



Washington Statistics:

State Population	6,971,406
<i>(2013 estimate)</i>	
0-5 population	6.4%
<i>(2012 estimate)</i>	
Poverty level	12.9%
<i>(2012 estimate)</i>	
# of local collaboratives	10
State/Local Collaborative	
Total Funding:	\$800,000
<i>(FY 2014)</i>	

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Washington State Profile

Thrive by Five Washington is Washington State's nonprofit organization with primary responsibility for funding and coordination of the state's ten early learning regional coalitions. Thrive leads this work in partnership with the Washington State Department of Early Learning (DEL).

Thrive is a 501(c)(3) organization with its own board of directors and is funded through a mix of public and private resources. It was created by private foundations to serve as the private sector partner with the then newly formed Department of Early Learning. Among its key priorities is to lead the state's work on home visiting, parent engagement and the regional coalitions. Three Thrive staff members provide part-time support to the work of the regional coalitions.

Washington's early learning infrastructure at the community level was regionalized in 2010, building off years of work and coordination in local communities, with a goal of leading the work at the local level around [Washington State's Early Learning Plan](#). Previously, some regional coalitions had been funded through a variety of resources through the Foundation for Early Learning to support topically-based coalitions and two demonstration communities funded by the Gates Foundation. When the state's early learning plan was created, a key priority in the plan was the creation of regional coalitions. DEL agreed to provide initial funding to launch the regional coalitions on a statewide basis. The regional coalitions were seen as an integral strategy for building greater public awareness and engagement for the implementation of key priorities within the early learning plan. Most recently, these priorities have included WaKIDS (WA's kindergarten entry assessment), Early Achievers (WA's QRIS), and implementing WA's Racial Equity Theory of Change, among others.

The estimated annual budget for Thrive by Five Washington is approximately \$17 million. Of that amount, approximately \$800,000 is targeted to support the regional coalitions through local Community Momentum grants.

In 2013, the Department of Early Learning (DEL), in collaboration with partners at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and Thrive, completed a 16-month study of the [Washington Early Learning State and Local Coordination Project](#).



The project’s goal was to strengthen how different parts of the state’s early learning system - state agencies, regional collaborative efforts, K-12 education and child care providers - work together to support the development of Washington’s early learning system. Some key recommendations (related to the work of Regional Coalitions within WA’s state-local coordination structure) resulted from this effort and are currently underway. For example, one representative from each of the ten Regional Coalitions has been invited to serve on the DEL Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) to ensure a regional voice in state-level decisions and planning and, overall, to strengthen joint regional and state efforts to achieve common goals for children and families.

Regional Coalitions

As stated on the Department of Early Learning website, regional coalitions are a group of early learning professionals, parents, K-12 school leaders, and business and civic leaders who represent a geographic area. **The state is divided into 10 regions.** Coalition members assess the need for early learning services in their community, plan actions and build public support. Listed below are key priorities for each coalition.

- Strengthen the coalitions’ effectiveness and durability.
- Increase engagement of diverse stakeholders.

- Strengthen joint regional and state action to achieve goals, including creating simple regional action plans and providing a voice in ELAC.

The requirements to be a regional coalition are fairly flexible at the moment. Regional boundaries were set by the state to align with the K-12 system’s regional infrastructure. (See map of the regional coalitions.) They generally follow county line boundaries although, in two regions, they split counties. The regions are also aligned with the existing infant/toddler hubs.

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In these first few years of funding, the focus of the coalitions has been on creating foundational documents and applying for specific funding from DEL or Thrive to support key projects. In these initial coalition building years, the goal has been to bring people to the table, to understand coalition work, reach agreement on making decisions, on what membership is, etc. There is no requirement related to regional coalition membership other than that it should include a broad and representative set of early learning stakeholders.

As in many states, there is a tension between state and local level authority due to the state’s need for greater authority over the work of the regional coalitions and the need of the coalitions for greater flexibility.





and private funding. The regional coalitions use these grants to fund at least one staff member.

Regional Coalition Funding

In 2013, approximately \$800,000 in grants was made to the regional coalitions. The smallest coalition received approximately \$60,000 while the largest received approximately \$100,000.

