

## Opportunity Partnership Program 2021-2022

### Project Overview – An integrated Collaboration

House Bill 1096 created the Opportunity Grant Program in 2007. The program provides financial aid and other services to students 200% below the federal poverty rate, while recipients are also enrolled at state community or community technical colleges in employer-demand programs of study.

Additionally, the legislation provides funding for the coordination of industry mentorship activities benefiting Opportunity Grant recipients who choose to enroll in the Opportunity Partnership Project (OPP).

In concert with local colleges and the business community, four geographically representative Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) design and facilitate regional OPP mentorship programs. Participating Opportunity Grant recipients are exposed to work-based activities that can reinforce the relevancy of academic coursework while developing valued work skills and professional connections.

### Opportunity Partnership - A Reflection of Continual Change

OPP highlights how the program has adapted to change in our community, schools, and workplaces. It also serves as a source for real-time observation for what works and what does not as Washington State seeks to develop a highly skilled workforce in high-demand occupations with living wages.

From the time the state legislature first conceived of an inclusive, integrated, and collaborative structure, the Opportunity Partnership Project has been responsive to student need, education-training models, and changes in industries and technological. The mentor/mentoring focus has necessarily evolved to include students in workplaces, employers in classrooms, resume building, mock interviews, group tours, individually designed job shadows, unpaid and paid internships, social media for development of career networks, and virtual trainings. Industry tours and job shadowing through virtual media were introduced as internet access and cellphone ownership allowed extensive web-based entry points for those at many economic levels.

### 2021-2022 OPP Participant Demographics

The demographic data collected during the 2021-2022 program year was incomplete and therefore, detailed analysis does not meet statistical standards. Generally, the data as reported indicates that:

- The vast majority of participants identified as female
- Of those participants who chose to provide information, ages ranged between 23 to 65 years, with 65% less than 40 and 35% older than 40
- Of those participants who chose to provide information, a majority identified as white

### Barriers to Enrollment in Opportunity Partnership

The Covid-19 pandemic continued to impact the number of students enrolled in the community colleges, and some Opportunity Grant scholars eligible for OPP services indicated they were overwhelmed by their remote

and hybrid coursework, and/or employment. The continuing coronavirus pandemic response meant schools and many businesses were operating on a hybrid schedule at best.

The declining number college applicants during the pandemic reflected fewer students meeting eligibility thresholds for the Opportunity Grant. Those who engaged in OPP mentoring activities communicated that they were struggling with job and/or income loss; school site and childcare closures, irregular work schedules, reduced transportation options; substantial learning curves with limited technological resources necessary to function in virtual-based classes, lack of time, reduced access to relevant business mentors; and concerns of disproportionate exposure to Covid-19 risk.

Industry trainings that were designed to boost workplace familiarity, skill sets, and access were upended by Covid-19; and while conditions improved in 2021-2022, student participation continued to decline. Prior to 2019, OPP tended to enroll between 146 to 186 Opportunity Grant recipients each year. Since the onset of Covid-19, OPP student enrollment dropped to 35% of the average. Business mentoring participation continued to be deeply impacted with just 31% of the average number of hosts that participated prior to the onset of Covid-19.

<b>Opportunity Partnership 8 year Summary</b>			
<b>Program Year</b>	<b>Number of Opportunity Grant Students who enrolled in OPP</b>	<b>Number of Participating OPP Mentor-Business Hosts</b>	<b>Notes</b>
2014-2015	152	121	
2015-2016	159	129	
2016-2017	186	96	
2017-2018	175	131	
2018-2019	146	133	
2019-2020*	80	34	*3 of 4 WDCs reporting; Covid-19 onset with statewide school and business closures; SBCTC terminated contracts
2020-2021*	60	20	*November 2021 launch of OPP instead of July 2021; Covid-19 school and business closures in full effect
2021-2022*	57	38	* Hybrid return to colleges and workplaces; 1 WDC's subcontractor requested termination of subcontract after Opportunity Grant scholars were unable to engage with OPP activities

Table 1 – Illustration of Opportunity Partnership Project declining enrollment during the Covid-19 pandemic

## Workforce Board 2021-2022 Summary of Active OPP Projects

### **Northwest Workforce Council and the Chamber of Commerce Foundation**

One of OPP's demonstrably effective 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 tours, one-on-one job shadows, and internships. This highly effective, personalized investment was disrupted by the continued closure of area colleges and businesses. In 2021-2022, Northwest Workforce Council's project leads returned to in-person engagement with students and businesses.

