Workforce Board also requests that ongoing funding that keeps up with the cost of tuition inflation be provided in subsequent years to ensure the intent of the law is met. This scholarship pool currently sits at \$1.138 million per year. The additional funds would make available a total of \$3.528 million per year for WAVE scholarship recipients. This works out to approximately \$12,000 per year per recipient, or \$24,000 over two years, starting with recipients in the fall of 2024.

Please note, this budget includes the assumption that (WSAC) is expected to receive an ongoing \$1.138 million per year in funding for the WAVE scholarship program. As noted, WSAC administers WAVE scholarship funding to students through its Student Financial Assistance division.

To summarize, the Workforce Board is asking for ongoing additional funds that will bring the WAVE scholarship to \$3,528,000 per year as an ongoing appropriation to meet current postsecondary education costs. Biennial-level funding totals \$7.056 million. The Workforce Board also asks that language be added to the statute requiring that the WAVE appropriation level keeps up with tuition inflation. These funds would be appropriated to WSAC, which distributes the scholarship funds to WAVE scholarship recipients and coordinates tuition payments to schools.

Washington's CTE students come from a wide range of backgrounds and pursue a broad set of career interests in areas ranging from agriculture to finance to health science to marketing and manufacturing. The WAVE scholarship, awarded to as many as 147 students each year, three from each of the state's 49 legislative districts—needs to be accessible and available to diverse, disadvantaged, and rural populations. Restarting this scholarship program provides an opportunity to reach more CTE students from disadvantaged backgrounds and provide them with the financial incentive to continue their education and training to fill needed, in-demand careers.

WAVE Implementation Timeline

WAVE is a top priority for the Workforce Board and the project team would move quickly to establish an improved application portal and

distribute fully funded scholarship awards.

The Workforce Board consists of nine Governor-appointed voting members from business, labor and government. The Board advises the Governor and Legislature on workforce development policy, ensures the state's workforce services and programs work together, and evaluates the performance of Washington's key workforce programs. In August, the Board voted unanimously to support the WAVE scholarship legislative request.

The project timeline is as follows:

- Requirements Gathering and Analysis – [July-Sept. 2023]
- Legislative Review [Jan.-March 2024]
- Software Purchase (pending legislative approval) – [July-Aug. 2024]
- Security Design Review [6-8 weeks]
- Software Buildout/Customization – [Sept.-Nov. 2024]
- Internal Staff User Training – [Oct. 2024]
- Testing and Quality Assurance – [Nov.-Dec. 2024]
- External Student and Evaluator Training and Testing – [Dec. 2024]
- Launch and Implementation - [Jan. 2025]

What is the problem, opportunity, or priority you are addressing with the request?

WAVE SOFTWARE SOLUTION:

The agency currently faces significant business challenges in maintaining the WAVE scholarship application portal on the state's existing scholarship aggregator website. This aging system does not meet current standards of architecture logic, security, privacy, automated features, and tiered access. This necessitates one-on-one staff support as an ongoing, time-intensive workaround. Details include:

- Many applicants encounter barriers when applying for a WAVE scholarship on the state's older scholarship aggregator system. Barriers can include unsaved entries, misdirected entries from intended sections, and the inability to download or upload required documents. Staff spend hours working with applicants to troubleshoot technical problems on the current scholarship portal. This is time-intensive administrative work that can cause frustrations among students who face difficulty completing their applications. The WAVE scholarship calls for multiple essays, letters of reference, and education verification information, among other requirements, so problems can arise on multiple required components delaying or preventing complete application submissions.
- Required application forms that are sent automatically via email to references and career and technical education (CTE) instructors are either not received or easily completed and uploaded. One-on-one support workarounds are necessary to ensure student applications include required documents for both eligibility status and for review by volunteer evaluators.
- Application assessment must be administered outside of the stopgap scholarship aggregator portal because of outdated design features related to security, privacy, and lack of tiered user access. These externalized workarounds delay access to student documents necessary for receipt by career and technical education instructors, references, and for assessment by evaluators.
- Currently, volunteer evaluators must receive by email multiple PDF documents instead of operating within a secure portal on the cloud with access to required tools and applicant documents. This requires significant staffing time to prepare documents for email delivery.
- Application packets sent to reviewers by email have been rejected by spam filters and firewalls, causing confusion and delay for volunteers. This requires significant staffing time to support volunteers. A new software solution would also allow career and technical education teachers to be notified when a reference letter or verification is needed. This process could be automated with a cloud-based solution, compared to manually sending letters and emails, as is done currently.
- In 2023, a large percentage of initiated applications were not completed. With the current portal, it is not possible to gain access to the scholarship application backend to run reports and determine the legitimacy of the initiated applications. Applicants who had started the application process—as seen in the portal—were emailed messages to prompt them to complete the process. The Workforce Board also extended the deadline for those who had started their applications but had not submitted them. These actions were to provide more opportunities for those facing technological challenges due to the portal's older architecture and confusing interface. Such actions are neither effective nor sustainable solutions when initiated applications already exceed 300 and the number of applications is expected to rise as the scholarship gains more visibility and the cost of college increases.

