

Bellingham Technical College Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Campus Climate Listening Session 2026

Summary

In the spring of 2026, Bellingham Technical College (BTC) held its fourth iteration of campus-wide listening sessions. In alignment with RCW 28B.10.147, BTC's DEI Office, in collaboration with Institutional Planning & Assessment (IPA), conducted listening sessions with the goal of checking in with the campus community about the key findings from the spring 2025 listening sessions. Listening sessions continue to help BTC employees understand what is needed to best support and retain all members of the BTC community. BTC held two three-hour drop-in sessions, one for students and one for employees. Students were provided four questions and employees were asked five questions lining up with all the key themes from the 2025 sessions. Questions were provided on posters where respondents were given a range of answers to select from. An additional question was added outside of last year's themes for all respondents in relation to the BTC children on campus policy to help with an assessment done through participatory governance about the policy's use and needs pertaining to its use. All questions also had the option to provide written feedback via QR Code or on paper. All students were compensated for their participation in the annual listening and feedback sessions in compliance with the expectations of RCW 28B.10.147 through de minimis gifts of less than \$100 and provided snacks and drinks for participants.

The 2026 listening sessions aligned clearly with the same themes that were found in the spring 2025 listening sessions, while allowing respondents to specify needs or support for belonging on campus. Students shared that overall BTC has resources that are highly accessible. Students expressed that their largest barrier to success is paying for school and living expenses but also shared that BTC Financial Aid is easy to access at the school. Student respondents also shared that when they need help on campus, a majority find their employee interactions to be very helpful with no students saying employees were unhelpful. Students identified instructor and Library support as the top resources for them to be successful at BTC. Employees indicated feeling like it was easy to connect and collaborate on campus but tagged burnout and workload as the most important items to address in the work environment. As BTC continues to utilize the campus climate listening session data to inform practice, employees were asked to share thoughts on changes that had been made since the 2025 listening sessions. Whereas employees shared that the new Computer & Information Support Services (CISS) info blasts are helpful, they did not notice changes in leadership decision-making. Overall employees continue to

be concerned about the larger political landscape and the effect it will have on BTC. All themes from the spring 2025 sessions continue to be relevant to both students and employees based on the information received this year in the 2026 listening sessions. Below is a summary of the findings based on key themes.

Key Findings

Student Themes

Student Resources

In 2025 students shared that access to various resources was important to their success at BTC. The 2026 listening session asked students to rate the accessibility of these resources on campus a year later. Of those who needed to access financial aid, 83% shared that financial aid was somewhat to very easy to access. Of those who needed Basic Needs support, 79% indicated that these resources were somewhat to very accessible (44% of all respondents said they did not need the basic needs resources). Among students who needed hygiene products, 97% shared that they were somewhat to very easy to access (47% of all respondents did not need this resource). Of students who used tutoring services, 75% found that tutoring was somewhat to very easy to access (half of all respondents had not used tutoring services). All respondents found counseling somewhat to very easy to access or had not utilized these services. Overall, BTC resources are accessible to students who have needed to utilize them with only one student out of all respondents checking that one resource was very difficult to access.

Barriers to Academic Success

In the 2025 listening sessions, students identified a variety of challenges that made success difficult at BTC. This year students ranked the largest challenges to success as paying for school and living expenses. The second largest challenge for students was balancing work and school. Students also found affordable housing and access to affordable nutritious food as key barriers.

Student/Staff Interactions

When asked how helpful BTC employees are when students have questions or need support, all students (100%) said that employees were somewhat helpful, helpful, or very helpful.

Learning Environment

In the 2025 listening sessions, students identified several areas of support and services that helped in their learning at BTC. This year student participants said the most helpful for their learning was instructor support, Library services, course materials and information on Canvas, and lab time (e.g., computer labs, learning labs, and shops).

Children on Campus

As part of the assessment of work done by DEI committee in the 2025-26 academic year, students were asked about the child on campus policy and its use. Almost all the respondents had not used the policy but a few shared they thought it was a positive policy to have. The only respondent who had used the policy said that the experience had been good and welcoming.

Employee Themes

Positive Campus Community

The 2025 listening sessions showed that employees found positive campus community to be an important part of their work. In this year's listening sessions employees were asked if it was easy to connect and collaborate with other employees when they needed. 90% of respondents found connection and collaboration with other employees to be easy to very easy.

Work Environment

In 2025 employees shared a variety of areas of concern during listening sessions, and in 2026 they were asked to pick one to two areas that are most urgent for BTC to address. The most frequently selected concerns included burn out and workload, coverage for absences, expectations and norms (e.g. work/life balance, autonomy, availability outside work hours), and flexible and remote work options.

Tech Concerns

CISS has taken feedback from the 2025 listening sessions and implemented changes in their everyday work. The 2026 listening sessions asked three questions seeking to understand if the changes have been helpful. When asked about a recent helpdesk restructure that was meant to improve response and communication, 88% said it had improved with 11% saying it was the same. Additionally, 88% of employee respondents said that the new info blast was somewhat helpful to helpful. However, when it came to the updates to CISS procedures that are on the intranet, 74% of employees were unsure about the updates and several respondents shared that they did not know these were available and suggested CISS make employees more aware of the availability of these updates.

Leadership and Supervisory Level Decisions

In August 2025, the Decision-Making and Communication Guide for BTC Leadership was created for the President's Leadership Team to utilize. Employees were asked if decision-making transparency had changed at BTC since the guide was created. Of responding employees who have been at BTC for at least one year, 6% found decision-making to be more transparent now,

77% found transparency to be about the same — with over half noting that decision-making has been generally transparent and the remaining noting that it has generally not been transparent — and 15% were unsure.

Political Landscape and Funding Concerns

Last year employees shared some concerns about the larger political landscape and how it would affect funding at BTC. When asked about concerns with the political landscape and funding this year, almost all (94%) of employees were somewhat concerned to very concerned.

Children on Campus

As part of the assessment of work done by DEI committee in the 2025-26 academic year, employees were asked about the children on campus policy and its use. Only four employees shared that they had utilized the children on campus policy, and those that shared more information had a positive experience.

Next Steps

BTC is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and this value is upheld through the work of this campus climate listening session report. BTC is engaged in reducing institutional barriers and harm that students and employees are experiencing daily. Data collected from listening sessions will help support the continued work of DEI and the DEI Strategic Plan on BTC's campus.

The DEI Office and the DEI participatory governance committee will work to identify areas of focus for enhanced education, programming, and professional development. Additionally, the DEI Office and IPA will use the results of these listening sessions and this report to facilitate continued campus climate work in 2027.

For more information, please contact 하나 (Hannah) Simonetti, BTC Director of DEI, at hsimonetti@btc.edu with any questions about the listening sessions or this report.