#### Northwest Workforce Council Program Activities included:

- During the winter 2022 quarter, there were 2 EWP orientations held on:
  - 04/21/22 – 05 students attended
  - 05/18/22 - 04 students attended
- The contractor facilitated a career panel for Human Services, Allied Health, Nursing and Medical Assistants. Panel members were Rosalee Ronquillo of Silverado Bellingham Memory Care, Julia Rowland of Skagit Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services and Kristie Minkoff of Where The Heart Is.
- Panelists shared recommendations to enter the industry, what to do today to become a better candidate for the companies they represent and the challenges and opportunities of the industries. A total of 4 students attended the career panel.
- A second career panel was scheduled for human services students and presented by Community Action of Skagit County. Due to a low registration, the panel was cancelled. The event will be re-scheduled during the 2022-2023 academic year.
- A total of 38 qualifying SVC students enrolled in EWP during the 2021 – 2022 academic year, 17 students participated in the EWP career panels and internship.

#### Northwest Workforce Council Observations:

- The main challenge during the current academic year has been the low participation of students in career panels and almost no participation from industrial trade students (welding/manufacturing).
- Learning opportunities were hosted by memory care, chemical dependency and community organizations serving vulnerable populations however most students were interested in hospital settings which were hard to engage due to the ongoing employee shortage.
- Northwest Workforce Council, Skagit Valley College and Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce staff plan to continue meeting during the summer months in an effort to brainstorm new ideas to generate student engagement. One of the plans is for the Mount Vernon Chamber to present EWP at industrial trade classes pending on class lead approval.

### **South Central Workforce Council and People for People**

South Central Workforce Council's partnership with People For People (PFP) has allowed for sophisticated integration of wraparound federal and state services over a large and diverse geographic area. Part of PFP's success in both 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 program years was directly related to long-established hybridized in-person and remote access services already utilized and familiar to their clients. That infrastructure aided in PFP's ready shift from hybrid services to mostly virtual. With the Workforce Board's encouragement and South Central's approval, PFP expanded access to Virtual Job Shadow resources offered through CareerOneStop.org wherever in-person engagement was not possible. The greater difficulty this year continued to be coordinating with college grant managers and instructors to gain access to students in both in-person and virtual classrooms.

#### South Central Workforce Council Program Activities included:

- The Opportunity Grant Coordinator (OPC) reached out to department heads of various programs at Yakima Valley College (YVC) to inquire if they would be able to share information about the Opportunity Partnership Program (OPP) during their virtual student orientations. Unfortunately, the YVC programs were unable to consistently accommodate this request during the 2021/2022 school year. Recruitment efforts continued through phone calls, video calls, and some in-person meetings at PFP.
- Throughout 2021-2022, the OPC reached out to engage students through individualized emails, texts, and phone calls. The most meaningful engagement continued to be through direct calls to each student. Efforts were made to reach the 65 new Opportunity Grant recipients in the lists provided by Yakima Valley College, with 10 opting to enroll in the Opportunity Partnership program.

#### South Central Workforce Council Observations:

- Throughout the PY21 OPP, Yakima Valley College (YVC) awarded far fewer Opportunity Grants than in the years past largely due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19. YVC has still not resumed full, in-person classes and offered only a small portion of their I-Best programs. For the full year, PFP only received 65 recipient names with many of these students being previous recipients that had already been contacted about the OPP opportunity. We reached out to all recipients with only 10 being enrolled during the Fall and Winter quarters. Despite several attempts to request the Spring Quarter Opportunity Grant recipient list from YVC, we were unsuccessful. The previous recipient lists had been exhausted, leading to no new OPP enrollments in the final quarter.
- Many of the students receiving the Opportunity Grant continue to be those who are working on their Early Childhood Education Stacked Certificates. We find these students are harder to enroll as they are already working in a childcare center or in their own home daycares. The same is true for those enrolled in Nursing School as their schedule is usually too demanding for them to engage in more activities.