INCREASE THE WAVE AWARD FUND:

Since launching in 1984, the WAVE scholarship has recognized and financially supported Washington's top career and technical education students in pursuing their education and career goals—both graduating high school seniors with a concentration in career and technical education, and students attending one of the state's 34 community and technical colleges who are enrolled in Professional Technical programs. However, with the sudden relaunch of WAVE in 2022—after over a decade of suspension following the Great Recession—the funding allocated for the newly restarted scholarship pool fell far short of the actual costs of attending college.

In that first year, because of a tight timeframe to get the scholarship up and running before the end of the 2022 school year, the total number of applicants was relatively modest. Even so, 78 students were awarded WAVE scholarships in that first year. They were provided with a two-year scholarship worth \$11,700 per year, for two years. In the 2023 cycle, more students applied and a total of 108 students were awarded. The scholarship fund was already facing financial pressure due to limited allocation. The 2023 cohort received just \$5,200 per year, for two years. Looking ahead, as the scholarship becomes more familiar and more students apply, we anticipate up to 147 awardees per year. That works out to three awarded students representing each of the state's 49 legislative districts. If no additional funding is provided, those winners will see an even more reduced award in the 2024 cycle. Our estimates put next year's award at \$3,740 per year, for two years, if 147 winners are selected, which is a real possibility. Not only would this make postsecondary education less affordable for the 2024 cohort of awardees but might also reinforce the perception that CTE is not as highly valued as more traditional forms of education.

What is the relevant history or context in which the DP request is made?

Statutory History of Wave

In 1984, [RCW 28B.76.670](#) established the Washington Award for Vocational Excellence (WAVE). This merit award is specific to students who meet career and technical education parameters set by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. Award recipients are allowed to attend an institution of higher education as defined in RCW 28B.10.016, or an independent college or university, or a licensed private vocational school within Washington state as authorized by the WSAC. WSAC is the fiscal agent for the WAVE award.

WAVE was conceived in 1984 by the state legislature to:

- (1) Maximize public awareness of the achievements, leadership ability, and community contributions of the state's public vocational-technical students.
- (2) Emphasize the dignity of work in our society.
- (3) Instill respect for those who become skilled in crafts and technology.
- (4) Recognize the value of vocational education and its contribution to the economy of this state.
- (5) Foster business, labor, and community involvement in vocational technical training programs and in this award program.
- (6) Recognize the outstanding achievements of up to three graduating vocational or technical students in each legislative district. [1995 1st sp.s. c 7 § 2; 1987 c 231 § 3; 1984 c 267 § 2.]

Recent WAVE Developments

The WAVE scholarship program paused in 2010 during the Great Recession. The Legislature restarted the program in 2022, without administration funding.

Existing agency staff at the Workforce Board and WSAC, and in partnership with WAVE stakeholders, launched a new scholarship program in roughly 90 days, which required several temporary, stopgap solutions. The current scholarship application portal is one of those temporary

solutions. It was not designed to process WAVE applications and significant challenges remain for students, agency staff, and volunteer evaluators today.

Why is this the opportune time to address this problem?

WAVE SOFTWARE SOLUTION:

Software as a Solution (SAAS) products have been commoditized in recent years, making them very affordable. Availability of affordable, high-quality SAAS scholarship management products preclude any need to build a portal from scratch, and maintenance licenses lessen the cost of ongoing product support.

The Workforce Board must employ functional customer-service tools for the WAVE scholarship to equitably reach all of Washington's top career and technical education students and enable them to successfully submit their completed scholarship applications through a user-friendly, inclusive portal. Current challenges can discourage students from applying. In too many cases staff have seen applicants start the process but encounter too many barriers to complete their submissions.