The funding to regional coalitions includes not only the Community Momentum grants but also new funding that arises each year for special initiatives. The regional coalitions are seen as the state's conduit for systems-building efforts at the community level and to support specific initiatives as they are rolled out. For example, when WaKIDS, the state's kindergarten entry assessment, was being implemented at the local level, regional coalitions received funding to help support the implementation process.

Regional Coalition Governance

Regional coalitions are generally not independent organizations but, instead, have fiscal agents and are housed within nonprofit agencies or government entities. While a few have incorporated as 501(c)(3)s, most simply have fiscal agents to manage the resources they receive from public and private sources. Beyond the fiscal agent, "governance" looks different in each regional coalition. Generally, most coalitions have a partnership council that reflects different components of the community and the early childhood system. There are no specific requirements in this regard and, thus, each coalition is different.

Another area of diversity is the age range covered by regional coalitions. It was left to the regional coalitions to determine and some had already formed partnerships before they officially became part of the statewide regional coalitions; some of the coalitions, therefore, focus on children from birth to age five while others focus on birth to grade three.

The common thread running through the coalitions is the funding they receive from the state that targets specific issues.

Regional Coalition Staffing

All local coalitions have staff and most have offices. Staff is funded through Community Momentum grants that come through Thrive and include a mix of federal, state

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Regional coalitions must apply annually for Community Momentum funding and they must propose how the resources will be used. Thrive convenes meetings each year to discuss the major initiatives that can be funded under the Community Momentum grants. Regions then have a "menu" of options to choose from in allocating their resources. In addition, regions are asked to include in their proposal details about how they will be involved in other statewide early childhood initiatives that the state is supporting under the early learning plan. For example, while a regional coalition may not be specifically funding a home visiting project, the state wants to know what they will be doing within their coalition to further home visiting in the region.

While there is a great deal of flexibility within the coalition funding, some projects require more specific guidelines. For example, for initiatives tied to federal requirements, such as funding for activities from Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge, there are tighter parameters about how strategies must be carried out in communities, such as actions related to WaKIDS implementation through the coalitions.

Technical Assistance to Regional Coalitions

Thrive by Five Washington leads the technical assistance for the regional coalitions. This technical assistance includes monthly webinars on a variety of topics and statewide meetings three times a year, with teams from each of the coalitions. Thrive also has a contract with a private firm to provide assistance to the regional coalitions on an as-needed basis on a variety of topics, particularly governance, regionalizing, and decision-making protocol.

Some technical assistance has emphasized a peer learning approach. This has been particularly true in regions where coalitions are in close proximity and can learn from each other.

In addition to technical assistance related to governance and the infrastructure of the coalition, there is much focus on the programmatic side of the work, as well, and this generally follows the funding requirements. For example, Thrive funds a local initiative called “Love/Talk/Play” and provides technical assistance to regional coalitions to support local implementation. The state is implementing a kindergarten entry assessment. Thrive is providing funds to the regional coalitions to help them have a presence in how that develops at the local level and provides technical assistance in that regard, as well.

Through the technical assistance and statewide convenings, Thrive is attempting to create opportunities to help the regional coalitions have some role in all of the statewide early childhood initiatives. To that end, it provides opportunities for coalitions to discuss how the initiatives are happening in each of the regions as a way to create general awareness and coherence across the initiatives and to showcase different roles that different coalitions are playing. How coalitions are to be involved in specific initiatives is not prescribed, but the hope is that, through this process, coalitions will want to be involved in a variety of ways.

Advocacy

While there have been limited requests of the regional coalitions up until now to engage in advocacy, it is a requirement of the Community Momentum grants that they assist with advocacy efforts. Thrive provides technical assistance related to advocacy and is helping build local

capacity for this effort. It is anticipated that the regional coalitions will play an important role in advocating for key elements of the early childhood system in upcoming years.