- The lack of I-Best students and students on campus impacted the ability to reach a broader scope of students and to have chances to meet directly with classes to present the opportunities within OPP, along with the benefits of participating. While we provide the option of virtual or in-person meetings for both the students and mentors, some sites were not available to students due to vaccination status, making job shadows and mentorship placements difficult.
- Despite the ongoing challenges from COVID-19 and the slow recovery in the Yakima Valley, we were able to engage 4 students with a job shadow or mentorship opportunity. Each student was able to gain invaluable experience within the field they are pursuing and noted that it positively impacted their career goals.
- As of now, YVC will be returning to full, in-person classes in the Fall. We look forward to a new round of OPP students, an increase in I-Best offerings, and the ability to access students on campus so that we can increase mentoring opportunities for these students. While there are still challenges caused by the pandemic, we feel OPP is a valuable tool for students who are looking to connect with a person in their chosen field and gain insight.

### **Workforce Southwest Washington and Equus**

Workforce Southwest implemented a new OPP program at Clark College with Equus and area businesses in 2020. Expectations shifted away from OPP student recruitment and mentorship that year to building a solid infrastructure and protocols with Clark College. 2021 was the implementation of their new program.

#### Workforce Southwest Washington Program Activities included:

- Equus coordinated with the Clark Opportunity Grant Coordinator Laura Jenkins, and other Clark College staff to recruit and engage participants actively enrolled in the Opportunity Grant (OG) program.
- Equus regularly attended the Monday “open-hours” or advising session for OG participants to provide an opportunity for connection and engagement
- As students were enrolled into the OG through Clark College, they received a checklist of items to complete to participate in the program, one of which is to reach out to Equus for additional supports.
- Clark College shared with Equus a list of the OG participants for this term at the end of January and continued to receive email updates to new participants from the school as enrolled. The list contained student contact information for 32 students, 2 new contacts were received during the term.
- Equus conducted outreach to several employers, educators, and professionals to develop mentorship opportunities in OPP participant fields. Equus made connections with individuals at PeaceHealth, WSU-V, Clark College and Lower Columbia College who were interested in developing mentorships. Equus continued to develop similar connections with the Vancouver Clinic, Long Term Care Association, and Community Home Health and Hospice.

- Equus reached out to each of the 34 contacts on the list to determine interest
  - 12 students have been enrolled: 6 enrolled only into OPP and 6 co-enrolled into other program, one of these students is co-enrolled into BFET.
  - Of the 34, 10 were identified to be potentially enrollees (due to eligibility), Equus continued to engage with the potential enrollees.
  - 8 students did not respond after multiple attempts.
  - 4 students declined services.
- When reaching out to participants, Equus continued to highlight the benefits of the program to students. Including the opportunity to grow their social networks and develop long lasting connections to local employers to increase their employability in the future, help acquiring a competitive job following graduation, and support services (like gas cards, childcare etc.).
- In collaboration with Clark College marketing about the program was made available to students.
- Recruitment Outreach Activities
  - Existing students currently enrolled in programs with Equus have been screened for eligibility and it was found that two (2) Clark College students may be eligible to receive services from the OPP grant. Customers were encouraged to reach out to apply with Clark College. One stated that she would reach out to the OPP Program Coordinator to apply. The other had already applied and was not eligible for the Opportunity Grant with Clark College.
- Essential Skills workshops were provided to each of the five (5) full enrolled customers this quarter. In addition, four (4) students who were eligible received additional tuition assistance through other available funding. This included funding assistance for two (2) students enrolled in the Registered Nursing Program, one (1) Health Information Management and one (1) Welding student for Spring quarter.
- In late March 2022, WSW received notification from our OPP subcontractor (Equus Workforce Solutions) that they were not confident in their ability to meet performance for the program and requested that they be released from their contract with WSW. With less than two months left in the contract with WTECB, it was determined to be too challenging to find a subcontractor willing to assume this role (and take on the included performance expectations) in the remaining time.
- Equus submitted a root cause analysis and corrective action plan on March 4, 2022 to WSW that then agreed with WSW to rescind the contract. A formal letter was submitted.

