

WORKFIRST PROGRAM

Getting families to work

WorkFirst is a Washington state program designed to help low-income families by supporting people as they complete training and find sustainable jobs. Program participants learn skills for good jobs and higher wages.

The WorkFirst program's three main goals are:

- Reduce poverty by helping people find and keep jobs
- Sustain independence by helping people keep and improve in their jobs
- Protect children and other vulnerable family members by providing child care and stop-gap funding in emergency situations

Administered by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, WorkFirst is funded by the federal government through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)¹ block grants.

A path to prosperity

Washington state residents responsible for caring for children or who are pregnant are eligible to participate in WorkFirst. Program requirements include:

- income and resource requirements
- citizenship and alien status requirements

To be eligible for TANF, families must have total resources of \$1,000 or less. Resources include:

- checking and savings accounts
- stocks, bonds, or mutual funds
- vehicle equity over \$5,000

As of August 1997, TANF recipients are limited to 60 months of benefits in their lifetime unless they qualify for a time limit extension.

WorkFirst-approved programs

WorkFirst funding provides participants ways to further their education so families can achieve financial independence. Community and technical colleges offer participants a variety of educational options like:

- full-time vocational education, including I-BEST
- basic education, including high school equivalency/ GED[®] preparation, high school completion, High School 21+ competency-based high school diploma, basic skills instruction, English language proficiency
- job skills training, including developmental education and part-time vocational education for those in other WorkFirst activities
- access to wrap-around support services provided to TANF students, including academic advising, retention services, barrier removal, WorkFirst financial aid, WorkFirst work study, employment access services, participation reporting and monitoring

Community and technical colleges, local employers, tribal governments, Workforce Development Councils and community organizations are key partners in planning and providing services for WorkFirst participants.

Success for the long-term

To help WorkFirst families along their path to self-sufficiency, participants may also enroll in programs like Worker Retraining and Opportunity Grants. These provide services like financial aid and emergency funding, advising, and assistance connecting with agencies, programs and other fund sources.

WorkFirst is also a direct path for participants to enroll in the Basic Food Employment and Training Program (BFET) in Washington state. WorkFirst staff work with BFET staff to provide a seamless transition for students.

Partnering for success

Agencies and providers throughout the state partner to help make WorkFirst work for Washington families. The result is a cross-institutional program providing support for parents and children.

Department of Social and Health Services

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) serves as the entry point and ongoing contact for WorkFirst participants.

Once an eligible participant enrolls in WorkFirst, DSHS provides an orientation and assigns a case manager to work with that person throughout their time in the program. The case manager will help the participant develop an Individual Responsibility Plan, a document that defines specific activities, expectations and a timeline. The case manager also encourages the participant as they work toward a job and arranges for support services like transportation and child care.

For parents whose primary language is not English, DSHS also provides culturally appropriate employment services in their native language.

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) contracts with DSHS to provide educational programs to WorkFirst participants. Thirty-three community and technical colleges, three community-based organizations and a private career school provide training and skill development to students under WorkFirst. Program participants learn what they need to enter the workforce prepared for jobs in high-wage and in-demand career fields. WorkFirst funds can help pay for tuition, fees, books, child care and other benefits. The community and technical college system served 5,067 WorkFirst participants in 2016-2017.

Department of Early Learning

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) helps WorkFirst-participating parents with child care while at work or taking part in a related activity.

Employment Security Department

The Employment Security Department (ESD) assists WorkFirst participants with finding possible career paths and in the job search process. ESD provides classes, workshops and individual coaching for participants to make the most of their job search.

Office of Financial Management

The Office of Financial Management (OFM) monitors the WorkFirst program's budget and performance. It also forecasts TANF caseloads and makes budget recommendations to the governor's office.

Local planning, local returns

Providers work together through WorkFirst's 31 Local Planning Area (LPAs) partnerships to find ways to improve the way the program operates. LPAs throughout the state serve as forums for local and state agencies, community and technical colleges, nonprofit organizations, tribes, contractors and other community partners serving those in need. Representatives meet to share best practices, stay up-to-date on program changes, and strategize ways to ensure WorkFirst participants receive the best service.

Source:

1. TANF is a federal program administered by the Office of Family Assistance in the US Department of Health and Human Services. States receive block grants to provide temporary cash assistance to families in need. In Washington state, TANF is administered by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. For more information, visit <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/tanf-and-support-services>



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