

INTERMEDIARY ORIGIN STORY

CAREER CONNECT WASHINGTON

Keys to Scale



Career Connect Washington

Governor Jay Inslee launches Career Connected Learning Task Force

Workforce Education Investment Act (WEIA) passes, guaranteeing postsecondary financial aid for more than 110,000 qualified students and establishing CCW with an initial \$15 million investment; WEIA also enshrines the three-step career connected learning continuum and the definition of Career Launch into state law.

CCW establishes statewide Sector Leaders to co-create strategies for scaling career connected learning with Washington employers; Receives \$23.5 million from Good Jobs Challenge and \$5.6 million from Apprenticeship Building America

2017

2018

2019

2020

2022

2024

Governor Inslee appoints Maud Daudon to develop a statewide strategy to grow career connected learning; the nascent Career Connect Washington (CCW) team conducts a statewide listening tour—including industry workshops, focus groups, and polling — and presents a plan in October 2018 to Governor and stakeholders

WA Legislature increases CCW's operating funds to increase program builder (intermediary) grant funds, create a statewide program directory, and add a tribal liaison to the CCW team to support career connected learning program growth with tribal nations and schools

CCW will transition to a new structure — a public-private partnership with board oversight.

Legislature allocates nearly \$37 million for the 2023-2025 biennium for CCW system.



WHAT IS CAREER CONNECT WASHINGTON?

Career Connect Washington (CCW) is a network of employers, labor, government, education, and community leaders that delivers academic and work-based experiences that provide young people in Washington state with clear postsecondary pathways to careers in the state's high-growth career sectors. CCW's framework describes a three-step continuum of career connected learning opportunities.

“We’ve [CCW] put an infrastructure in place that we really can do some awesome...collective work together.”

Angie Mason-Smith,
Program Director
of Career Pathways,
Washington STEM



CCW'S FRAMEWORK

- **Career Explore:** early exposure opportunities to careers and career options (e.g., career fairs, worksite tours)
- **Career Prep:** career-specific instruction at a worksite or in a classroom for academic credit.
- **Career Launch:** paid work-based programs with aligned classroom learning that culminates in a postsecondary credential, including Registered Apprenticeship programs, producing a competitive candidate for meaningful employment.



CCW serves as a state-level partner that engages regional leaders to drive the work on the ground. The initiative's public-private partnership team leads statewide convenings, strategy development based on continuous feedback from field partners, technical assistance, and overall stewardship. CCW seeks to build connective tissue and fill gaps in the current education and workforce system by building partnerships across education, employers, labor, community-based organizations, government, philanthropy, and more.

CCW also functions as a mechanism for funding work on the ground. The initiative provides competitive grant funding for program builders (intermediaries who build and grow career connected learning programs for students and employers), regional networks, and sector leaders. State funding supports Career Launch enrollment for K-12, community and technical colleges, and public four-year colleges and universities. Career Launch programs are endorsed by a multi-stakeholder team to ensure programs meet the statutory definition and are in line with the statewide goals for long-term growth and equity.



The Beginning

Launched by Governor Jay Inslee in 2017, Career Connect Washington began as the Career Connected Learning Task Force. At the time, Governor Inslee was confronting the challenges of low high school graduation rates and lagging numbers of students earning college degrees. At the same time, Governor Inslee was hearing from industry leaders that there was a talent gap in what was otherwise a robust and diversified economy in which 70 percent of jobs required a postsecondary credential.

Under Governor Inslee's leadership, the Career Connected Learning Task Force led regional discussions to explore how career connected learning could help to connect Washington's young people with high-demand, high-wage jobs. Subsequent to these discussions, 45 leaders from industry, labor, education, philanthropy, and government traveled to Switzerland to observe that country's apprenticeship model. The trip was a catalyst for the leaders who participated, enabling them to better understand how intentional coordination across systems could serve young people and industry.

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Search



The trip was instrumental in moving the work in Washington state forward. It helped key stakeholders to align themselves around the importance of collaboration and combining their efforts to scale impact. It was also on this trip that Governor Inslee approached Maud Daudon, then the leader of the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, to create the strategy that would bring Washington's multiple systems actors together to create scalable change.

For the next year, Daudon and a set of consultants went on a listening tour across the state. They spoke with everyone involved in career connected learning: state legislators, organized labor, K-12 and higher education leaders, elected officials, community-based organizations, industry associations, and business representatives. The tour intentionally included people closest to the communities that have been historically marginalized and underserved by the education system. They heard from students and parents through focus groups and polling. This research informed

preliminary designs for a statewide system of career connected learning. Daudon and her team then used an iterative process in which key stakeholders had opportunities to review and provide feedback as the design progressed. By the end of 2018, the final plan had tremendous support.

