

Tribal Liaison

Budget Language

\$150,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024 and \$150,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 are provided solely for a tribal liaison at the office of the superintendent of public instruction to facilitate access to and support enrollment in career connected learning opportunities for tribal students, including career awareness and exploration, career preparation, and career launch programs, as defined in RCW 28C.30.020, so that tribal students may receive high school or college credit to the maximum extent possible.

Proviso Purpose

The Career Connect Washington (CCW) Tribal Liaison serves as a critical bridge between tribal communities and the state's career-connected learning ecosystem, operating within the Office of Native Education (ONE) under the Director's guidance and in strategic partnership with the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Department. This position represents a transformative approach to ensuring tribal youth have equitable access to workforce development opportunities while honoring tribal sovereignty, cultural values, and community-driven educational priorities.

The CCW Tribal Liaison works collaboratively with CTE program leads to establish and maintain consistent communication channels, expand career-connected and work-based learning opportunities within Washington state's tribal compact schools, and strengthen partnerships with school districts serving significant tribal youth populations. This role is essential for supporting CTE program development, expanding career exploration and preparation activities, launching career pathway initiatives, and establishing CTE graduation pathways specifically designed to increase access and improve outcomes for tribal youth.

The position's unique value lies in its dual focus: advancing tribal youth workforce development while simultaneously building the state's capacity for culturally responsive, tribally-informed career education programming.

Services Provided

Regional and Tribal Outreach

During 2024–2025, the Tribal Liaison established strategic partnerships with the Office of Native Education, Washington State Native American Education Advisory Committee, Educational Service Districts (171, 101, 105), and Washington State-Tribal Education Compact Schools (STECs).



Direct Support to Tribal Education Institutions

Provided technical support to all eight STECs: Chief Kitsap Academy, Chief Leschi Schools, Lummi Nation Schools, Muckleshoot Tribal Schools, Pascal Sherman Indian School, Quileute Tribal School, Wa He Lut Indian School, and Yakama Nation Tribal School.

Tribal Government Partnerships

Engaged directly with nine tribal nations: Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Kalispel Tribe of Indians, Lummi Nation, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, Nez Perce Tribe, Spokane Tribe of Indians, Suquamish Tribe, and Swinomish Tribe.

Specialized Training Development

Developed and delivered "Tribal Sovereignty 101" covering tribal sovereignty frameworks, historical and intergenerational trauma, tribal economic development, and engagement best practices. Also provided "Tribal Consultation in Developing Workforce Educational Programs" training for state partners.

Tribal Resources Website

Launched dedicated tribal resources hub at careerconnectwa.org/resources-for-tribes/ featuring program information, funding resources, partnership pathways, success stories, and key documents including "A Guide to Career Connect Washington for Washington State Tribes" and funding access guidance

Criteria for Receiving Services/Grants

N/A

Beneficiaries in the 2024–25 School Year

Number of School Districts:	ALL
Number of Schools:	ALL
Number of Students:	ALL
Number of Educators:	ALL
Other:	Washington State Tribes

Are Federal or Other Funds Contingent on State Funding?

No.

State Funding History

2025	\$150,000	\$117,485
2024	\$150,000	\$133,911
2023	\$150,000	\$124,253
2022	\$150,000	\$125,907
2021	\$150,000	\$66,887

Number of Beneficiaries Per Fiscal Year (e.g. School Districts, Schools, Students, Educators, Other)

2025	N/A
2024	N/A
2023	N/A
2022	N/A
2021	N/A

Programmatic Changes Since Inception (If Any)

None.

Program(s) Evaluation or Major Findings

The following examples represent positive outcomes from program evaluation, highlighting grant recipients who have successfully uplifted tribal sovereignty, impacted both tribal and non-tribal communities, and strengthened relationships between tribes, schools, and state partners. While these two success stories demonstrate exemplary models of tribal-led and tribally-informed workforce development, they represent a small sample of grant recipients committed to culturally responsive programming and meaningful tribal engagement.

Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation Natural Resources Pathway

The Colville Tribes Education Division, led by Curriculum Developer Kamea Pino, developed an innovative dual-credit natural resources program to address critical tribal workforce needs and strengthen cultural identity. Natural Resources 108 is piloted at Omak High School and Inchelium High School, with Natural Resources 160 launching next year. Students earn five dual college credits through eight culturally relevant units including pine needle basket making, forest management, plant identification, land ownership, and career exploration, integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern natural resource management.