#### Workforce Southwest Washington Observations:

- In the prior quarter, WSW’s subcontractor shared that they had experienced the following challenges:
  - Equus expressed engaging full-time students presented a challenge. Upon reaching out, students reported not having the time to devote to requirements of the program as school, work, and home

were already placing heavy demands on their capacity. Equus worked with the OG grant program lead at Clark to problem-solve this issue and even with reworking required workshops, the participation requirement was still significant enough that it is difficult to keep the student engaged.

- Many students expressed only seeing value in participation toward the end of their schooling, as they are beginning to look for work and complete their educational program. Therefore, early participation (early in the student experience) presented a challenge.
- Equus expressed that it is a challenge to get students to fill out additional paperwork for eligibility as many already had a significant amount of paperwork for other programs already and they did not want to fill out additional paperwork from this program.
- WSW has made additional observations of trends or elements of programming that might be posing a barrier to greater programmatic success. These include:
  - The tension of student busy-ness of schedules, and the pitch for OPP not being compelling enough to demonstrate value for participants who are already overwhelmed with school or work opportunities.
  - Insufficient outcomes on the part of involved partners involved (Equus, Clark, WSW) to express the compelling elements and resources of the public workforce system which may be provided to youth.
  - Though they have generally been a willing collaborative partner, the lack of direct contractual performance expectations with Clark College reduces the level of priority and urgency of undertaking activities to support the program.

### **Spokane Workforce Council and Talent Solutions Team at WorkSource Spokane**

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 could not be a required component until appropriate tracking and attestation methodologies were identified and adopted. 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. One of Spokane's innovative and equitable engagement strategies occurred because of the willingness of a college department to provide virtual access to OPP presentations independent of OPP eligibility. This had the effect of energizing the interest of all students and resulted in successful engagement with those eligible for the services available under OPP funding. Another innovative

strategy was college instructors offering extra credit to all students who participated in OPP activities.

Spokane Workforce Council Program Activities included:

**Networking Events**

A combined virtual networking event was held May 25th for both the Addiction Studies and Integrated Community Services Programs of Spokane Community College. The event was combined based on feedback from the college professors that there is much crossover between the programs and both programs would be interested in many of the same agencies. This event focused on practicum and mentoring opportunities.

Businesses in attendance were:

- The Healing Lodge of 7 Nations
- CHAS (Community Health Association of Spokane)
- Catholic Charities Eastern Washington

Total Students attended – 19

OPP Students attended – 2

**Virtual Resource Rooms**

As a way to provide opportunities to foster networking and mentorships virtually, we utilized the Premier Virtual platform to provide “resource rooms” for participating employers/agencies, that students could sign into at any time throughout the grant term. This was used as a way to encourage communication between agencies and students and to allow the students one location they can go to for current agency information.

There are virtual resource rooms for Addiction Studies and Integrated Community Resources. An agency’s virtual booth includes information such as positions they are hiring for, practicum opportunities, information about the organization relevant to students, and current contact information of whom a student should reach out to.

