



BASIC FOOD EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAM (BFET)

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Off Food Assistance, into Jobs

Washington's community and technical colleges are helping thousands of people who receive food assistance¹ train for jobs and become self-reliant. All 34 colleges participate in the Washington State Basic Food Employment and Training Program, or BFET.

BFET provides training and education supporting Basic Food recipients as they work toward a living-wage career. All Washington state community and technical colleges and many community-based organizations offer BFET services, offering supports tailored to the community and individual. Providers understand community needs and employment and training options that best contribute to their neighborhoods. By offering unique and independent services, they are able to collaborate and co-enroll clients with other agencies, providing individuals full employment and training services.

Impressive Results

The BFET program yields impressive results. Two years after exiting BFET, 60 percent of participants are employed with a median hourly wage of \$14.44, above the state's \$12 minimum wage.²

Since 2005, BFET has served more than 89,448 Washington residents. Most clients use vocational training benefits, and community and technical colleges are the largest source of that training.³

Tailored Services

BFET services are delivered through a partnership of the state Department of Social and Health Services, the community and technical college system, and more than 30 community-based organizations.

Services include:

- Up to 365 days of retention services after employment.
- English language acquisition.
- Personal assessment and career planning.
- Tuition assistance applied to a vocational certificate or non-transfer associate degree.
- Adult education for foundational skills in reading, writing and math.
- GED[®] preparation, high school completion, youth service and Running Start.
- Case management.
- Job search help.
- Support services for tuition, educational supplies, books, childcare, housing, utilities, personal hygiene, medical/dental/vision, clothing, tools and other job related expenses.

The recipient cannot be enrolled in "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families," (TANF)⁴ the federal government's cash-assistance program. TANF offers its own job training component, known as "WorkFirst."

Student Food Security

Washington's community and technical colleges and the State Board are dedicated to expanding student access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to ensure student food security.

During the 2018-19 school year, 64,631 students received need-based aid.⁵ The colleges are providing wrap-around services to 13,706 students who are receiving SNAP, but there are over 50,000 students potentially eligible for the program.⁶ Navigators at all

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campuses 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 of the 34 community and technical colleges offer on-campus food pantries, indicating widespread student need. The college system is also launching a Student Emergency Assistance Program and Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness pilots, both of which have focus on student food insecurity.

ABAWD (Able Bodied Adults without Dependents) Navigators

The State Board contracted with DSHS for FFY20 ABAWD Navigation Design Funds. ABAWD Navigators at each college create a single point of contact for immediate support and engagement in activities, allowing ABAWDs to maintain their Basic Food eligibility. The ABAWD Navigators defined scope of work will help 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. Local, private and state educational funds are packaged to leverage matching funds from the federal government. This stretches dollars further, allowing more students to be served.

- **The impact is collective.** The Seattle Jobs Initiative⁷ 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.** Historically, state programs for people who receive food assistance are limited to job-search support. Washington state's program provides education and training opportunities that lead to industry-recognized degrees and credentials valued in today's labor market. BFET represents a shift from a "stand-alone program with a compliance feel, to an employment and training program connected to the state's workforce system," according to the Seattle Jobs Initiative.⁸ And because BFET is a voluntary program, it serves people who are prepared and motivated to change their lives through education.

National Recognition

The BFET program won national recognition for using a collaborative approach that leverages resources and connects with the state's workforce system. The 2014 federal Farm Bill created a three-year grant fund encouraging states to provide targeted employment and training programs similar to Washington's BFET program.

Washington state was awarded one of those grants for the "RISE" project (Resources to Initiate Successful Employment). The RISE project was a three year, \$22 million federally funded program that ended in December 2018. The State Board and DSHS is continuing to provide Mathematica with data to determine the impact of the pilot program.

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. DSHS BFET website: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-partnership-program/basic-food-employment-training-bfet>
3. Ibid
4. TANF was formerly known as federal "welfare."
5. SBCTC Academic Year Report Dashboard 2018-19. <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/academic-year-report-dashboard.aspx>.
6. SBCTC Academic Year Report Dashboard 2018-19. <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/academic-year-report-dashboard.aspx>. Total BFET and WorkFirst students in 2018-19.
7. Washington State's Basic Food Employment & Training Program, June 2014, Seattle Jobs Initiative.
8. Ibid.