

Tech College is Lead School in Sharing \$1.85M

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THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM — Bellingham Technical College and three other northwest Washington colleges will share a \$1.85 million federal grant to expand programs in the advanced manufacturing industry.

The three-year Department of Labor grant will be shared by the members of the Pipeline to Advanced Manufacturing Careers partnership, which includes BTC, Grays Harbor, Olympic and Peninsula colleges and several northwest companies.

BTC, which leads the partnership, will receive about \$750,000 to expand programs including process operation, mechanical engineering, instrumentation, electrical and mechanical maintenance and shipbuilding, according to Patricia McKeown, vice president of instruction at BTC.

"I think that this is really a win-win for Whatcom County and the state of Washington," McKeown said. "I think we'll have some impact in a really broad way here."

The group of schools applied for the grant because the region has a large manufacturing industry — shipyards, refineries, food processing, smelter, and more — but there is a shortage of people who have the advanced training to do the work, according to the grant application.

As the lead in the partnership, BTC will be developing curriculum and materials in several programs that can then be distributed to schools without those programs.

"People in Whatcom County are going to benefit from what we're doing," McKeown said. "And beyond that we're going to create some materials we can share with other colleges so they can provide these courses across the state."

The goals of the partnership include increasing the number of students in advanced manufacturing programs by 25 percent, developing distance learning courses that can be shared by all four partner colleges and increasing recruitment and outreach for advanced manufacturing programs.



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Bellingham Technical College instrumentation students Carl Reppun, left, and Mike Fraley work on lab projects at the Northwest Center for Process Manufacturing building on Wednesday. BTC is sharing a \$1.85 million federal grant to expand several of its programs with three other northwest Washington colleges.

BTC is working on providing options for students who live in an area that makes daily travel to campus a hardship. For example, remote labs might be set up in areas of the county for computer training so students would only come to the Bellingham campus once in awhile, McKeown said.

"This really helps Bellingham Technical College move forward with a lot of different initiatives we have on the table," McKeown said.