In May 2019, the Legislature officially passed HB 2158, which Governor Inslee signed into law. The Act established the Workforce Education Investment Act (WEIA), which guarantees financial aid for more than 110,000 qualified students in Washington to attend college for free or at a discounted rate. The Act also established Career Connect Washington and allocated \$9 million for its implementation. The WEIA act codified the three-step career connected learning continuum, the definition of Career Launch, created a cross-agency work group to support CCW, and established the Career Connected Learning grant program.



Opportunities and Challenges

Daudon and CCW's initial research focused on identifying the opportunities and challenges of developing a statewide career connected learning system. In many ways, CCW was established in a conducive and supportive environment. CCW had the backing of the governor, as well as seed funding from philanthropy. Washington state already had a number of successful career connected institutions and innovative learning programs, including a long-standing registered apprenticeship system and invested government agencies. There was an existing regional network of leaders — organized by Washington STEM, a statewide nonprofit — who had established relationships to address previous challenges. These local leaders had experience and a common language around student-centered planning, equity by design, and developing infrastructure. There was a funding community that understood the value of public policy and advocacy work; creating a healthier landscape in Washington would benefit everyone. There was a national conversation about career connected learning that added legitimacy and momentum to the effort. Finally, CCW had a bold and persistent leader in Daudon, who had a deep technical knowledge about the workings of government and industry, and relationships across the state with many important stakeholders.

“If you don’t get the 800-pound gorillas, government, education, workforce systems to take on the work and take on the change, it’s never going to scale ever.”

Jane Broom
Senior Director,
Microsoft Philanthropies



Alongside the enabling conditions, there were obstacles as well. From an education standpoint, Washington is a local control state in which local boards are primarily responsible for school district and higher education institution governance. In addition, Washington has a strong populist political history. Establishing a statewide system in an environment resistant to, and not organized for, any type of top-down edict requires navigating politics, power players, and the complexity of pre-existing institutions and entities, each with its own relationships, agenda, history, and set of practices that define them. With the scope and scale, politics were an issue.

Despite the existence of successful programs and promising initiatives, efforts were siloed. While there was strong interest and effort from multiple government agencies, they operated independently and without adequate coordination. There were existing regional conveners and broad interest in achieving systemic change, but also tensions and disagreements between some of the system's actors. Because there were so many systems and stakeholders operating without formal procedures for collaborating on this issue, progress was inefficient and relationship-based rather than the result of well-formed processes. Individual stakeholder groups had reason to be suspicious. School systems had been focused for years on the importance of a four-year college degree; was this shift an effort to track certain populations into certain industries? Labor organizations had developed a successful apprenticeship program; would this effort dismantle what they built? Some in the system had seen initiatives come and go — they wondered if this one would have staying power.



A Creative Solution

The research Daudon and her colleagues conducted in 2018 built goodwill and created buy-in. Then, the planning process helped bring existing stakeholders along, giving them time to examine and consider a new set of ideas, assess them, and then develop and finalize solutions in partnership.

As part of the process, a listening tour surfaced two primary gaps: (1) students and parents loved the concept of career connected learning, but did not know how to find or access programs; and (2) effective career connected learning programs existed across the state, but they lacked coordination and scale. A statewide system, including common language and supportive infrastructure, would allow programs to scale and provide access for all young people in Washington. CCW identified Regional Networks and Program Builders (intermediaries) as two key elements of a successful statewide system.

As a result, CCW presented a vision rather than a new organization or oversight committee. This vision was co-created with all relevant stakeholders, so ownership was shared. CCW's strategy was a hallmark of its success. CCW was described as helping stakeholders to align around a shared goal of career connected learning and enabling ecosystem actors to achieve this vision.

With the state ecosystem focused on youth pathways, the network focused on supporting efforts to improve and scale existing career connected learning programs and build new programs where none existed. CCW used its convening authority and voice to successfully mobilize stakeholders and advocate for policies that would more effectively address gaps and inefficiencies in the current system.

CCW partnered with Washington STEM, a statewide non-profit that has relationships with program providers across the state, from the inception of the initiative to assist with implementation. Washington STEM still supports the data work, regional networks, and technical assistance for

“[The] thing that’s crazy about Career Connect is that it’s everybody. It’s every part of our state. It’s everybody. It’s every industry sector.”