The state scholarship aggregator website is aging and does not meet the needs of WAVE scholarship applicants, who are accustomed to a more user-friendly, seamless experience. With new cloud-based, customized scholarship management software, the Workforce Board could begin serving students as early as the 2025 program year with a much-improved user experience and the agency hopes to then increase the number of students who successfully complete their applications, so that far fewer start the process without reaching the finish line. Automated features in software as a service solution exist whereby applicants can know their entries are saved as intended, that their uploads are successfully completed, and that all required documents and entries are successfully included within their application. Similarly, automated tools allow those providing letters of reference, including career and technical educators, to be notified and receive forms they are either required, or requested, to complete and return.

Because this software as a service is cloud-based and customizable, the Workforce Board would be able to launch it quickly and ensure that the system is maintained and adapts to changing needs over time. This software is readily available so the process of launching it and training staff will take less time than building an entirely new scholarship platform from scratch.

Enabling more equitable access to apply for the WAVE scholarship as soon as possible makes sense for several reasons, not the least of which is the ongoing demand for skilled workers called for by Washington business and industry.

WAVE creates a clear path to postsecondary success for students and addresses our state's skilled workforce needs.

THE WAVE AWARD FUND:

Washington employers are clamoring for workers with the skills and competencies attained through high-quality CTE programs. Fully funding the WAVE award now sends a message to Washington businesses that the state understands and supports their workforce needs.

Additionally, the cost of college and postsecondary education continues to pose major challenges for many Washington families. Worker/learners are choosing other methods to launch their careers, including work-based programs and online short-term certifications. The traditional postsecondary pathway, still showing top results for employment and earning outcomes for students, is simply seen as "out of reach" for some in communities across Washington. This impacts the local labor pool and economic success across the state. Career and technical education students may be especially burdened given lingering pandemic impacts to first-generation college applicants, English language-learners, pandemic-related layoffs, access to childcare, and other challenges.

A fully funded WAVE program will provide a significant boost to awardees and help them complete their training and education on time and with less or no debt. This is a rare, significant scholarship that pays major postsecondary education costs for up to two years, often in high-demand programs of study. This investment will lead to a stronger workforce, reducing skill shortages, which directly supports our overall economy and quality of life.

Have you previously proposed this request? If so, when and how was it received in the budgeting process at that time?

This request was not previously proposed.

What is your proposal?

How do you propose to address this problem, opportunity, or priority?

WAVE SOFTWARE SOLUTION:

The Workforce Board seeks a \$233,000 legislative appropriation, with \$170,000 in fiscal year 2025, and \$63,000 in fiscal year 2026 to purchase and customize software as a service solution. This scholarship management solution will result in a new, user-friendly WAVE Scholarship Application Portal. The new portal will be cloud-based, flexible and adaptable to changing business needs over time.

This appropriation will cover initial purchase of the software, licensing, design set up and training, staff time and contracting with an outside quality assurance provider.

To fulfill this directive in the digital and internet era, the state must meet student and associated stakeholders' technological needs and expectations. The Workforce Board seeks a comprehensive, agile application system that permits all users to succeed in completing standard and secure online processes. In 2023, for example, many students started but did not complete their applications. A stronger application portal will ease the application process and make this award more accessible and equitable.

The WAVE AWARD FUND:

The Workforce Board seeks a \$2.428 million ongoing legislative appropriation, in addition to the ongoing appropriation currently received by WSAC, to fully fund the 147 WAVE scholarship awards.

Note, this budget includes the assumption that WSAC will continue to receive \$1.138 million per year in ongoing funding for the WAVE scholarship program. The Workforce Board is asking for additional funds that will bring the WAVE scholarship to \$3,528,000 per year as an ongoing appropriation to better meet current postsecondary education costs.

This will support the state's top career and technical education students with awards that better match the cost of college today. This appropriation will support a scholarship fund that pays students up to \$12,000 per year, for up to two years. This is based on the annual cost of tuition at Washington's largest public universities.

The Workforce Board is confident that this investment in Washington's workforce will pay dividends benefiting our state over the near and long term. For example, anecdotal evidence from the 2023 award cycle shows students studying to become commercial pilots, nurses, early childhood education teachers, counselors and engineers.

Why is this proposal the best option?

WAVE SOFTWARE SOLUTION:

The Workforce Board has researched several software as a service solutions to provide a new, user-friendly, cloud-based scholarship application platform.

Similar solutions have been vetted and tested by other local governments. These solutions can offer a more nimble design with mobile, tablet, and desktop interfaces that provide functional access to applicants, evaluators, administrators, and agency partners; multiple options for file uploads and downloads; significantly lower cost for features needed; quick start implementation with customizable branding; efficiency of

common administrative processes and a backend database; common evaluator tools; a solution that meets current IT security requirements; and training for all identified users.

