



**COMMISSION  
AGENDA MEMORANDUM**

**Item No.** 11a

**BRIEFING ITEM**

**Date of Meeting** March 24, 2026

**DATE:** March 5, 2026

**TO:** Stephen P. Metruck, Executive Director

**FROM:** Derek Bender, Manager, Talent Connections  
Kim DesMarais, Director, Talent Management  
Katie Gerard, Senior Director, Human Resources

**SUBJECT: Port of Seattle Talent Connections Programs Update**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This briefing informs Commission of key internship program updates and impacts from 2025 and outlines a new pathway program opportunity that will launch in 2026.

In 2025:

1. We offered and hired 65 internship opportunities for college students in various degree programs ranging from Juris Doctor, Master's, Bachelor's, Associate, and certification programs.
2. We hired and welcomed 55 High School interns into our Winter and Summer program through the efforts of numerous community partnerships with local school districts and youth supporting organizations.
3. We continue to foster key community partnerships with near Port communities including school districts, regional university and college campuses, Tribal partnerships including the Muckleshoot and Suquamish Tribal schools, and community groups in the Duwamish Valley.
4. With our commitment to equity, our outreach efforts span from prioritizing youth facing barriers to employment and supporting those furthest from opportunity.
5. We saw tremendous gains in all measurable categories of youth development through our program metrics.
6. We celebrated the achievements of many interns who were successful in transitioning into regular and temporary Port roles, leveraging the skills and knowledge gained through their internship opportunities.
7. We look forward to the launch of our new pilot program, Port Pathways Program, that offers new opportunities to those who face barriers to higher education and often are structurally excluded from participating in traditional internship models that lead to wage gain and increased career mobility.

Meeting Date: March 24, 2026

## Program Updates

### ***Talent Connection Pathway Opportunities***

Our Talent Connections team provides four different programs that support entry into Port career pathways:

1. **High School Internship Program** – Designed to provide early career exposure and career connected learning for youth enrolled in high schools throughout King County.
2. **Post-Secondary Internship Program** – Designed to provide engaging and intentional professional development to college students, looking to leverage their academic learnings and apply them to practical experiences.
3. **Veteran Fellowship Program** – Designed to support recently transitioned service members with transferrable skill identification and civilian career exposure.
4. **Port Pathways Program** – New pilot program in 2026, offering internship experiences to those facing barriers to higher education and career mobility, addressing a gap in traditional internship offerings tied directly to academic experience.

Collectively, our combined programs offer 134 opportunities each year.

### ***High School Program***

The Port of Seattle’s High School Internship Program provides structured, early-career exposure and career-connected learning opportunities for high school students throughout King County. Through strong partnerships with local school districts, tribal schools, and youth-serving community organizations, the program creates equitable pathways for students to explore Port careers and develop foundational workforce skills.

Consistent with the Port’s commitment to advancing equity and expanding access to economic opportunity, outreach efforts intentionally prioritize students who face systemic barriers to employment or who are furthest from opportunity and communities in low and very low equity communities.

In 2025, the Port hired and supported 55 high school interns across the Winter and Summer sessions, reflecting both strong community engagement and the effectiveness of targeted recruitment strategies.

Program outcomes in 2025 demonstrated significant gains across key youth-development metrics, and several former interns successfully transitioned into additional Port roles, underscoring the program’s role in building long-term career pathways. As a critical component of the Talent Connections portfolio, the High School Internship Program strengthens the region’s talent pipeline while advancing the Port’s strategic priority of fostering inclusive, community-centered workforce development.

Meeting Date: March 24, 2026

***Post-Secondary Program***

The Port of Seattle's Post-Secondary Internship Program provides career focused, professional development experiences for college students pursuing a range of academic pathways, including certificate, associate, bachelor's, master's, and juris doctor programs. The program is designed to help students apply their academic learning to practical, real-world contexts while gaining career exposure across Port divisions and operational environments.

In 2025, the Port offered and hired 65 post-secondary internship opportunities, reflecting its continued commitment to building a strong regional talent pipeline. Interns benefited from intentional development programming that supports skill-building, career exploration, and professional readiness. These experiences prepare students for high-demand careers while strengthening future workforce capacity for the Port and its industry partners.

The program has demonstrated meaningful impact, with many former interns transitioning into full-time Port roles by leveraging the skills, relationships, and applied knowledge acquired during their internship assignments. As part of the broader Talent Connections strategy, the Post-Secondary Internship Program supports the Port's long-term workforce development priorities and helps advance equitable access to high-quality career pathways for students across the region.

***Outreach***

In 2025 and through the first quarter of 2026, Talent Connections strengthened and expanded its community-centered outreach strategy to ensure equitable access to Port of Seattle career pathway opportunities. Through intentional engagement with nearly 70 community partners, Talent Connections advanced its commitment to supporting youth furthest from opportunity.

Throughout the year, staff participated in more than 60 youth-focused outreach events across King County, providing career awareness, direct engagement, and early exposure to Port industries. In addition, staff hosted 23 dedicated information sessions and facility tours, offering students, educators, and community partners deeper insight into Port careers, operations, and internship pathways.

These combined outreach efforts have reinforced the Port's regional presence as an accessible, community-aligned workforce development leader. They continue to build trust, expand career-connected learning opportunities, and deepen relationships with partners who play a critical role in connecting young people to meaningful career pathways at the Port.

Meeting Date: March 24, 2026

***Port Pathway Program***

The Port Pathway Program is a new pilot launching in 2026 that expands the Port of Seattle’s commitment to equitable workforce development by creating internship opportunities for individuals who face significant barriers to higher education and traditional career-entry models. This program is designed to address a longstanding gap in conventional internship structures, which often require academic enrollment and can unintentionally exclude communities historically underrepresented in pathways to living-wage careers.

Through Port Pathways, participants gain exposure to Port careers, develop transferable workplace skills, bolster skills gained through alternative routes, and engage in structured professional development activities tailored to their needs. By removing academic-experience requirements, the program broadens access to Port opportunities and helps build career mobility for participants who have historically lacked access to similar career-connected learning.

As part of the broader Talent Connections suite of programs, Port Pathways strengthens the Port’s career ecosystem by intentionally serving those furthest from opportunity. This pilot will support the Port’s strategic goals of expanding equitable economic access, diversifying the regional talent pipeline, and creating more inclusive pathways into Port careers.

**ATTACHMENTS TO THIS BRIEFING**

- (1) Presentation slides

**PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS OR BRIEFINGS**

April 12, 2022 – The Commission was briefed on Youth Internship Programs

June 23, 2020 – The Commission authorized Workforce Development Policy Directive, Resolution No. 3776

February 11, 2020– The Commission was briefed on Youth Internship Programs

November 27, 2018 – The Commission was briefed on Youth Internship Programs

May 9, 2017 – The Commission was briefed on Workforce Development Updates