

## Project Overview

Adopted in 2007, House Bill 1096 created the Opportunity Grant Program. The program provides financial aid and other services to low-income students enrolled in employer demand programs of study at a state community or technical college.

The legislation also created the related Opportunity Partnership Project (OPP) to provide industry mentors and relevant work experiences to eligible Opportunity Grant students who choose to participate.

In July of 2019, The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges awarded a designated portion of the Opportunity Grant program funds to the Workforce Training Board to administer OPP for the 13th year. The South Central Workforce Council, Spokane Workforce Council, Northwest Workforce Council, and Workforce Southwest Washington each applied for and were awarded contracts of equal amounts for their proposed work plans.

In concert with regional colleges and participating local businesses, the WDCs offered Opportunity Grant students employment-related experiences. The trainings included job shadows, interviews, mentoring, tours, and short internships. These career exploration opportunities were to expose students to employer contacts and real-world employee activities that could reinforce the relevancy of their academic coursework. In the first two quarters of the state fiscal year, the Opportunity Partnership Project advanced at the four WDCs in a familiar, promising trajectory.

Three conditions greatly impacted outcomes in 2019-2020: The coronavirus pandemic, the investigation of a college employee which resulted in cancellation of the OPP agreement, and the termination of the OPP contract by the State Board.

## Opportunity Partnership - A Reflection and an Incubator of Change

The Opportunity Partnership Project has actively adapted to changes in societal and work conditions since the legislature first conceived of its inclusive and collaborative structure. The program initially identified a mentorship focus which gradually evolved to include worksite visits, interviews, individually-designed job shadows, and both unpaid and paid-internships. Industry and job tours using virtual media were being introduced as internet growth and cellphone ownership allowed extensive web-based access at many economic levels. COVID-19 health concerns and Stay Home Stay Safe measures instantly altered society's norms for in-person education and employment training.

As virtual interfaces were necessarily implemented in response to the public health crisis, OPP continued to highlight how it is both an incubator of change and a source of real-time observation for what works and what does not.

If any year underscores the necessity of the OPP commitment, 2021 is when Opportunity Grant students will especially need industry introductions and trainings to boost their familiarity, skill sets, and access in a dramatically changed employment landscape. The OPP student-college-business-technology models become especially relevant during a pandemic. The interface adaptations also evoke the future of work once the current crisis resolves.

### Workforce Board - 2019-2020 Summary of Active OPP Projects

One of OPP's most successful projects involves the Chamber of Commerce Foundation as Northwest Workforce Council's OPP subcontractor. The Chamber coordinates with Skagit Valley College and local industries to recruit and host OPP students for in-person, one-on-one job shadows and internships. This highly effective, personalized investment was meeting quarterly performance outcomes when public health exigencies required the immediate closure of colleges and businesses. In-person student engagement could not immediately transform to phone, email, or video conferencing when companies were laying off employees and contending with economic survival. In the aftermath, Northwest Workforce Council's project leads are pursuing viable online options given reopening uncertainties for schools and businesses.

Two OPP projects had introduced remote learning options within their designs, but distinctly different from one another. South Central Workforce Council's partnership with People For People (PFP) allowed for the sophisticated integration of wrap around federal and state services over large and diverse geographic area. Part of PFP's success was because the technology services were already familiar to their clients. That infrastructure aided in their pivot from in-person activities to electronic hybrids. With the Workforce Board's encouragement and South Central's approval, PFP expanded access to Virtual Job Shadow resources offered though CareerOneStop.org. These two factors--familiar technological interfaces and readily available online resources, allowed South Central to meet their deliverables despite a truncated time period. PFP also discovered they could reach additional qualifying students and provide crucial wrap around services at a time of great need.

Spokane Workforce Council had informally developed their next generation of online industry and career outreach through videos paid for by local businesses and hosted on a local, public television website. These virtual tours and in-depth career explorations were accessible to any interested party across the state. Spokane discussed and strategized with the Workforce Board on the expansion of their videography as an integral part of their student engagement with local businesses. OPP students were alerted to the existing video resources but the videos were not a required component until appropriate tracking and attestation methodologies could be identified. The early termination of the OPP contract prevented Spokane from to conducting planned outreach; and demographic information could not be readily obtained from students whose colleges had closed. Prior to the coronavirus outbreak, Spokane discussed with WTB their vision to utilize platforms such as Linked-In and Facebook to help students and other WDC

clients build their online professional presence and to create career networks. Coronavirus, in effect, accelerated the need for virtual engagement for all job seekers. Spokane is poised to expand their digital offerings in ways that are timely, responsive, and relevant to OPP students.

### Opportunity Partnership Student and Business Data Summary 2019-2020

The OPP data for 2019-2020 is incomplete due to COVID-19 conditions that interrupted mentoring, outreach, internships, student communications, and final data collection. A bright note was South Central’s pivot to productive online and telephone engagements. Similarly, Spokane Workforce Council made a strong shift to online service delivery, but their data collection protocols and exit interview timelines did not allow them to fully reflect their successes.

