



SkillUp Washington

Low-income working adults need jobs that will let them support themselves, their families and their long-term career goals. Employers need workers that possess the professional skills, abilities and attitudes that make some form of postsecondary education a virtual requirement in today's economy.



SkillUp Washington is a collaborative of public, private, and philanthropic funders of adult workforce education and training who have joined together to address these economic needs by increasing the number and rate at which people complete postsecondary education and training that has value to employers.

Our primary target is low-income working adults – approximately 100,000 people living in King County – above age 18 with no postsecondary credential and who have household incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.



Our primary goal is to double the annual number of low-income working adults in King County who obtain a degree or credential beyond high school within the next five years.

Our approach is to influence the practices of programs and systems currently serving low-income working adults so that they work together more effectively to support smoother and more rapid transitions into, and more rapid completion of, postsecondary education and training programs.

Our Investors include: The Seattle Foundation; The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Microsoft Corporation; Northwest Area Foundation; United Way of King County; Washington State Board for Community and Technical College; City of Seattle's Office of Economic Development; King County Department of Community & Human Services; National Funders for Workforce Solutions; and Living Cities.

SkillUp Washington is pursuing **five implementation strategies** to achieve its goals:

- 1) **On-ramps to postsecondary education:** Increase participation in and effectiveness of programs designed to support entry into postsecondary education and training (Attainment Fund, Washington Families First)
- 2) **Postsecondary completion:** Increase completion of one and two year credentials and degrees that have value in the workplace and provide opportunities for career advancement (College for Working Adults)
- 3) **Employers:** Partner more effectively with industry in the design and delivery of postsecondary education and training programs for working adults (Industry-driven partnerships)
- 4) **Alignment:** Develop common strategies, objectives, and accountability standards (Joint application for recovery funds)
- 5) **Advocacy:** Increase public and political will to support postsecondary attainment (Policy Forums)



2009 Actions and Accomplishments

In 2009, SkillUp is testing new ways of working together to improve the lives of low-income working adults through completion of postsecondary education programs and attainment of higher wage jobs that support career advancement. The major initiatives include:

- 1) **College for Working Adults:** \$750,000 granted to demonstrate the feasibility of new programs customized for the needs of non-traditional adult students who, because of full-time work, family obligations, or other barriers, have seldom found success in traditional postsecondary occupational programs. The four essential design elements are:
 - Compressing the classroom time;
 - Reducing the complexity of registration, course selection, and class scheduling;
 - Building support services into the program;
 - Building in “soft skills” development, information about labor markets, and job placement.

The grants fund the development of six new programs involving the ten community colleges located in King County, Washington. SkillUp anticipates that up to 250 individuals will participate in the initial cohorts and that these demonstrations will lead to a dramatic expansion of similar programs tailored specifically for working adults and non-traditional students facing barriers to college.

- 2) **The Attainment Fund:** Establishment of a fund to promote persistence and completion of a postsecondary degree or credential for low-income working adults who are participating in the new college completion programs. The funds would be used for unexpected or emergency expenses that threaten an individual's ability to complete their program. Expenses could include emergency payments for child care, housing, food, transportation, or class related equipment or materials.

SkillUp is working to extend the Attainment Fund to cover low-income adults with career plans that require completion of a postsecondary credential and who need to overcome numeracy, literacy, or other barriers that disqualify them from entry into, and success in, a postsecondary program.

- 3) **On-ramps to Postsecondary Education for Homeless Families:** SkillUp is partnering with The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, King County and others to design more effective ways to connect recently homeless parents and caregivers to the jobs and career tracks they need to maintain housing stability and self sufficiency. SkillUp will focus on identifying new practices that successfully advance the recently homeless into and through a postsecondary program, even while they are working. The recommendations will require new ways of partnering across homeless, human services, workforce, and education systems to support the development and achievement of long term career goals. SkillUp anticipates testing these approaches with the formerly homeless and then applying them more broadly to all low-income adults who need help meeting minimum qualifications for successful participation in a postsecondary program.
- 4) **Industry Partnerships:** SkillUp has funded the formation of employer/worker partnerships involving business, labor, and education leaders in the health care and energy efficiency industries. The partnerships will better align training capacity with projected demand for workers and will increase industry investment in the skill development of their entry level and incumbent workers.