

Joint Training and Recruitment Plan

Julie Meredith
Secretary of Transportation

Steve Nevey
Deputy Secretary, Washington State Ferries Division

John Vezina
Assistant Secretary, Washington State Ferries Division

Chantae Recasner
President, Seattle Central College

Chris Sullivan
Vice President of Instruction

Dale Bateman
Associate Dean, Seattle Maritime Academy

December 2025

In response to the proviso outlined in Chapter 416, Laws of 2025, ESSB 5161, Section 222 (16)(b), the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is pleased to submit the following report.

(b) Washington state ferries must submit the joint training and recruitment plan to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the legislature and the office of financial management by December 1, 2025. The Washington state ferries must submit findings of program effectiveness and recommendations for continuation of the pilot to the appropriate committees of the legislature and the office of financial management by December 1, 2025.

Washington State Ferries (WSF) values the Seattle Maritime Academy (SMA) as a critical industry partner. As the only publicly funded post-secondary maritime school in the region, SMA plays a unique and essential role in advancing maritime education and workforce development. The Academy's mission naturally aligns with WSF's strategic goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion; resilience; and workforce development- creating accessible and equitable opportunities for community members to enter the maritime industry.

WSF benefits from this partnership both as a maritime employer and as a training organization. The two agencies recently renewed their Memorandum of Agreement for an additional two years. Through this agreement, WSF prioritizes the use of SMA's training resources and facilities, including Bridge Resource Management, Engine Resource Management, Fire Watch, and classroom rentals.

Over the past four years, WSF has worked closely with SMA to recruit and train new mariners who have been underrepresented in the maritime industry, including women and people of color, preparing them for employment with WSF and other maritime organizations. SMA hired a dedicated full-time Student Recruiter in July 2023 which has made a significant impact in implementing a recruitment program in support of SMA and WSF's shared goals. With only one start date per academic year, it is critical that SMA fills all 36 seats (18 Deck students, and 18 Engine students) to help address current workforce needs. Since hiring the Student Recruiter, SMA has started every year with a full cohort of Deck and Engine students and held a strong waitlist as well.

As a result of SMA and WSF's strategic recruitment efforts, we have made significant progress in creating accessible and equitable opportunities for community members to learn about and enter the maritime industry, especially through SMA training. Since hiring a Student Recruiter, SMA has seen a 144% increase in students whose gender and/or race is underrepresented in maritime (see Table 1).

Every new SMA graduate increases the availability of qualified mariners for WSF. A measurable number of SMA graduates find their way to WSF within their first few years following graduation. In order to shorten the pipeline and align with student's needs, WSF opened a specific application cycle in Spring of 2025 that aligns with the SMA schedule to apply directly to WSF entry-level positions as Ordinary Seafarers or Wipers. That application cycle will continue in Spring of 2026.

WSF also maintains a contract with SMA for use of simulator equipment in both Deck and Engine training programs. These simulators play a vital role in developing licensed engineers and deck employees as they promote into higher-level positions. SMA provides WSF with affordable access to this specialized equipment, making the partnership both fiscally responsible and sustainable.

Additionally, WSF leases a year-round classroom at SMA to support training programs such as AB to Mate, Pilotage, and New Employee Orientation. This ongoing collaboration increases WSF visibility for current SMA students considering their career options upon graduation, and ensures a seamless relationship between SMA and WSF, aligning current and future training needs.

Recruitment of students into SMA and employees into WSF is critical to the success of both organizations and filling maritime workforce needs in support of the region's economy. The close relationship supports joint recruitment efforts, which strengthen both the quantity and diversity of students and future WSF employees. This legislative appropriation has enabled incremental improvements to already strong job training within each organization and effective partnership between them. It has also allowed for significant growth in effective recruiting.

Short-Term Recruitment Plan Recommendations

SMA currently employs a full-time student recruiter, previously funded through the City of Seattle's Office of Economic Development. SMA is currently creating a revised Workforce Outreach position to align this role more closely with the priorities from this proviso. This role will drive SMA's strategic outreach planning and execution over the next two years, including but not limited to leading the following activities:

- **Community-Based Organization (CBO) partnerships:** SMA will collaborate with CBOs to build long-term relationships with communities of color and promote maritime careers to individuals historically underrepresented in the industry.
- **High-Impact On-Campus:** Plan and host on-campus maritime exploration tours for small groups including high schools and middle schools, to engage attendees in experiential career connected learning activities to increase awareness and interest in maritime careers.
- **Outreach at college and career fairs:** Active participation in regional fairs to introduce individuals to maritime career pathways and connect with prospective students.
- **Information Sessions:** Host monthly information sessions at SMA.
- **Community events:** Participate in and co-host-local events, with emphasis on maritime career opportunities.

SMA and WSF Workforce Outreach workers will meet monthly to collaborate, share about upcoming events, and keep SMA informed on upcoming recruitments that will appear on NEOGOV. The uniting goals are to 1) strengthen regional interest and awareness in maritime career pathways; and 2) strengthen the pipeline from SMA to working at WSF. Specifically:

- In consultation with WSF’s Workforce Outreach Specialist, specific events will be identified where WSF personnel SMA staff will collaborate to highlight both the educational opportunities available and the clear career pathways to WSF upon graduation. This includes but is not limited to joint tabling at fairs and events, co-facilitating workshops, and supporting large-scale events.
- WSF will present to SMA students twice each academic year navigating the WSF application and interview processes, and to discuss WSF career opportunities, including internship and post-internship employment.
- WSF will offer a behind-the-scenes vessel tour experience once per academic year for both SMA Engine and Deck student cohorts. This will showcase what life underway at WSF can look like both at entry-level and throughout deck and engine career paths. When possible, emphasis will be placed on connecting with WSF professionals who reflect the diverse backgrounds of our region to help students from diverse backgrounds see themselves working in the strong wage and high demand careers WSF has to offer.

Five-Year Recruitment Plan

- **Expanded CBO partnerships:** Continued and expanded collaboration with CBOs to reach underrepresented communities, focusing on both education and career pathways. SMA will also partner with organizations such as Northwest Maritime Center (Maritime High School, Classroom on the Water, etc.), Washington Alliance for Better Schools, Girl Scouts of Western Washington, and participate in WSF-sponsored events such as WSF Eagle Harbor Days.
- **Ongoing outreach:** SMA and WSF staff will continue high school visits, job and college fair participation, and other community outreach with a strong emphasis on building a more diverse and representative maritime workforce. SMA will continue building out some middle and elementary school outreach to engage in developmentally appropriate activities to spark interest and awareness in maritime, and support creating positive associations with water-based activities.
- **Continued Development of High-Impact Experiences:** SMA will continue to develop brief, yet immersive hands-on career connected learning experiences to use during tours, community events, and in off-campus settings to help increase interest and inform about maritime opportunities, especially for those coming from backgrounds historically underrepresented in maritime.

Seattle Maritime Academy Cohort Enrollment

	Fall 2022*	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	Fall 2025
Gender Identity Underrepresented**	4	6	7	11
Race/Ethnicity Underrepresented	5	10	9	11
Race/Ethnicity AND/OR Gender is underrepresented	9	16	16	22
Race/Ethnicity AND Gender are underrepresented	1	1	2	6
Total Student Cohort Size	32	36	36	36

Table 1.

* No Student Recruiter for Fall 2022 cohort. Whereas, Fall 2023, 2024, and 2025 cohorts did have a Student Recruiter.

** Includes women, transgender, and nonbinary students.