For more information on alternatives considered, please see the “What alternatives did you explore?” section.

After consulting with other agencies, we discovered that the state’s Department of Agriculture was successfully using an off-the-shelf software solution to manage a pair of scholarships. During the pandemic, the Department of Agriculture used this platform to quickly disburse and track needed funding to Washington farmers as part of a federal mandate. This platform proved to be customizable and user-friendly. Later, Department staff began using it for a pair of scholarship programs they administer.

Our research shows that off-the-shelf software solutions, such as the one used at the Department of Agriculture, more closely align with the technologies Washington residents are familiar with and routinely utilize. These technologies include current internet services, cloud access and storage, tiered security for different uses, security protocols, mobile phone friendly access, and current standards for technological interfaces.

The WAVE AWARD FUND:

A WAVE scholarship fund that meets the true costs of attending college means that WAVE awardees can quickly advance student educational pursuits and launch their careers more readily without burdening debt. This benefits all Washington communities.

WAVE was created by the Legislature in 1984 to cover the cost of two years of college or postsecondary education for the state’s top CTE students, among other goals. The current appropriation falls far short of the actual cost of college or postsecondary education.

A strong workforce is critical to Washington’s economy and overall quality of life. Washington employers consistently rank a lack of qualified workers as one of their top concerns.

A fully funded WAVE scholarship program directly invests in our workforce. This is a win-win: Students can better access postsecondary education and training, and our state gains badly need workers in key professions like aviation, nursing, behavioral health and early childhood education.

Identify who will be affected by this DP and how.

Washington Students

Roughly 130,000 high school and community and technical college students are potentially eligible to apply for the WAVE award. This includes qualified career and technical education high school seniors and qualified community and technical college students at the 34 community and technical colleges in Washington. There can be as many as 147 career and technical education awardees each year across the state. Up to three awards are associated with each of Washington’s 49 legislative districts. Federal Perkins grant demographic data collected before and during the pandemic indicate that career and technical education programs serve individuals with disabilities, individuals from economically disadvantaged families, individuals preparing for non-traditional fields, English learners, and youth in foster care.

Washington Career and Technical Education instructors

Washington’s CTE instructors are a crucial partner in the WAVE program. They recruit and encourage students to apply, supply letters of reference and certification forms, and of course support high quality career technical education curriculum that benefits the state of Washington.

Volunteer Evaluators

A volunteer scholarship review committee scores applications each year and helps with publicity and community outreach. These evaluators include leaders from labor, business and industry, community groups, educators and administrators, and community volunteers.

Organized Labor

The WAVE scholarship supports multiple career pathways, including many in the trades and other professions where union membership is robust. Labor members often volunteer as application reviewers.

Washington Employers

Washington and the nation face an ongoing skilled labor shortage that limits the ability of business to expand and grow. The WAVE scholarship creates new opportunities for students to succeed and establish themselves in high-wage, high-demand careers. This directly benefits Washington employers in an extraordinarily tight labor market. Many employers volunteer to review applications.

Washington Communities

All Washington communities will ultimately benefit from greater investments in career and technical education. This scholarship specifically rewards career and technical education students, supporting a nontraditional pathway for developing a skilled and educated workforce that builds on economic security in every community.

Additionally, the new application portal will greatly improve access to WAVE-specific demographic data and scholarship program analytics. Beneficiaries of this information and the efficiencies it offers include WSAC, school-based career and technical education directors, Workforce Board members, legislators, postsecondary institutions, and economic development planners.

The intent of the new WAVE application portal and fully funded awards is to fulfill our legislative responsibility by:

- Serving Washington high school and public community and technical college students who are excelling in their career and technical education pathways.
- Actively engaging and collaborating with our secondary and postsecondary partners on a project with a statewide significance in celebrating and rewarding excellence in career and technical education pathways.
- Actively engaging with our statewide partners in labor, industry, and community groups across rural and urban communities for the advancement of a well-trained population working in high-skill, high-wage jobs that advances the Washington economy and wellbeing.

How many clients will or will not be served? Served by whom?

Roughly 130,000 Washington career and technical education high school seniors and community and technical college students attending State Board for Community and Technical Colleges within the active WAVE application cycle are eligible to apply. This program supports up to 147 career and technical education awardees; three from each of Washington's 49 legislative districts may be recipients of awards that cover two years of postsecondary education.

Assumptions and Calculations

Expansion, Reduction, Elimination or Alteration of a current program or service:

Not applicable.

