

RCW 43.185C.340 Students experiencing homelessness—Grant program to link families with housing—Program goals—Grant process—Requirements—Grantees report to the department. (1) Subject to funds appropriated for this specific purpose, the department shall administer a grant program that links students experiencing homelessness and their families with stable housing located in the student's school district. The goals of the program are to:

(a) Provide educational stability for students experiencing homelessness by promoting housing stability; and

(b) Encourage the development of collaborative strategies between housing and education partners.

(2) To ensure that innovative strategies between housing and education partners are developed and implemented, the department may contract and consult with a designated vendor to provide technical assistance and program evaluation, assist with making grant awards, and support collaboration between the department and the office of the superintendent of public instruction. If the department contracts with a vendor, the vendor must be selected by the director and:

(a) Be a nonprofit vendor;

(b) Be located in Washington state; and

(c) Have a demonstrated record of working toward the housing and educational stability of students and families experiencing homelessness.

(3) In implementing the program, the department, or the department in partnership with its designated vendor, shall consult with the office of the superintendent of public instruction.

(4) (a) The department, or the designated vendor in consultation with the department, shall develop a competitive grant process to make grant awards to eligible organizations on implementation of the proposal. For the purposes of this subsection, "eligible organization" means any local government, local housing authority, behavioral health administrative services organization established under chapter 71.24 RCW, behavioral health organization, nonprofit community or neighborhood-based organization, federally recognized Indian tribe in the state of Washington, or regional or statewide nonprofit housing assistance organization. Applications for the grant program must include a letter of support from the applicable school districts. Within 60 days of receiving a grant award under this section, a memorandum of understanding must be established between the housing providers and school districts defining the responsibilities and commitments of each party to identify, house, and support students experiencing homelessness. The memorandum must include:

(i) How housing providers will partner with school districts to address gaps and needs and develop sustainable strategies to help students experiencing homelessness; and

(ii) How data on students experiencing homelessness and their families will be collected and shared in accordance with privacy protections under applicable federal and state laws.

(b) If a memorandum of understanding cannot be established as required by (a) of this subsection, the housing provider and school districts may work with the department on a case-by-case basis to provide, in lieu of a memorandum of understanding, a detailed accountability plan for a partnership between the housing provider and the school districts.

(5) In determining which eligible organizations will receive grants, the department must ensure that selected grantees reflect

geographic diversity across the state. Greater weight shall be given to eligible organizations that demonstrate a commitment to:

(a) Partnering with local schools or school districts as demonstrated by a letter of support; and

(b) Developing and implementing evidence-informed strategies to address racial inequities. Specific strategies may include, but are not limited to:

(i) Hiring direct service staff who reflect the racial, cultural, and language demographics of the population being served;

(ii) Committing to inclusive programming by intentionally seeking and utilizing input from the population being served;

(iii) Ensuring eligibility criteria does not unintentionally screen out people of color and further racial inequity; and

(iv) Creating access points in locations frequented by parents, guardians, and unaccompanied homeless youth of color.

(6) Activities eligible for assistance under this grant program include but are not limited to:

(a) Rental assistance, which includes utilities, security and utility deposits, first and last month's rent, rental application fees, moving expenses, and other eligible expenses to be determined by the department;

(b) Transportation assistance, including gasoline assistance for students and families with vehicles and bus passes;

(c) Emergency shelter;

(d) Housing stability case management; and

(e) Other collaborative housing strategies, including prevention and strength-based safety and housing approaches.

(7) (a) All beneficiaries of funds from the grant program must be from households that include at least one student experiencing homelessness as defined as a child or youth without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence in accordance with the federal McKinney-Vento homeless assistance act, 42 U.S.C. Sec. 11431 through 11435.

(b) For the purposes of this section, "student experiencing homelessness" includes unaccompanied homeless youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. "Unaccompanied homeless youth" includes students up to the age of twenty-one, in alignment with the qualifications for school admissions under RCW 28A.225.160(1).

(8) (a) Grantee organizations must compile and report information to the department. The department shall report to the legislature the findings of the grantee, the housing stability of the homeless families, and any related policy recommendations.

(b) Grantees must track and report on the following measures including, but not limited to:

(i) Length of time enrolled in the grant program;

(ii) Housing destination at program exit;

(iii) Type of residence prior to enrollment in the grant program; and

(iv) Number of times homeless in the past three years.

(c) Grantees must also include in their reports a narrative description discussing its partnership with school districts as set forth in the memorandum outlined in subsection (4) of this section. Reports must also include the kinds of supports grantees are providing students and families to support academic learning.

(d) Data on all program participants must be entered into and tracked through the Washington homeless client management information system as described in RCW 43.185C.180.

(9) In order to ensure that housing providers are meeting the requirements of the grant program for students experiencing homelessness, the department, or the department in partnership with its designee, shall monitor the program at least once every two years.

(10) Any program review and monitoring under this section may be conducted concurrently with other program reviews and monitoring conducted by the department. In its review, the department, or the department in partnership with its designee, shall monitor program components that include the process used by the eligible organization to identify and reach out to students experiencing homelessness, and other indicators to determine how well the eligible organization is meeting the housing needs of students experiencing homelessness. The department, or the department in partnership with its designee, shall provide technical assistance and support to housing providers to better implement the program.

(11) The department is subject to the requirements established in RCW 28A.300.542(9). [2023 c 386 § 2. Prior: 2019 c 412 § 2; 2019 c 325 § 5015; 2016 c 157 § 3.]

Effective date—2019 c 325: See note following RCW 71.24.011.

Finding—Intent—Short title—2016 c 157: See notes following RCW 28A.300.540.