Opportunity Partnership 2019-2020 Project								
WDC Counts	Enrolled	Entered the program	Completed	Continuing in school	Dropped out	Employed	Employer hosts	Notes
Northwest	20	20	20	unknown	unknown	unknown	15	Covid-19 closures prevented planned outreach and completions. Program restructure to an online format was not immediately possible given program design and contract termination
South Central	36	36	30	27	1	21	17	Project design allowed for a nimble shift to telecommunications and online resources with students and contract partners
Spokane	25	24	8	unknown	unknown	3	2	Project redesign investment is allowing greater utilization of professional resources, such as Linked-In and virtual media development, to expand resource accessibility to students. Performance information is based on exit interviews and surveys which were not conducted at the time of the contract termination
Southwest	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	The Southwest contract for 2019-2020 was terminated at the request of the SW WDC upon discovering alleged fraudulent activity in the Lower Columbia Community College grants program. With approval from SBCTC, SW WDC investigative costs were approved for invoicing under the 2019-2020 OPP grant

## Best Practice Recommendations

These recommendations come primarily from the WDC project management teams with additions from the Workforce Board.

- **Best Practice Recommendations – South Central Workforce Council**

“By offering Virtual Job Shadow (VJS), the students were able to research many potential career interests instead of being limited. “

“Students also appreciated that with this option, they were able to work at their own leisure as their schedule permitted.”

“The Opportunity Partnership Coordinator (OPC) called the enrolled students weekly to check in with them and see if they needed anything. The OPC was able to assist many of the students with questions regarding unemployment, connecting them with needed services, job searching, interview skills, and assist them with creating resumes and cover letters. Although pleased with the VJS's, many of the students still want to complete an onsite job shadow once this option is available again.”

- **Best Practice Recommendations - Spokane Workforce Council**

“Converting to an online platform has generated many benefits, including ongoing connections between students, navigators, and employers which will continue well beyond the program timeline.”

“It has also accelerated the conversion to utilization of online platforms in general, which aligns well with current job search and recruitment strategies.”

“Prior to the COVID-19 health crisis, we were envisioning greater use of online platforms and virtual connections for future program years. The health crisis has accelerated those plans, and we see value in continuing to pursue those avenues even after the crisis has ended.”

- **Best Practice Recommendations – Northwest Workforce Council**

“The partnership of NWC and Skagit Valley College (SVC) with the Experience Work Project (EWP) serves as a bridge between the business community and the local schools and colleges using relationship building and continuous learning processes. Both employers and students benefit from getting to know one another through job shadow and internship opportunities. This positive learning experience helps prepare students for the real world of work and provides employers potential workers for the ever-changing demands of a global and technologically driven economy.”

“The contractor will also start discussions with SVC to ensure they will give appropriate credit to students who participate in virtual opportunities. This may be our future reality, so it makes sense that we look at potential changes we can make now to be best prepared for next year.”

- **Best Practice Recommendations – Workforce Southwest Washington**  
Workforce Southwest Washington is keenly aware of continued monitoring of grants program executed in concert with their OPP partners. They are verifying college oversight of any college staff managing grant projects, and identifying established internal controls and protocols specific to OPP. Additionally, the 2021 OPP design will specify WDC approved methods of student support.

### Overall recommendations for future project design considerations

These recommendations come primarily from the WDC project management teams with additions from the Workforce Board. This section highlights beneficial program activities as well as barriers impacting program implementation and student outcomes.

- **Design Considerations - South Central Workforce Council**  
“Job shadows serve a dual purpose. First, they allow students to experience what it would be like to work in a particular environment, and how different positions within that environment work together to meet their goals. Second, the individual that the student shadowed also serves as a mentor. Students who engaged in a job shadow reported upon completion they were able to develop a mentor relationship with the person they were shadowing. The experience helps to develop a relationship allowing for more open communication.”
  - Yakima Valley Community College (YVCC) receptivity and support would greatly enhance receipt of timely information and coordination with YVCC eligible Opportunity Grant students. Improved connections with Opportunity Grant students will strengthen outreach engagement and onset of OPP trainings.
  - An optional opportunity to have the experience over the summer - Many students expressed a desire to engage in the program during the summer, when most students are not attending classes full time. This concept has been proposed in prior program years, even if not possible due to health concerns in 2020.
  - Utilizing a well-recognized community non-profit to enhance and expand the broad engagement necessary to support the project demands.
- **Design Considerations - Spokane Workforce Council**  
As noted by all the WDCs in previous years, the May end date significantly restricts the success of the students and the overall project. The 2020 contract termination negated standard data collection methods for student outcomes. The normal year contract

expiration in the middle of the spring quarter doesn't allow program navigators to track and report the degree completion of the students that they've worked with if their final quarter is in the Spring quarter. The Workforce Board has encouraged a collection model that allows for greater upfront information to be gathered and reported. It is also recommended that Spokane Regional WDC identify data-tracking methodologies that more accurately report both employer participation and student engagement in their expanding online activities.