Performance Measures

Since the regional coalitions are still in a relatively formative stage at this writing and given the limited resources they receive, there are few requirements as to performance measures they must meet. The ones currently in place relate to the governance of the regional coalitions in terms of fiscal agent structure, those tied to specific federal requirements, etc. To that end, there is a set of questions they must respond to each year that are designed to access an evaluation of performance and collaboration. In recent years, this has included a survey requiring coalitions to rate themselves on collaboration and how they were functioning as a coalition on such issues as decision-making, priority setting, etc.

Regional Coalition “Snapshot” - Northwest Early Childhood Regional Coalition

The Northwest Early Childhood Regional Coalition is housed within the Northwest Educational Service District (ESD) and serves the five counties in the northwest corner of the state. The ESD is a quasi-governmental agency and serves as the fiscal agent for the coalition. The Northwest Regional Coalition was created approximately eleven years ago, long before the state offered the Community Momentum grants.

The coalition has an advisory board comprised of representatives of each of the five county coalitions that report up to the regional coalition advisory board. The regional advisory board meets on a monthly basis. It sets the priorities as a coalition and submits the annual Community Momentum grant proposals, along with approving other funding proposals.

Long before the state funded the ten regional coalitions, the Northwest Coalition decided it was important to come together as a network of



information sharing and, in some cases, to share resources and funding across the five counties. Even when funds were not available, the region felt it was important to work together to best leverage their joint assets and to work together on common challenges confronting early childhood services across counties. Even in periods where there were no resources, the advisory board met on a monthly basis and shared work currently underway and used the meetings as a way to stay connected. Resources have waxed and waned over the years. The goal was to leverage the power of the broad regional reach of all the partners across the five-county area.

In the early years, the Foundation for Early Learning (now merged with Thrive by Five Washington) provided some funding to the regions to help coalitions develop their infrastructure. They focused more on county coalitions and less on regional coalitions. The goal was to build internal structures around membership, formal practices, etc.

The Northwest Regional Coalition has one full-time staff member. It also contracts with coordinators for some of the individual county work across the 5-county region. The coalition offices are housed within the fiscal agent offices.

Funding for the coalition varies each year. For 2013, the coalition had a budget of \$82,000. It was required that some of these resources be used for the Love/Talk/Play parenting campaign and the WAKids early learning collaboration. Other funds supported general infrastructure development, convening meetings, coordinating agendas, etc. For 2014, the coalition expects to receive a grant of \$60,000 from Thrive for their Community Momentum grant.

The regional coalition regularly strives to raise funds to support some of the projects that their membership prioritizes for their region. They have had some success in their fundraising efforts although it varies from year to year. These fundraising efforts help keep coalition members engaged while still implementing some of the programs under their Community Momentum grants that are less of a priority.



When asked about the key components to success in a local early childhood coalition, the regional coalition director emphasized the following:



Even in periods where there were no resources, the advisory board met on a monthly basis and shared work currently underway and used the meetings as a way to stay connected.

- Clear governance structures are important.
- Having actual work to do is important - not just meeting for the purpose of collaborating.
- Having resources/funds and being tasked with something specific is helpful.

She further stated, “When I came in as regional coordinator, I had previously been a member of a county coalition and I found the coalition meetings to not be meaningful. Everyone has told me that having projects funded now through the Community Momentum grants has reinvigorated the coalition. It started with the infant/toddler project where we convened a steering committee. It gave us all a sense of purpose and reason to collaborate. It felt like we were making a difference. There is definitely value in meeting as a network because our coalition members were doing it for years before we received funding. They must have been getting something out of it but it’s more meaningful now that there is actual funded work to be accomplished.”

One area of work of which Northwest regional coalition members are particularly proud is the increasing focus on early learning in the school districts and the increasing effort to reach out to the early learning community. They have worked to position themselves as a key partner to the schools and, thereby, had success in raising awareness of the importance of early learning. To that end, they launched