Employers Participating:

Integrated Community Resources:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pioneer Human Services</li><li>• Catholic Charities Eastern Washington</li><li>• The Salvation Army of Spokane</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SOAR Behavioral Health</li><li>• CHAS</li></ul> |
|--|---|

Addiction Studies:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Partners with Family &amp; Children</li><li>• Compassionate Addiction Treatment</li><li>• The Healing Lodge of 7 Nations</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pioneer Human Services</li><li>• Merit Resource Services</li></ul> |
|--|--|



Total Students participating – 8  
OPP Students attended – 2

### **Feedback from Students:**

- “Networking is always a great thing. Getting these employers names out there and seeing what is available helps tremendously to students who may not know the modality they wish pursue in their degree.”
- “I thought the positives were the explanations by the agencies and the staff. Make it much easier to understand the process. Thank you for preparing this event.”
- “It really opened my eyes on what to look forward to for my practicum, I'm excited but nervous.”

### **Spotlight Video**

Torchlight, a local computer security company, was selected to do this year’s spotlight video. The was selected based on the number of opportunity scholarship students studying some form of IT security and the increased demand of this work. The video is focusing on entry level IT security positions and then broadening into the different career pathways one could take after getting experience. The company needed to postpone filming due to a key employee’s schedule, but the video has been filmed and paid for, and is currently in editing. The final video will be shared with students, and we will be happy to share the link with WTB as well.

- Explore the site here: <https://www.careerexplorenw.org/>

### Spokane Workforce Council Observations:

One challenge faced this quarter has to do with the timeline of the grant term. Many students shared they found these activities very helpful in researching where they would like to do their practicums or begin job shadowing, as well as generating industry contacts, but they don’t plan to pursue these opportunities until summer. It is anticipated there may be a challenge getting feedback from these students over the summer on their potential practicums or mentorship.

Engagement also becomes a challenge the closer the students get to finals and the end of the school year and reflects the engagement we are seeing in the overall job seeker engagement regionally. There was good attendance at the networking events and many students came to all events and formed first name relationships with the agencies participating, but some were slow to engage in practicums or take job offers, stating that they will be interested in the near future or further in their studies.

As with any new technology, we experienced some technical challenges related to the Premier Virtual platform. There was lack of engagement as some students dropped off after a technical challenge at our first event. This challenge was corrected for future participation and was not uncommon for there to be a slight learning curve.

Integrated Community Services was a new program for us to work with this year. The student engagement was less than that of the Addiction Studies program, but we anticipate this engagement to grow in the following school year as it will be a re-occurring opportunity now for the students.

As online college enrollment has become more frequent and more permanent, we invited agencies that operated both around the Spokane area and in other parts of the state where the community colleges had online students enrolled. This was done at the request of the students, teacher and businesses. Adapting to meet the needs of remote Spokane Community College students helps to show the value of participation to all of the parties involved (students, faculty, agencies) and encourages continued future participation.

We explored offering in-person networking events this year but the college felt the turnout would be better from students if we continued to offer remote options. We partnered with the programs and set the networking events at times they already had established for students to connect virtually through their weekly Coffee and Connect lunch hour. We plan to continue following the feedback from students, faculty and agencies to offer the networking events in the format and time frame they prefer and to work closely with the faculty and students in how we design each year's program.

The faculty were very involved with communicating these events to their students, both in class and through email. They also were very involved with and attended each networking event and virtual resource rooms. Continuing to partner with the colleges in the design and implementation of each year's program is helpful in improving both the quality and student attendance each year.

The virtual resource room we opened this year runs through the summer and through the next program year. This allows students to still have contacts and information for agencies over the summer. This also allows a faster start to any future program years as a plan is already laid out for and ready to go. By having a consistent and reliable program for students and agencies to look forward to and be familiar with, we hope to increase and sustain initial participation and to be able to offer even more value as the work is laid out and ready for a future program year.

Being able to serve an entire class continues to be beneficial, as is forming a good relationship with teachers and coordinators in the programs at the community college. The assistance of the college programs with OPP students has been very beneficial.

Offering more than one networking opportunity has been beneficial. Many of the students had numerous interactions with local agencies rather than one. The same is true for agencies looking for a good fit for their organization.

We also held a meeting this year between faculty and agencies offering practicums to improve communication and to explore how student placements could be improved. We had feedback that it was beneficial to bring all the players to the same room and to have this year be very much a collaborative effort.