

Open Office Hour: Benefits Navigator and Campus Strategic Plan Q&A

What's the likelihood of renewal? Is this a more secure position than the ABAWD Navigator?

Yes, this is different than the funding that provided colleges with ABAWD Resource Navigators. That was federal funding that was based on a waiver from DSHS. 2SHB 1559 as passed, implemented a WA state law that required all colleges to hire a benefit navigator and build a hunger-free and student basic need strategic plan. This was not an opt in/out pilot. The legislature, through appropriations, has provided the State Board with funding to allocate to all 34 CTCs for a minimum of a .75 FTE for a benefit navigator role. While we know there are challenges with not being fully funded, we have been working with college leadership to help them understand the options for funding from other programs that can support the additional FTE need to hire a full FTE. Additionally, the State Board is already working with the Post Secondary Basic Needs Coalitions, partners, and advocates across our state to prioritize seeking additional funding for colleges.

Are there any reports that will need to be done for this grant?

Yes, we will have an annual legislative report. We have two upcoming deadlines.

- April 24, 2024 - Hunger Free and Basic Needs Campus strategic plan – the work of the strategic plan will tie into the legislative reporting requirements.
- December 1st, 2025 - legislative report is due and then annually after that.

The SBCTC is working on developing technical support and assistance for colleges that support the development and implementation of their Campus Strategic Plan. As soon as we have a plan and timeline developed, we will be sharing that out.

As far as reporting criteria, we're not asking colleges to track students. It will center more around the strategic plan and evaluating the success of the implementation of the Benefit Navigators.

Another requirement of the bill is a needs assessment which is tasked to WSAC to work with the State Board and an entity representing the public universities. We're putting our heads together now to look at what type of assessments are in use, what is needed, etc. We are also being intentional in finding ways to not put additional burden(s) on college staff.



In the strategic plan outline, Appendix A, I see that each college needs to have their strategic plan developed by April of 2024. So, this really gives us a lot of headway on that. How wide or how much to expand on this? Is there an expectation to expand on this and a strategic plan that is pages and pages and pages or do we adopt the majority of what's presented to us already and make modifications to fit the program that we're implementing? Where's the expectation in terms of how? How far we should be going with it and how much time would be dedicated to development?

Through the bill and mandated by law, all colleges are required to have a hunger free and basic needs campus strategic plan in place. Realizing the legislature did not provide a whole lot of time for developing an entire campus plan, we really want to be as helpful as possible and have developed a template to guide colleges. We are working on a timeline for how the SBCTC can support and assist colleges with the intent of providing space and time for colleges to commit to the work with the right folks at the table across their campuses to really have the most impact.

In the table inside of the position descriptions compensation piece it says that this would be an exempt position. Can you clarify why it is exempt verses classified?

We know that colleges have both classified and exempt. Depending on what you're planning to do, you may already have a classified position that you are thinking of restructuring to fit this work. Generally, with appropriations and things like this, these are exempt positions, because they are not always guaranteed funding. However, I think we want to be fully flexible. We also want to be understanding of current campus hiring practices, alignment with like positions and campus structure. We encourage you to work with your college HR to look at the position you have developed compared to similar work on the campus.

With the new law about overtime exempt staff, if it's an exempt position and they're going over, and we have a certain dollar amount will the college be encumbered with the overtime amount?

Possibly. The salary basis test and the duties determine whether or not the position is exempt from civil service (it may also be exempt from overtime if the salary is above the current thresholds). It definitely would, be something you'd want to think about and consult with your HR.

At some point will we need to let you know who the point person is? Will there be a listserv that they can be added to, to receive announcements and other communication?

Yes. We are building a support page on the SBCTC website as well as a CANVAS page in the canvas community. At the same time, we're working with some of our partners over at United Way of King County to develop some onboarding and training for the cohort of Navigators. Knowing who your Navigator is would be helpful for us in making sure that the communications are getting to the right people.

If the purpose of the funding is to pay only for salary benefits for this position, does that mean there is no funding for student services?

Correct, not at this time. The funding of the 48,762 is for the Benefit Navigator position only. The way the law is written, the position must be funded at, at least .75, not capped at a .75. The funding that colleges receive is to go towards that one position and is not to be split amongst multiple positions.

SSEH is kind of doing this work. It's also helping us with students applying for SNAP benefits and things like that. I was thinking of taking some of this money to pay a percentage of this position that I already have and then use the rest of the funding for a part time position. Am I allowed to do that, or do I need to use the funding for this new position? 48,762 is including salary and benefits, not salary and then benefits after that?

I understand that colleges would want to be creative and innovative, especially with a really modest amount of funding, but the way the law is written the 48,762 goes towards one position. Colleges in some areas, such as King County, 48,000 does not cover .75 FTE for a navigator, they're paid much higher. Those colleges will have more backfill to do to get that position to that .75. We've encouraged colleges to be creative with other funding. Because the scope of the work is so aligned with Workforce, and Student Support programs, we've encouraged colleges to consider braiding/leveraging funding from those sources. Additionally, if colleges follow the scope of work for the Navigator, the position may be leveraged for reimbursement by their BFET program.

If we're adding money to it, does the .75 need to be allocated for this navigator position and then the .25 to make it up to full time? Does that also need to be 100% allocated to the benefits navigator or can they be doing something else for that .25?

