

**Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges**  
**July 2003 – Report on Ford Foundation Bridges to Opportunity Initiative**  
First Year Planning Grant – August 2002 to June 2003

The Washington State Community & Technical Colleges have one of the highest participation rates in the country\*. Approximately one-third of the system's students are low-income, and nearly 20% of our state-supported student headcount is enrolled in adult literacy courses (adult basic education and pre-college ESL), for which the system has primary responsibility. The success of these students in completing enough coursework to provide them living wage jobs is much lower than is needed for the economic survival of these individuals and economic health of the state. In an effort to improve these results, in summer 2002 Washington joined five other states in the Ford Foundation Bridges to Opportunity Initiative, initiating a 15-month planning grant for the Washington system.

The planning grant period has been devoted to developing among the key players a systemic vision that integrates adult literacy, workforce and transfer missions with the state's economic development needs to the end of providing a pathway to a better future for low-income people. Key players have included: community social service organizations, employers, K-12 districts, state and local agencies, low-income students, faculty and system administrators from adult literacy, student services, workforce and transfer instruction, together with presidents and the state board of trustees. The Bridges Project staff used a variety of engagement strategies: a guiding taskforce of system and state agency representatives; student and community agency focus groups held in different parts of the state; communication through the statewide colleges system quarterly group meetings (presidents, instruction, basic skills, workforce, student services, articulation and transfer); a joint meeting of state-wide literacy and workforce program directors; review of results of employer focus groups on college responsiveness to employer training needs, and strategy review sessions with high-level agency administrators and the state board of trustees. In addition our work was informed by national and state research on low-income and disadvantaged students and a statewide study on community and technical college responsiveness to employer training needs.

The result of this work was a vision statement that commits the system to improving the attainment of its low-income students and identification of key policy areas to effect this change. In the next two years, the SBCTC plans to engage in a series of targeted strategies to affect policy changes in the following three areas:

1. improved instructional design and student support strategies that respond to the realities of low-income students' lives and increase their ability to complete courses and programs, and to transition to the next level of education and training
2. more stable and equitable funding for literacy courses and other courses with high proportions of low-income, disadvantaged students
3. financial support available to all low-income students, at levels and in length of time sufficient to sustain them while completing their education.

To support these policy changes, the system will work in a fourth focus area: to create communication strategies that engage the key audiences needed to implement these policy changes, including conveying clear outcomes and our commitment to accountability.

The current vision/policies statement was completed in June 2003. At the end of the planning grant period in early fall 2003, Washington will submit a two-year implementation grant proposal to support the next phase of policy change. Washington is very pleased to be a participant in this multi-state Ford Foundation initiative, which is providing both the financial resources to obtain project leadership and meeting support and connection to national research, expertise and the alternative strategies devised by other states.

\*6.4% of the 15-44 age population, The Chronicle Almanac, August 2002