The OPP and WIOA partnership is something that should be recommended with every area that has both programs. The students were motivated to take their paid work-experiences/mentorships very seriously; employers enjoyed guiding the next generation of talent. If the instructors and OPP service provider(s) can build a schedule/rotation that works for everyone, the experience is rewarding for all parties involved.

- [Design Considerations - Northwest Workforce Council](#)  
Developing online resources will offer greater outreach opportunities. Possible expansion to Whatcom Community College and Bellingham Technical College would increase outreach opportunities for qualifying WorkFirst students.
- [Design Considerations - Workforce Southwest Washington](#)  
Developing a robust OPP program at Clark College with strong fiscal and programmatic safeguards are actively developed.

The following sections offer additional excerpts from each of the four projects on their challenges, successes, and project leverage opportunities.

### [South Central Workforce Council](#)

The OPP project at South Central operates under a contract with a local non-profit People for People (PFP)

- [Challenges - South Central Workforce Council](#)  
“Early Childhood Education (ECE) program students being more difficult to connect with due to their more than full-time job of running their own in-home daycares, attending classes on the weekend, and homework, the Opportunity Partnership Coordinator (OPC) needed to be more creative.”

“With schools turning to online schooling and the ‘Stay Home’ order in place, the OPC had to look at other opportunities in order to engage the students.”

“The OPC reached out to the established mentors to see if any would be interested in providing mentorship opportunities via email and the telephone but none were interested

at this time. Some of the mentors did say they would be willing to do this once they had established a routine with working from home and the pandemic had subsided. At this time they seemed overwhelmed with the idea.”

- **Successes - South Central Workforce Council**

“By reaching out to the ECE coordinator, the OPC was able to present at three ECE classes in Grandview, one ECE spring orientation in Grandview, and one spring orientation in Yakima, all which were for English language learners. The OPC found that these presentations were the most effective way to connect with these students in order to help them see how this time commitment could fit easily into their busy schedules, as well as the benefit.”

“The majority of the students preferred a job shadow to a mentorship opportunity. In the end though, many of the students ended up with a mentor too in addition to participating in their job shadow. Across the board, the students were excited about these opportunities and really appreciated all they learned from a job shadow or mentor. For a few students they found the experience so meaningful that they shared the program with their friends who then signed up for the program too. All in all the program year went well despite the COVID-19 disruption.”

“The South Central Workforce Council consented to allow PFP to use the Virtual Job Shadow (VJS) program that we had purchased to help meet the program objectives. Students were very excited about having this opportunity, and the OPC was able to enroll 9 more students with a total of 15 completing the VJS’s. Some of the careers were not found on virtualjobshadow.com but the OPC was able to find them on the CareerOneStop website and emailed the specific career links to the students.”

“With the future uncertain as to when our community will reopen and turn to the “new normal”, PFP will continue to offer VJS, new enrollments through email with signatures obtained through DocuSign. The OPC will also be reaching out to all mentors to see if they would be comfortable using a media platform such as Zoom to host mentor meetings, and to revisit mentoring students via email or the telephone. Once the COVID-19 restrictions of gathering have been lifted, PFP will continue to offer onsite job shadows and in-person mentorships.”

“Although pleased with the VJS’s, many of the students still want to complete an onsite job shadow once this option is available again.”

- **Project Leverage Opportunities - South Central Workforce Council**

Given the geographical expanse and the extraordinary range of students’ base education levels, South Central WDC has continued to build on their successful partnership with People For People. Student outreach and connection has dramatically increased along with

student success. People For People has broad and trusted connections to the local population.

## Spokane Workforce Council

The OPP project at Spokane Workforce Council works holistically with the WDC system in offering wrap around services to further support eligible OPP students.

- **Challenges - Spokane Workforce Council**

“The Stay Home, Stay Healthy order, which led to school and business closures, has greatly impacted our approach to connect with students and provide them with the services that this grant requires.”

“We held two in-person industry tours before the Stay Home, Stay Healthy orders were enacted. The other four in-person tours were cancelled due to COVID-19.”

- **Successes - Spokane Workforce Council**

“In response to COVID-19, we re-focused on connecting Opportunity Grant students with our featured employers that are hiring during the pandemic. Connections were made via email and Facebook. Our larger campus efforts to connect job seekers with hiring employers has been taking place through Facebook, so we focused primarily on that platform, although we also invited students to join LinkedIn and follow the WorkSource Spokane page. Virtual hiring events were provided for the following employers: Humanix, Rescare, Rockwood Retirement Communities, and Eastern State Hospital. Facebook hiring events provide introductions to the employers and include information about the nature of the work, the industry, what a successful candidate looks like, and the company culture.”