Key Components to Success and Lessons Learned

- **Local input:** Give regional coalitions a seat at the table and real input in determining the vision and mission and structure for the local systems building work. Do NOT simply hand them the “finished product.” Moreover, create an established protocol early in the developmental process about what it means to gather local input into the system building process.
- **Set requirements and structure:** Conversely, the strong voice of the regional coalitions in shaping the design can create its own set of challenges in that there is no alignment across the coalitions. “Membership” on the coalitions varies by region. How they “cover” all the counties in their regions varies. Their approach to governance varies by region. For the long-term, there must be greater alignment and a sense that all coalitions are marching towards similar visions. Put some parameters in place that will assure alignment across the state.
- **Have both a short- and long-term plan related to the coalitions:** From the outset, develop both a short- and long-term plan regarding the coalitions and the role they will play in the state’s early childhood systems building efforts, and consider how they will be financed for the long-term. In developing this plan, think about where you want to go in the long-term instead of focusing on short-term gains and resources.
- **Local Sustainability and Funding:** Plan ahead regarding funding and sustainability of the regional coalitions. It will not work if you fund it in “fits and starts.” There’s a need in the early years of their development to have initial funding to maintain consistency and adequate funding levels to help build the capacity of regional coalitions. *Flexible* funding is also extremely important in allowing communities to tailor the resources to fit their specific needs and realities.
- **State and Local Coordination/Collaboration:** There must be coordination/collaboration at both the state and local level. You are asking local coalitions to think across the system and to partner together. The state *must* do the same through partnerships and alignment across agencies at the state level.

an annual brunch on early learning that is increasingly well attended and they are now reaching out to school districts to help them think about how to partner in improving school readiness. They are also developing a network of pre-K teachers who are aligning their practices to school district practices and managing a transition process. They have worked to make this a key priority of the regional coalition so that the schools see the coalition as the place to go for assistance in partnering with early learning. As the regional director noted, “If you’re a pre-K teacher and want to connect to schools or vice versa, we’re the place to go. If you have funds and want to support something specific, our coalition is the central driver. There was a school district that had just gotten funding and convened a group to brainstorm. They discussed forming an early learning group and then realized that this group already existed - our regional coalition. It is helping people to remember that there is no need to reinvent the wheel.”

When asked to provide final words of advice on local coalition building, the regional director noted, “A lot of time is lost trying to understand how to organize and what membership structures to use. If a state is looking at coalitions as a part of its infrastructure, the more fully realized that can be and the more support and clarity around governance and membership there is, the better. Washington is a state that has a preference for local control. There needs to be a balance between being prescribed versus not enough prescription. A lot of time has been lost with trying to figure out things on our own and with limited guidance. It’s important to be clear on where you are going and what you want to accomplish and how it needs to look, while providing opportunity for input by the local citizens and decision-makers. This will allow you to move forward with expectations more quickly.”

- **Technical Assistance:** Assure that there are adequate resources at the state level to provide technical assistance to the regional coalitions and assure that that technical assistance is targeted and aligned with your vision.
- **Learn from what has already been created:** In many cases, communities have been doing this work for a long time. Design your regional approach in a way that values and respects what they are already doing.
- **State-level buy-in:** Build buy-in for the local work at the state level across multiple departments and divisions and assure that they are thinking in terms of how they coordinate with the regional coalitions in their work, as well. For example, make sure that your child care licensing office is as engaged in the local efforts as your pre-K office.
- **Creating “statewideness”:** While flexibility is important, there also must be some structure and alignment across regional coalitions in order to create continuity and a sense of “statewideness” to the initiative. Consider providing parameters around “membership” on the regional coalition or around how they will represent the counties within their region. Particularly in the early days of the initiative, the clearer you can be on the role of the coalition and how it will function, the quicker it can get down to doing business.
- **Communications Strategy:** It is important to communicate the value, purpose and reason for being a coalition - to both the membership and the community at large. Lots of coalitions may form over the years. What’s the reason that the public should value THIS particular coalition and why is it important to recognize that it will be around for the long-term?

Resources

- [Thrive by Five Washington website](#)
- [Department of Early Learning website](#)
- [Washington State Early Learning Plan](#)
- [Washington State Early Learning Regional Coalitions](#)
- [State and Local Coordination Project - Final Recommendations \(2013\)](#)

Interviews

Kelli Bohanon, formerly with WA Department of Early Learning

Lauren Hipp, formerly with Thrive by Five Washington

Karma Hugo, Northwest Early Learning Regional Coalition

