

MARITIME ADMINISTRATION
U.S. Department of Transportation

Center of Excellence (CoE) for Domestic Workforce Training and Education

Washington State Ferries – Seattle, Washington

The Secretary of Transportation designates the Washington State Ferries (WSF) as a 2026 Center of Excellence for its integrated recruitment pipelines and operationally embedded training architecture within the Pacific Northwest. Operating under the Washington State Department of Transportation, WSF runs the Nation's largest public ferry system, linking regulatory safety to daily fleet execution across the Puget Sound. This structure secures regional supply chain reliability while reinforcing national mariner crewing reserves.

Operational Footprint & Assets

WSF integrates Federal training credentials into the daily operations of its 21-vessel active fleet.

- **Autonomous U.S. Coast Guard Approvals:** Holds independent National Maritime Center authority to deliver and test core regulatory certifications, including Basic Firefighting and Personal Safety and Social Responsibilities.
- **Embedded Pathways:** Manages 12 career tracks with onboarding for up to 360 hours covering bridge resource management and pilotage.
- **Safety Infrastructure:** Uses its FAST manual and on-the-job logs to validate mariner competency and safety compliance.
- **Multi-Site Facilities:** Utilizes distributed classrooms footprint (Alki/Shilshole) and regional fire fields to handle high-volume training cohorts.

Workforce & Regional Impact

Acts as a direct-hire engine, fully compensating mariners throughout their training lifecycle.

- **High-Volume Intake:** Onboarded and deployed 324 Ordinary Seamen, 140 Wipers/Oilers, and 345 Terminal Attendants into the regional transit network since 2022.
- **Retention & Completion:** Sustains a 93 percent overall workforce retention rate (up from a 49 percent deck historical baseline in 2024) backed by a 98.9 percent training completion index.
- **Cross-Sector Pipeline Alliances:** Partners with K-12 programs (Maritime High School, Sno-Isle TECH, Core Plus Maritime) and commercial vendors for officer upgrades.

Strategic Outlook

WSF is updating its engineering curriculum to support incoming vessel and terminal electrification programs for hybrid diesel-electric configurations. In times of national need, the institution functions as a vital capacity anchor. By utilizing an agile, rotational instructor model and remote module access, WSF can expand critical training pathways and surge basic safety output within 30 days to secure continuity of civil transportation under peak emergency demands.