Detailed Assumptions and Calculations:

This appropriation request includes two major components:

1. \$233,000 to launch a new scholarship application portal.
2. Fully funding the WAVE scholarship program to reflect today's postsecondary education costs. A fully funded WAVE scholarship award fund totals \$7.056 million each biennium, ongoing.

WAVE Scholarship Application Portal

The Workforce Board requests \$233,000 to launch the WAVE Scholarship Application Portal. This includes \$170,000 in the 2025 fiscal year and \$63,000 in the 2026 fiscal year. The agency also requests \$47,000 per year to maintain the portal going forward.

These funds will cover salaries and wages to backfill existing staff who will launch the project; software purchases; and hiring an outside quality assurance contractor.

Backfill existing positions

The agency requests funds to backfill 0.8 FTE in the 2025 fiscal year to support the launch of the project. This includes \$92,000 for salaries and benefits for the 2025 fiscal year, \$30,000 for the 2026 fiscal year and \$24,000 for the 2027 fiscal year and future years going forward. This does not include some indirect costs.

WAVE Scholarship Fund

The Workforce Board requests \$2.428 million per year, ongoing, to fully fund the WAVE scholarship award program. This is in addition to the \$1.138 million per year currently allocated, ongoing, to WSAC.

This totals \$3.528 million per year, ongoing, or \$7.056 million each biennium.

These funds will support and maintain a more equitable and robust WAVE scholarship program. This investment will pay dividends for future generations by investing in workforce development and helping CTE students reach their education and career goals.

The Workforce Board requests \$233,000 over the next two fiscal years to launch and test the new scholarship application portal.

Additionally, the agency requests ongoing to fully fund the scholarship program so that students have two years of postsecondary education paid for, as intended by the original legislation that created the program. This request assumes WSAC will continue to receive \$1.138 million per year in ongoing WAVE scholarship funds. A fully funded WAVE scholarship program totals \$3.528 million per year, over two years, for a total of \$7.056 million.

The following table shows a breakdown of these costs.

Object of Expenditure	SFY 24	SFY 25
Obj. A – Salaries and wages	0	67,000
Obj. B – Employee benefits	0	25,000
Obj. C – Professional services contractor	0	20,000
Obj. E – Goods and services (including software)	0	49,000
Obj. G – Travel	0	2,000
Obj. J – Capital outlays	0	0
Obj. M – Interagency Fund Transfers	0	
Obj. N – Grants, benefits and services	0	2,428,000
Obj. P – Debt service	0	
Obj. S – Interagency reimbursement	0	
Obj. T – Intra-agency reimbursement	0	7,000
Revenue	SFY 24	SFY 25

Additionally, in 2024 we expect to see the number of student applications at least double. That equates to upwards of 500–1,000 applications. Staff managed 250 completed applications in 2023 with a stopgap software.

Continuing with this system requires an immense amount of manual labor related to one-on-one troubleshooting support, sending emails external to the portal for security and privacy reasons, manually preparing student files, sharing outcome data and other correspondence with applicants, evaluators, and partner agencies. Once the new software solution is built and implemented it will significantly decrease staff workload and simplify the interface for external users.

The software purchase is an annual fee paid to the vendor for use of their product on an annual basis. There are no revenue components.

Workforce Assumptions:

The Workforce Board will manage this project with existing staff. The appropriation request includes funding to backfill existing staff to launch, test and manage the project in its first year. This request equals 0.8 FTE.

Backfill of existing staff conducting the project: (year one)

	FTE		Salary & Benefits	Overhead & Indirect
Management Analyst 4	0.25	60L	\$30,162	\$6,660
Management Analyst 4	0.25	60L	\$30,162	\$6,660
IT Journey Level	0.10	06 IT F	\$12,689	\$2,819
Administrative Assistant	0.20	46L	\$17,891	\$3,773

Strategic and Performance Outcomes

Strategic Framework:

The Workforce Board's proposal directly supports the Governor's Results Washington goal area of World Class Education. WAVE is a scholarship program aimed specifically at Washington's career and technical education (CTE) students with an emphasis on students receiving tuition support to pursue in-demand occupations through additional postsecondary education and training.

This project will help align the WAVE application and review process, the state's public-facing career-and-technical education (CTE) merit award, with the Strategic Plan by:

- Providing better access to diverse, disadvantaged, and rural populations through modern mobile-friendly and accessible design practices for the scholarship application portal.
- Pre-built components as part of overall solution. Examples include ready-made forms, backend database, global and individualized email messaging, and document handling in relation to the digital applications.
- Cloud-based hosting using the new software purchase.