The predefined scope of work in the guidelines is based on the intent of the legislature. We do understand there is a funding gap to fill. We caution colleges around adding additional duties to the benefit navigator such as intensive case management. The scope of work in the position announcement duties laid out for this position is already heavy, so adding on additional responsibilities may not create a sustainable position.

If you're going to use other program funding because of the alignment of the scope of work with, for example, the Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) program, you can do so without adding additional duties. This would also increase the overall amount that is reimbursable from this position.

Example:

1 FTE: \$65,000 Salary + \$22,000 Benefits = \$87,000
 $\$87,000 \times .5 = \$44,000$ in annual reimbursement to BFET program.

That additional \$44,000 generated can go to another part-time/full-time position to help with this work and can be billed for reimbursement. In doing so, you're building capacity too.

We've heard from some other colleges that they're going to be aligning a portion of the position with their emergency assistance grants work that's already being done, which is fine. We drafted the position



description to be such that it could be built into the work of the colleges are already doing if they have structure and foundation to support that kind of need for leveraging of other resources to get to a full FTE.

If the funding doesn't expire after one year, is it a two-year allocation for the salary?

The funding is considered ongoing, as long as the legislature appropriates funds. So that means every biennium the legislature will appropriate the funds for the navigators. Colleges automatically got their allocation July 1, and they will again July 1, 2024, which will continue to happen year over year without application unless the law is changed or stricken.

Is the job description that was provided only an example, or does it have to be exactly like that?

It does not have to look exactly like that, but the scope of work that's provided should be the scope of work of the navigator as intended by the legislature.

How much case management would be involved? The word Navigator in the title leads us to believe that case management was part of the position because we have had past programs containing navigational components.

The purpose of this position is to provide a single accessible point of contact for a student to get connected with resources both on and off campus. When we think of case management, we really think of that intentional relationship building for a specific support service. We do it in WorkFirst, BFET, and SSEH where there's a case management element. The Benefit Navigators will be responsible for having a basic understanding of eligibility for programs and resources on campus and in the community – this is to help students navigate access to multiple resources they may not know exist. A small intake/assessment, and conversation is not case management and may be necessary for the Benefit Navigators to make meaningful referrals to support the student. We are not asking colleges to track students or keep files on students connected resources.

Would you be opposed to using a different title?

Not necessarily. When we're thinking about a cohort, keeping alignment is good. Changing the title significantly may require the need to alter position duties and unintentionally impact alignment with the scope of work. The bill as passed into law calls these positions Benefit Navigators and scope of work is to help students navigate access to and application for resources/funding.

Because this position would be working with BFET and WorkFirst, can we request access too eJAS?

Yes, possibly, to verify eligibility – however, in BFET you have to actually do an eligibility check, so it may not be as simple as just checking eJAS.



You said that this position needs to be at least 75% FTE, so the funding we receive for this navigator position, from this specific pot of money, doesn't have to be 75% of their salary, correct, since we're supplementing it with other funding? So, if for some reason this pot of money is 50% and then emergency assistance is another 50%. That's OK as long as that position is at minimum 75%. Is that correct?

Correct. I'm glad you're thinking of it that way because the amount of money allocated in certain areas is not 75% of the salary for this type of position, it could be less than.

On page six of the position description under the first section and last bullet point of the navigation design, it references that the navigator would collaborate with WSAC and the State Board to implement a student survey. My question about that is whether our institutional research folks should be involved in that process or if there will be research experts from WSAC State Board who are looking at what is this the right way to ask a survey question and how do we analyze the data? I'm just wanting to determine or understand whether I should give a heads up to our institutional research folks on campus.

Last fall, WSAC worked with the SBCTC and research folks to develop the Basic Needs Census Survey. We're still in conversation on whether WSAC is planning on doing something at that same level. We don't anticipate this being a yearlong ongoing survey, but more so a snapshot in time. As the conversations begin to formulate what needs to take place per legislation, we will continue to keep the colleges up to date and include Executive Leadership in decision-making.

Will there be another convening for supervisors of these positions, or can you share things that supervisors of the role can be thinking about as next steps?

We're going to be working on some next steps for the rollout of the strategic plan, sharing what we anticipate FY 24 will look like and how spaces will be available for folks to engage. We'll want to make sure we're engaging with those VPSS and supervisors of the position to ensure we are building space for a community cohort for the Navigators. We are thinking this will be more of a phased approach with multiple levels of work. This will also include strategic plan development, how that's going to be laid out and how we'll be working with the colleges. I don't have an ETA on all that yet because, like you, we're still navigating what this all really means. Who's going to be leading this work on the campuses? How do we involve others? What is the full timeline? Where can we provide support and assistance? Etc.

We're being very intentional to the connection between Guided Pathways and Basic Needs and involving Guided Pathways in the foundational structure for all this. We're trying to identify gaps and we really want this to be comprehensive, yet less burdensome on the colleges. It's much broader than just serving students in student services or workforce, it becomes more ingrained into the work that Guided Pathways is already doing. Some of the colleges have intentional coaching in their advising where they're asking students up front what basic needs support they need and then they're doing direct referrals. So, looking at how does this role of the new benefit navigator fit within a network that's already happening? Where can we support the work where it's not happening to get it up and running? That's why we're thinking of this as a phased approach. As I mentioned, I don't have any ETA, but I assume that probably sometime in August we'll be able to get something out to the colleges that just really lays this all out.

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