



# BASIC FOOD EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAM (BFET)

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## Career Pathway Equity

Washington's community and technical colleges are helping thousands of people who receive food assistance<sup>1</sup> train for living-wage careers. All 34 colleges participate in the Basic Food Employment and Training Program, or BFET, and provide tuition assistance, support services and holistic case management. This program helps advance Washington state's efforts to dismantle poverty and ensure educational equity.

## Tailored Services

BFET services are delivered through a partnership of the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, the community and technical college system, and more than 50 community-based organizations.

Services include:

- Tuition assistance.
- Personal career assessment and planning.
- Holistic case management and employment plans.
- Support services for educational supplies, books, childcare, housing, utilities, personal hygiene, medical/dental/vision, clothing, tools and other job-related expenses.
- Job search assistance and employment retention services.

## Helping Students Prepare for the Workforce

The BFET program helps prepare low-income students to earn a credential or degree in a wider range of industry-recognized programs, provided they meet all other eligibility criteria.

Previously, BFET support was available only to income-eligible students enrolled in vocational programs or basic skills classes, severely limiting the number of potentially eligible students.

The expanded BFET program now includes:

- **Basic Education for Adults** — High school completion or equivalency, remedial education and English Language Acquisition.
- **Two-Year Vocational Certificate and Degrees** — Professional-Technical training programs.
- **Two-Year Non-Vocational Degrees** — Training programs not categorized as professional or technical programs that provide employability skills.
- **Apprenticeship** — Related Supplemental Instruction (RSI) for a state registered apprenticeship programs.
- **Pre-apprenticeship** — Pre-apprenticeship training directly connected to a registered apprenticeship.
- **Entrepreneurship Preparation** — Training provided by community and technical colleges to prepare an individual to start a business.
- **Customized and Contract Training** — Training provided by community and technical colleges in response to business and industry needs.
- **Work-Based Learning/Internship** — Work-Based Learning/Internship required for completion of a credential or degree in an approved activity provided by a community or technical college. This includes Career Launch activities requiring paid work-based learning as part of Career Connect Washington.

## Impressive Results

The BFET program yields impressive results. Since 2005, BFET has served more than 110,000 students. Two years after exiting BFET, 55% of participants are employed with a median hourly wage of \$18.72, with wages being adjusted for inflation. This is above the state's \$15.74 minimum wage.<sup>2</sup>

## Student Food Security

Washington's community and technical college system is dedicated to expanding student access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to ensure student food security.

College staff assist students with the SNAP application through the Washington Connection portal and have added information about accessing SNAP in financial aid award letters.

Additionally, 33 community and technical colleges offer on-campus food pantries, indicating widespread student need. BFET also partners with the Student Emergency Assistance Program and Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness pilots, both of which focus on student food insecurity.

Colleges expand their support of students experiencing food insecurity, enhance their collaboration with community partners and increase resources to support students across the college, especially within BFET.

## What Sets BFET Apart

Several features set BFET apart from other programs:

- **Leveraged resources.** BFET is a public-private partnership. Packaging local, private and state educational funds leverages matching funds from the federal government to serve more students.
- **The impact is collective.** The Seattle Jobs Initiative<sup>3</sup> describes BFET as a rare example of collective impact: It spurred colleges and community-based organizations to build partnerships, allowing them to serve people they would not have been able to serve on their own.
- **BFET goes beyond job-search services.** The Seattle Jobs Initiative called BFET a shift from a “stand-alone program with a compliance feel, to an employment and training program connected to the state’s workforce system.”<sup>4</sup> And because BFET is a voluntary program, it serves people who are prepared and motivated to change their lives through education.

Note: The recipient cannot be enrolled in “Temporary Assistance for Needy Families,” (TANF), formerly known as federal “welfare,” the federal government’s cash-assistance program. TANF offers its own job training component, known as “WorkFirst.”

### Sources

1. Washington's food assistance program is called “Basic Food.” It is the state’s name for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP. Both programs were formally known as “food stamp” programs. In addition to food assistance, all states are required to offer an employment and training component — hence, “BFET” for Basic Food, Employment and Training.”
2. SBCTC Academic Year Report Dashboard 2020-21. <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/academic-year-report-dashboard.aspx>.
3. Washington State’s Basic Food Employment & Training Program, June 2014, Seattle Jobs Initiative.