The WAVE scholarship program is directly linked to the Workforce Board's four-year statewide strategic plan as well as our vision and mission.

Our agency's vision is that every Washington community is thriving, inclusive, and economically resilient. Providing ease of use and access to the WAVE scholarship award application gets us one step closer to this goal. We need CTE students to fill high-wage in-demand jobs in our state contributing to thriving, inclusive and economically resilient communities. Our mission is to champion strategies and align organizations and stakeholders statewide to enable the future of work, which ensures a successful business climate and livable-wage jobs for all. The WAVE program is a strategy that exemplifies this mission.

The Workforce Board's 2024-2028 strategic plan's guiding principles include closing economic disparities for marginalized communities and providing comprehensive support for individuals with barriers to employment. Our state's strategic Workforce Plan, "Talent and Prosperity for All," seeks to provide a roadmap to better economic outcomes for jobseekers, workers, employers, and communities; meet requirements for program funding; guide multi-agency initiatives; align partner plans and activities; measure progress; and gauge effectiveness.

The Workforce Board is also the prime recipient of the federal Perkins grant, which targets delivery of career and technical education (CTE) in the K-12 system through the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and community and technical college system through the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. Improving access to CTE programs such as WAVE is a critical component of the Workforce Board's agency mission and focus on helping people reach their career goals, no matter their barriers or background.

Identify how this proposal affects agency activity funding by amount and fund source.

The WAVE program falls under agency activity, A004, Career and Technical Education (CTE). We are planning to use existing FTE to build out and implement the software solution piece of this decision package. We are increasing the general fund contribution by \$233,000 to purchase the software, backfill existing FTE, and launch and monitor the project.

Regarding the scholarship fund component of this request, while that funding serves to achieve our purpose of fully recognizing and supporting CTE students seeking postsecondary tuition assistance to advance their career and education goals, it is not appropriated to the Workforce Board. Rather, this funding would flow to WSAC, which manages the distribution of WAVE scholarship funds.

Performance Outcomes:

Two key performance outcomes we anticipate achieving out of this funding change are to provide 100 percent of students awarded their full tuition amount for two years of postsecondary education or training. With a new application portal, we also anticipate achieving 80 percent successfully completed applications in the first year and up to 90 percent successfully completed applications in the following years.

The primary positive outcomes of this funding change include:

- Washington's top performing CTE students across the state secure a full two years of funding for their continuing education and career goals.
- Applicants filling out the online application will now have an intuitive, user-friendly software solution to use, allowing them to easily submit

their application for consideration.

- Reviewers will have a better experience being able to use the side-by-side mode to evaluate applicant materials and view their scoring rubric all within the same screen using the new software.

As it pertains to Lean initiatives, we can better serve the students who are Washington's future workforce by streamlining the WAVE scholarship application process through a customized, cloud-based, scholarship management portal. This will help ensure more successful application completions among interested students, including those from disadvantaged, rural, and diverse backgrounds who often face technology challenges. This new portal will also help continuously improve the way our work is done. For example, this software solution eliminates unnecessary steps such as manually emailing volunteer evaluators applications to review. We are also simplifying processes. For another example, in the old system, staff must manually contact teachers and references to request their recommendation letters. With the new software, these parties will be automatically sent an email notice with instructions on how to log in and complete this step. This modernization project includes many opportunities for greater efficiency.

Incremental performance metrics

1. Customer Value:

Metric: Number of completed scholarship applications. This metric reflects the primary goal of the software—to facilitate the application process. It directly measures how effectively users can apply for scholarships using the software.

2. Lead Time:

Metric: Average time taken from starting an application to submission. Short lead times indicate that the application process is streamlined and user-friendly, reducing unnecessary delays for applicants.

3. Cycle Time:

Metric: Average time taken to process a scholarship application from submission to decision.

This metric measures the efficiency of the evaluation process. A shorter cycle time indicates that the evaluation process is well-defined and free from bottlenecks.

4. Application Completion Rate:

Metric: Percentage of started applications that are successfully submitted.

5. Error Rate:

Metric: Percentage of applications with errors or incomplete information. High error rates suggest usability or communication issues that need to be addressed to improve the quality of applications.

6. User Satisfaction:

Metric: Regular surveys or feedback ratings from applicants. Positive feedback indicates that the software aligns with user expectations and needs.

7. Waste Reduction:

Metric: Percentage reduction in redundant or unnecessary steps in the application process.