The program responds to urgent workforce needs identified through a 2023 survey of the Tribes' Natural Resources Division, which employs 366 individuals and anticipates 122 openings over the next decade (34% due to retirements). Tribally enrolled students completing

coursework can apply for a six-week summer youth apprenticeship providing 250+ hours of hands-on experience, three industry certifications, and portfolio development.

Supported by a \$169,957.70 Program Builders grant, the Tribes developed comprehensive instructional materials and compensated tribal subject-matter experts to ensure culturally specific content. This initiative serves as cultural empowerment, connecting tribal students to their identity and heritage while preparing them as future land caretakers who maintain traditional knowledge systems. The program exemplifies education shaped by community needs and cultural values.

Pacific Education Institute (PEI) Tribal Partnership

PEI developed the Youth Engaged in Sustainable Systems (YESS) program and comprehensive CTE frameworks through direct collaboration and consultation with tribal nations. YESS operates through partnerships between PEI, school districts, skill centers, and natural resource organizations, providing five to six weeks of summer programming where high school students earn credit while building job skills in natural resources through classroom learning and hands-on service activities.

PEI's CTE frameworks were co-created with high school teachers, industry, tribes, career and technical colleges, and OSPI, ensuring tribal voices shaped curriculum from its foundation. The five pathways—Aquaculture and Fisheries, Education through Outdoor Learning, Forest Management, Restoration Ecology, and Urban and Community Forestry—align with CTE standards, Next Generation Science Standards, and graduation requirements. The Restoration Ecology framework explicitly incorporates historical, traditional, and contemporary land management units, directly uplifting Indigenous knowledge systems and traditional ecological practices alongside modern restoration science.

PEI's partnership with the Yakama Nation exemplifies their commitment to tribal sovereignty, recognizing that continued natural resource stewardship requires engaging and educating tribal youth as the next generation of community leaders. The partnership honors how forestry and natural resources create opportunities for youth to combine their culture with environmental preservation, protection, and enhancement, ensuring tribal knowledge, cultural practices, and self-determination remain central to educational programming.

Major Challenges Faced by Program(s)

Data Collection and Representation

Current program data demonstrates gross underrepresentation of American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) students and other non-white racial and ethnic groups. A critical need exists for a dedicated data support specialist to systematically collect, analyze, and accurately report participation data for AI/AN students. Without specialized data capacity, the program cannot adequately track equity outcomes, identify barriers to participation, or effectively measure progress toward eliminating disparities for Indigenous students.

Future Opportunities

The Tribal Liaison has identified key areas for ongoing professional development across the educational ecosystem:

Professional Development

The Tribal Liaison identified priority training areas for Local Education Agency administrators/staff, CTE Directors/staff, and STECs administrators/staff: Tribal Sovereignty 101 (foundation knowledge), Intergenerational Trauma (understanding impacts and responsive approaches), Tribal Consultation (proper protocols and meaningful engagement), Washington State Tribal Economic Development (aligning education with tribal economic priorities), County Economic Development (regional coordination), and Skills Center Development (expanding career pathways for tribal youth).

Sustainable Systems Development

The CCW Tribal Liaison's work builds capacity across state agencies, educational institutions, and tribal communities, creating lasting infrastructure for consistent and respectful tribal engagement, culturally responsive program development, equitable access to career and technical education, strong government-to-government relationships, and increased economic opportunities for tribal youth and communities.

The Career Connect Washington Tribal Liaison represents a critical investment in educational equity and tribal sovereignty. Through comprehensive outreach, strategic partnership development, innovative training programs, and the creation of accessible digital resources, this position has established new standards for state-tribal collaboration in workforce development. The development of the Tribal Resources website, implementation of Government-to-Government Training, and direct support to tribal education institutions demonstrate the transformative potential of culturally responsive, tribally-informed career education programming.

The work accomplished during the 2024–2025 year creates a sustainable foundation for continued growth in tribal youth workforce development opportunities while honoring tribal sovereignty and supporting community-driven educational priorities. This approach ensures that every tribal youth in Washington state has access to multiple pathways toward economic self-sufficiency and fulfillment, aligned with their cultural values and community goals.

Other Relevant Information

- [Career Connect Washington 2025 Legislative Report](#)
- [Career Connect Washington Resources for Tribes Webpage](#)

Schools/Districts Receiving Assistance

[Click here to see a list of all OSPI grant recipients in the 2025 Fiscal Year.](#)

Program Contact Information

Name: Shandy Abrahamson
Title: Director, Office of Native Education
Phone: 360-725-6160
Email: shandy.abrahamson@k12.wa.us