“We also began work on the LinkedIn learning video that was to be an additional resource offered to this year’s students. For students, we ultimately decided to make four short videos instead of one long one, and b-roll was shot and storyboards were completed by April 30.”

“We focused efforts on contacting all 111 students from both campuses. Through these efforts, we provided direct instruction and guidance on mentorship to 31 students and engaged 25 in full mentorship activities, successfully connecting 20 with employers via the Facebook platform for WorkSource Spokane Featured Jobs.”

“We successfully shifted focus to online platform service delivery, and given more time, we are confident we could have reached a far greater number of students than before.”



- **Project Leverage Opportunities - Spokane Workforce Council**  
“We’ve established a process to enroll students into other funding sources such as WIOA individualized career services, if they’re in need of additional support such as paid internship or comprehensive career coaching, so they can access those services seamlessly through our navigators, effectively rolling their education directly into employment engagement.”

## Northwest Workforce Council

The OPP project at Workforce Northwest Council operates under a contract with Experience Work Project (EWP). It was founded in 2006 as a division of the Mount Vernon Chamber Foundation. Their goal is to help students see the career opportunities in Skagit County and support the business community and their future workforce.

- **Challenges - Workforce Northwest Council**  
“The number of WorkFirst students continues to decrease. During the 2019 -2020 school year, the contractor has received 3 WorkFirst students from Skagit Valley College (SVC). This has been shared with SVC navigators and Northwest Council (NWC) during monthly meetings. In turn, SVC has shared they have a reduced number of WorkFirst students. The contractor has proactively reached out to qualifying WorkFirst students from previous school years, however, the few that are available prefer not to participate in the program while new WorkFirst students express their need of paid internships.”

“Although there was good attendance during the January 23rd orientation, some OG/BFET students became unresponsive once the job shadow/internship interview had been confirmed. In some cases, this was due to personal reasons and other challenges the students were facing.”

“Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, several employers who had been approached for internship for our SVC students suspended visitations and internship opportunities until further notice.”

- **Successes Workforce Northwest WDC**  
“The Mount Vernon Chamber Foundation/EWP has secured new business partnerships. The following employers are/will be offering Job Shadow/Internship opportunities to students. Aqua-Terr Systems, INC (ATSI), Northwest Ecological Services, and Lifeline; The total number of business partners is 184.”

## Workforce Southwest Washington

The OPP project at Workforce Southwest Washington operated directly with Lower Columbia College and its grants program personnel.

- **Challenges - Workforce Southwest Washington**

“Workforce Southwest Washington was made aware of alleged misuse of funds in our Opportunity Partnership Program (OPP) at Lower Columbia College (LCC) on September 23, 2019. Lower Columbia College completed an investigation on October 22, 2019. The report concluded the following incidents more likely than not had occurred:

- Program Manager misappropriated funds from the Career Success Grant (OPP) to a student not qualified for the program;
- Program Manager violated Lower Columbia College’s Code of Ethics and Washington State ethics laws when providing \$500 from a grant she administers to her son, which is a clear conflict of interest; and
- Program Manager violated Lower Columbia College’s use of leave rules as well as ethics rules when not submitting leave slips for time off.”

“As a result, the OPP Program Manager is no longer with Lower Columbia College and the program is in transition.”

“On November 12, 2019, WSW completed the PY18 monitoring and concluded:

- Hours charged on staff timesheets were not consistent with amounts charged to WSW resulting in \$4,860 to be refunded to Workforce Southwest Washington. Lower Columbia College was notified of this repayment requirement on November 12, 2019.
- Lower Columbia College appears to be struggling with their new fiscal and enrollment system implemented this past year. This raises some additional concerns for Workforce Southwest Washington on the administrative capability of Lower Columbia College.”

“\$8,077.61 were identified and recovered as improper OPP expenditures, incurred at Lower Columbia College in the 2018-2019 grant and returned to the State Board.”

“Workforce Southwest Washington’s costs in FY20 were due to the work they put into monitoring and working with LCC in identifying improper program costs. Workforce Southwest Washington’s costs were allowed expenditures under the FY20 grant. At the time the fraud was discovered no FY20 program costs had been reimbursed by Workforce Southwest Washington to Lower Columbia College out of OPP grant funds.”

- **Project Leverage Opportunities - Workforce Southwest Washington**

In February 2020, Workforce Southwest began the process of evaluating different models for future OPP opportunities based on the success of three other WDCs with strong regional models. They spoke with the leads of the other OPP projects about design attributes and structure. They also met regularly with the board at Clark College regarding future recommendations for OPP activities supporting eligible Opportunity Grant students.