Implementing lean principles is an ongoing process so we plan to regularly analyze these metrics, identifying areas for improvement, and adapting our application software accordingly.

Equity Impacts

Community outreach and engagement:

Upon learning of WAVE's reactivation in 2021, the Workforce Board reached out to state education partners, such as WSAC, the Office of Superintendent for Public Instruction, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and career and technical education professional

groups with the intent to ensure that all communities and populations were included in their access to WAVE. These subject matter experts readily offered their expertise, insights and advice on the formation of the WAVE application, the application evaluation rubric, the WAVE landing page on the Workforce Board's website, and feedback about the outreach materials to career and technical education (CTE) instructors and students within the schools.

Staff received real time feedback on WAVE portal processes from students and career and technical educators from around the state. Coordination and feedback on communication protocols and technical improvements occurred weekly between WSAC staff and the Workforce Board on how to best serve the career and technical education students across Washington who were applying for the WAVE scholarship. A review of identified barriers and resolution to those barriers occurred weekly during all key phases of the WAVE process, including but not limited to the implementation of WAVE utilizing the scholarship portal, testing phase, activation of the application, award evaluation period, post-award outcomes, and awardee transition to WSAC's fiscal oversight.

The Workforce Board is also a partnership of business, labor, and government dedicated to workforce development. In early 2022 the agency reached out to a broad group of community partners to convey the intent of the award, how to access it, and to recruit volunteers to serve on the scholarship review committee.

Evaluators are made up of volunteers from Washington career and technical education groups, teachers, private career schools, education agencies, and community business and labor partners. Evaluators were surveyed about their experiences with the review processes. They provided specific feedback on evaluation training, on the rubric used for evaluating applicant materials, on accommodations for disabilities, and on processes where potential for unintended bias might be a concern within the evaluation process itself.

Additionally, several evaluators commented on the overall value of the program and indicated strong support for expanding the scholarship to reflect today's education costs. For example, the agency's oversight board voted unanimously to support this decision package. This oversight board includes state leaders from business, labor, and government.

In the second year of WAVE's activation, the agency initiated a comprehensive media relations and public outreach effort to publicize the WAVE scholarship opportunity prior to the opening of the application period. This effort included statewide press releases and announcements, direct marketing, newsletters shared with media, community, business and labor partners, chambers of commerce, public schools, workforce agencies, community colleges, career and technical education instructors, and the community at large.

Each announcement was amplified on agency social media accounts and the agency website. Additionally, the agency executed a paid Facebook advertising campaign to specifically target all parents and potential scholarship applicants (18-years and older) in every Washington county.

Increased outreach and awareness resulted in a diverse cohort of scholarship winners in the 2023 award cycle. Several students shared their stories of personal challenges and overcoming obstacles with the Washington media. This year's outreach resulted, in part, in 10 newspaper and television news stories. View the 2023 coverage and these inspirational stories at <https://www.wtb.wa.gov/wave>.

Additionally, the agency has iteratively modified and narrowed the possible solutions based on feedback from recommendations and information from agency partners, students, labor, business, and researched on off-the-shelf scholarship software utilized by universities and other agencies engaged with scholarships activities.

Disproportional Impact Considerations:

All graduating Washington high school seniors with at least two courses in a single career and technical education program are eligible to apply for the WAVE award, as are community and technical college students enrolled in a professional-technical program.

Target Populations or Communities:

Populations and communities that benefit from this proposal include:

- Washington high school and public community and technical college students across the state who are excelling in their career and technical education pathways.
- Career and technical education student populations from all communities throughout Washington. The demographic breakdown of this population aligns closely with Washington's overall racial and ethnicity population categories.
- Career and technical education student populations represented by individuals with disabilities, individuals from economically disadvantaged families, individuals preparing for non-traditional fields, English learners, and youth in foster care.
- Secondary and postsecondary partners engaged with WAVE in advising, celebrating, and rewarding excellence in career and technical

education pathways.

- Statewide partners in labor, industry, and community groups across rural and urban communities for the advancement of a well-trained, ready to work citizenry working in high-skill, high-wage jobs that advances the Washington economy and wellbeing.
- Eligible public and private Washington colleges and universities, private career schools with a physical campus operating in Washington state, and the Washington tribal colleges. Eligible education institutions are those identified by WSAC: <https://wsac.wa.gov/colleges-and-institutions-washington>.

Target populations and communities benefit when a fully funded WAVE award is in alignment with the current costs for attending college in Washington state. These communities also benefit when known barriers for applying for the WAVE award are eliminated.