Maud Daudon
Executive Leader,
Career Connect Washington

program builders across all of the regions of the state. It also works to promote equitable outcomes by providing capacity building, removing barriers through technical support, and conducting outreach with BIPOC and community-based organizations in particular. Washington STEM helped to identify successful projects operating regionally throughout the state and convened regional networks, intermediaries, industry associations, career connected learning coordinators within the K-12 system, and industry champions to preserve and strengthen the statewide coalition.

CCW continues to secure and distribute funding. Distribution of responsibilities for funding was built into the model: initially, philanthropic dollars paid for the small group of leaders who guide implementation; moving forward philanthropic dollars will only go toward industry engagement and advocacy. Public funds now support the competitively selected implementation team, the regional networks, program builders (intermediaries), and education institutions implementing career pathways. Employers are by far the largest funder as they pay student and apprentice wages.

A key to CCW's success is that it started with listening, and it continues to listen and learn. The transition from rallying everyone behind a banner to actual marching requires the continuous adjusting of tactics in response to learnings along the way. In 2022, CCW established statewide Sector Leaders who co-create coherent sector strategies for scaling career connected learning with Washington employers in high-growth industries. Their job is to build on the already-established relationships with employers through outreach and marketing. These sector leaders talk to employers to understand their needs, share updates, and help them make valuable connections. As a result, each of the 10 sectors that CCW is using to deploy its program-building funds has an informed strategy.

“CCW has never been territorial. There’ve been more... intermediaries and conveners, but they haven’t been locked into one way of doing things.”

Kairie Pierce
former Lead Workforce Development
Director for the Washington State
Labor Council, AFL-CIO

Outcomes

CCW's impact can be described across three categories.

Growth

Increases in available career connected learning programs in Washington state.

- **183** new Career Launch programs created of which **70+** are registered apprenticeships
- In 2023, **100+** program builders won grants to expand or develop **147** career connected learning programs across the continuum: Career Explore, Career Prep (includes Pre-Apprenticeships), Career Launch (includes Registered Apprenticeships)
- **150+** businesses employing students in endorsed Career Launch programs

Increased numbers of students accessing career connected learning programs.

- **16,000** total enrollees in Career Launch opportunities; participation in Career Launch programs has grown **28%** since implementation of CCW legislation in 2019

Funding

These successes have led to additional funding.

- CCW has advocated for incremental increases in state funding each legislative session connected to specific needs and student demand for programs. The legislature has increased CCW's operating funds each legislative session. For the 2023-2025 biennium, the legislature allocated nearly \$37 million for the CCW system.
- In 2022, CCW grew employer interest and commitment to Career Connect Washington, culminating in an outpouring of support for the:

- **\$23.5 million**

CCW Good Jobs Challenge grant led by the Washington Student Achievement Council and the;

- **\$5.6 million**

CCW Apprenticeship Building America grant led by the Employment Security Department.

Infrastructure

- **Data infrastructure:** CCW tracks student outcomes in its programs to assess progress toward more equitable student outcomes in Washington State.¹
- **Collaborative processes:** Previously, getting things done in the pathways space happened through personal relationships; without the right relationships, coordinating work was arduous, if not impossible. Kairie Pierce, former Lead Workforce Development Director for the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, notes that because of CCW's efforts, that has begun to change: **“CCW sort of formalizes those ideas and those relationships which result in efficiency improvements for creating the pathways. There is a set avenue, a correct contact for finding information.”**

¹ CCW equity goal: eliminate the predictive impact of race, income, geography, gender, citizenship status, and other student demographics on the outcomes of Washington's students.



Looking Ahead

CCW's longtime champion, Governor Jay Inslee, will complete his final term in early 2025. To ensure CCW's longevity, the network will transition to a new structure — a public-private partnership with board oversight. The oversight board, composed of business, labor, and higher education leaders, will hold CCW and the state accountable to ecosystem stakeholders. Finally, a single individual will no longer lead the network. Instead, it will be run by four leaders representing the following groups: Washington Student Achievement Council, Washington STEM (current implementation partner), Washington Roundtable, and the Washington Employment Security Department.

“I think the ultimate vision of this thing has always been the system. All the various important parts of the system and the process are going to embed their role in this work. They're going to start funding it and doing it and leading it and owning it.”

Angie Mason-Smith
Program Director for
Career Pathways at
Washington STEM