

**RCW 28C.18.180 Lifelong learning program.** (1) A lifelong learning program is established within the workforce training and education coordinating board to provide the opportunity for employees, with the support of their employers, to create educational savings accounts that may be used to fund approved education and training. In operating the program, the board:

(a) May partner with, and coordinate the voluntary alignment of services with, financial institutions and other public, private, and nonprofit organizations in order to enable low-wage workers to attain high-skilled and high-wage jobs in their communities;

(b) Must work with its partners to:

(i) Establish the policies, rules, and procedures, including but not limited to standards for fund management and for approving career development plans and education and training, that support the operation of the program;

(ii) Ensure the program is marketed to various geographic areas and industry sectors of the state, as well as to low-wage workers, their employers, and the communities in which they reside; and

(iii) Help partners coordinate new career counseling services with existing online and other providers, including the state's WorkSource system;

(c) May work with financial institutions to encourage their full engagement in:

(i) The management functions of the program, including managing lifelong learning accounts for individual employers and their respective employees consistent with program requirements and guidelines;

(ii) Adding value to the program through the provision of financial literacy and career counseling; and

(iii) Aligning their activities under a consolidated partnership, which may include the designation of one fund manager to streamline the establishment and management of the program; and

(d) May develop program policies and system options that will lead the program to become self-sustaining.

(2) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this section.

(a) "Approved career development plan" means an employee's career development plan that is approved by the program managers and contains the necessary information to determine if expenditures are in alignment with program criteria.

(b) "Approved education and training" means education, training, and associated costs aligned with an approved career development plan and thus eligible to be funded from a lifelong learning account.

(c) "Financial institution" means any federally chartered or state chartered bank, savings bank, or savings and loan association, or credit union.

(d) "Lifelong learning accounts" means joint savings accounts that are established by employees and employers to support the education and training of employees and that are aligned with their approved career development plan. [2012 c 33 § 2.]

**Finding—Intent—2012 c 33:** "The legislature finds that training and education is vitally important in the development of skilled workers and the promotion of an internationally competitive economy. It is the intent of the legislature to promote the opportunity to succeed. It is the further intent of the legislature to build a highly

skilled and globally competitive workforce by supporting the movement of low-skilled workers into average-skilled jobs and moving average-skilled workers into high-skilled jobs to achieve a world-class competitive workforce that is sustainable through the coming decades. The legislature intends, through the establishment of a lifelong learning program, to address the challenge of providing low-skilled workers with postsecondary education and training and ultimately achieving excellence in all sectors of our workforce and economy. The legislature intends that participation in the lifelong learning program is completely voluntary and in no way obligatory for employers or employees. The legislature intends the lifelong learning program to develop partnerships and mechanisms through which:

(1) Workers take responsibility for advancing in their careers and improving their economic future by investing their own funds in their training and education;

(2) Employers voluntarily promote the success of their businesses, workers, and communities by investing in their workers' lifelong learning accounts;

(3) Educational and training institutions promote the establishment of lifelong learning accounts to equip students and their employers with a means to meet the financial demands of higher education tuition costs and the competitive needs of industries;

(4) State and local government institutions provide the infrastructure, incentives, and proactive support for employees, employers, and institutions to invest in lifelong learning accounts; and

(5) Financial institutions and nonprofit organizations invest their resources to provide the initial web of support to establish pilot projects, foster program development, assist in impact evaluation, and assist in migrating the program achievements and best practices across other communities and industries in the United States." [2012 c 33 § 1.]