Postsecondary education is a vital economic driver that provides substantial returns to local communities while serving many disadvantaged populations. Washington's 34 community and technical colleges offer professional-technical training that provides participants with skills required for specific, in-demand occupations. Professional-technical education training covers a broad range of occupational fields and credentials, including short term certificates and two-year technical degrees. These certificates and degrees, in turn, can lead to multiple pathways of training and higher education at Washington postsecondary institutions.

There can be up to three WAVE awardees per 49 legislative districts. Last year's awardees represented 40 of 49 legislative districts and 21 of 39 Washington counties. This year's awardees represented 45 of 49 legislative districts and 24 of 39 counties. Together, in the two years since WAVE was re-established, the cohorts represent 47 of 49 legislative districts and 27 of 39 counties. This means that awardees are well distributed geographically across the state.

Perkins-funded career and technical education programs at Washington high schools are represented by 185 school districts, 14 skills centers, and one Tribal organization. Perkins-funded career and technical education programs are offered at 31 (of 34) public community and technical colleges. Perkins demographic data collected before and during the pandemic indicate that career and technical education student populations align closely with Washington state racial and ethnicity percentages, as well as by individuals with disabilities, individuals from economically disadvantaged families, individuals preparing for non-traditional fields, English learners, and youth in foster care.

Participants in professional-technical education programs at the public community and technical colleges gain an additional \$15,000 in earnings per year. This earnings gain is attributed directly to program participation and would not have occurred otherwise. The program also delivers a net increase in employment of about 8,400 people within the first year after exit on average, an employment gain that would not have occurred if the program did not exist. Employment gains alone account for an estimated \$1.6 billion in economic output.

The net economic return on investment (ROI) for this program is \$8.5 billion over five years, rising to \$14.9 billion over 10 years—a \$6.48 and \$11.40 ROI per dollar spent respectively. Taxpayers reach a breakeven point 3.2 years on average after participants exit the program, experiencing an ROI of \$0.75 over five years and \$2.20 over 10 years per dollar spent.

Source: *Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, The 2021 Net Impact and Cost-Benefit Evaluation of Washington State's Workforce Development Programs, April 2021:*

https://www.wtb.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Net-Impact-Study_FINAL.pdf

Other Collateral Connections

Puget Sound Recovery:

Not applicable.

State Workforce Impacts:

This proposal does not affect existing collective bargaining agreements or statewide compensation or benefits policies.

Intergovernmental:

The Workforce Board facilitates the WAVE Scholarship in partnership with WSAC. The Workforce Board also collaborates with the Office of Superintendent for Public Instruction, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and local school districts on outreach materials and information directed to career and technical education students in Washington high schools and community and technical colleges.

At this point in time, there is no known opposition in increasing WAVE award amounts to the current tuition thresholds, nor is there known opposition to improving the WAVE award application and review process through a customized, cloud-based portal.

Stakeholder Response:

Statewide partners involved with the Washington Award for Vocational Excellence include those in labor, industry, education, and community groups across rural and urban Washington state. Our Board is also made up of 2/3 business and labor representatives, and they are also in support of this proposal. Each of these groups actively supports the WAVE project and some even chose to volunteer as evaluators of student applications and meet with WAVE awardees once they are determined.

The Workforce Board anticipates nongovernmental stakeholders would also support this proposal. Programs that improve educational opportunities tend to reduce reliance on other public services.

State Facilities Impacts:

Not applicable.

Changes from Current Law:

Not applicable.

Legal or Administrative Mandates:

Not applicable.

HEAL Act Agencies Supplemental Questions

Not applicable.

Reference Documents

[Final IT Addendum WAVE Modernization Workforce Board.docx](#)

IT Addendum

Does this Decision Package include funding for any IT-related costs, including hardware, software, (including cloud-based services), contracts or IT staff?

Yes

Objects of Expenditure

Objects of Expenditure <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2024	2025	2023-25	2026	2027	2025-27
Obj. A	\$0	\$67	\$67	\$22	\$17	\$39
Obj. B	\$0	\$25	\$25	\$8	\$7	\$15
Obj. C	\$0	\$20	\$20	\$2	\$0	\$2
Obj. E	\$0	\$49	\$49	\$27	\$21	\$48
Obj. G	\$0	\$2	\$2	\$1	\$0	\$1
Obj. N	\$0	\$2,428	\$2,428	\$2,428	\$2,428	\$4,856
Obj. T	\$0	\$7	\$7	\$3	\$2	\$5

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