

Governor's Council on Workforce Investment

Aligning Wisconsin's Workforce Needs with Its Economic Development Goals and Strategies



2026 - 2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

June 10, 2026

Governor Tony Evers
Wisconsin State Capitol
115 East Capitol Drive #1
Madison, WI 53702

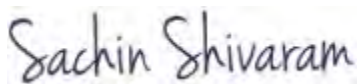
Dear Governor Evers,

On behalf of the Governor's Council on Workforce Investment (CWI), it is our honor to submit the 2026-2030 CWI Strategic Plan for your review. Through 2023 Wisconsin Executive Order #182, you tasked the CWI with aligning Wisconsin's workforce needs with its economic development goals and strategies. This council exists to help Wisconsin employers find the skilled talent that they need while providing resources, training, and reskilling for workers to access in-demand careers necessary to obtain family-supporting jobs and help move Wisconsin's economy forward.

Since the CWI developed our last strategic plan four years ago, your administration has invested over \$168 million into innovative solutions to address the state's workforce needs through the Workforce Solutions Initiative. These investments are paying off, with over 127,000 Wisconsinites served by these programs, and nearly 3,000 businesses benefiting from the Workforce Solutions Initiative. Wisconsin continues to have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country and in 2024 saw record high employment, including record high disability employment. Your investment ensured businesses and community leaders across the state could tackle specific regional workforce barriers like child care, transportation, or in-demand skills training.

With your support, the CWI will implement the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan to build on the success of the last four years and continue to advance Wisconsin's workforce. The key priorities outline workforce development strategies that are data-driven and reflect employer demands. The strategic plan will be a living document that will continue to shape Wisconsin's workforce policies and CWI members will serve as ambassadors of the work ahead.

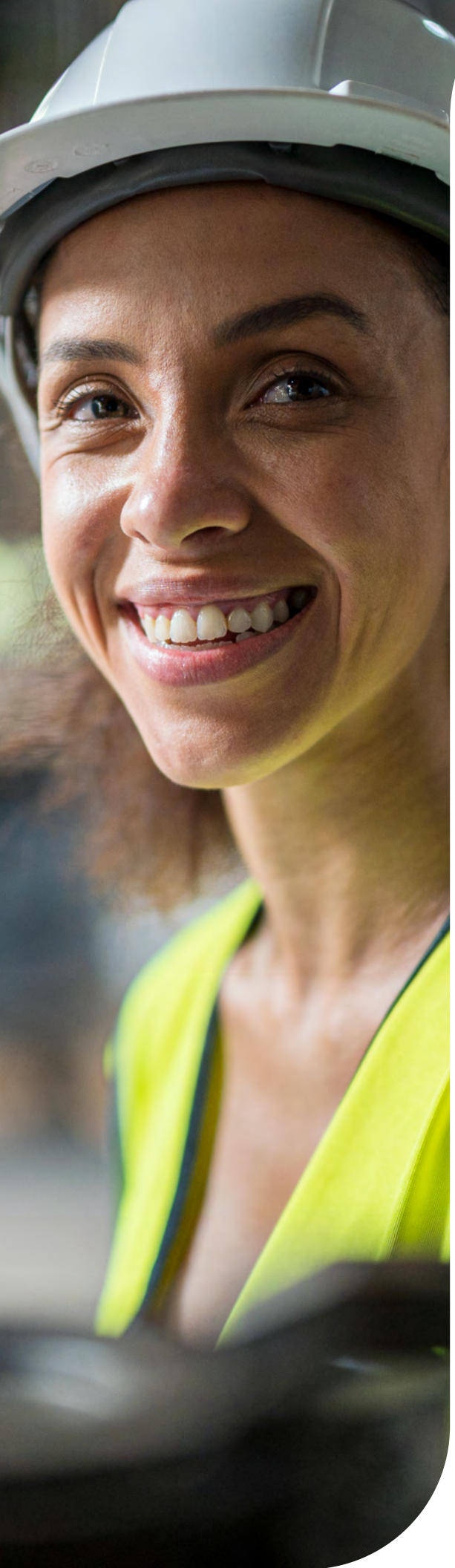
Kind Regards,



Sachin Shivaram, Chair
Governor's Council on Workforce Investment



Amy Pechacek, Secretary
Department of Workforce Development



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GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

CWI is Wisconsin's federally mandated state workforce board under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) that helps the governor to develop innovative and dynamic approaches for Wisconsin's workforce. The CWI is tasked with aligning Wisconsin's workforce, talent development initiatives, and investments with its economic development strategies. In assisting the governor and legislature carry out their federally mandated responsibilities, the council helps Wisconsin employers find the workers they need and provides resources enabling workers to access training for in-demand careers. The CWI was most recently reconstituted in its current form through 2023 Wisconsin Executive Order #182.ⁱ

The council is administered by the Department of Workforce Development (DWD). DWD program and policy staff provide CWI members and partners overall support and advise on policy and how to carry out their mandated responsibilities. DWD team members also offer guidance on developing strategic policy to support aligned and effective service delivery.

Due to the state's large geographic area and diverse economy, achieving a strong workforce vision for Wisconsin requires collaboration between state agencies, educational institutions, workforce organizations, and economic development partners to strengthen the talent pipeline and support private-sector employers across all regions of the state.

MEMBERSHIP

Led by private sector business representatives from across the state, who make up a majority of the council's membership, the CWI also includes organized labor; leaders from state agencies responsible for post-secondary education, career and technical education, workforce development, and economic development; and community organizations. Members take a central role in setting the vision for the state, model and manage strategic partnerships, and use data and other tools to keep the system accountable.

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON WORKFORCE INVESTMENT 2026 Leadership

Sachin Shivaram
Chair, CWI
CEO
Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry

Jake Gorges
Chair, Workforce Committee
Executive Director
Wisconsin Literacy Inc.

Amy Pechacek
Executive Director, CWI
Secretary
Department of Workforce Development

Brent Smith
Chair, Education Committee
Attorney
Johns, Flaherty & Collins, SC

Ann Franz
Vice Chair, CWI
Chair, Employer Committee
Executive Director
NEW Manufacturing Alliance



Council Members

(as of June 1, 2026)ⁱⁱ

Tony Evers

Governor
State of Wisconsin

Masood Akhtar

President & Founder
CleanTech Partners, Inc.

Christopher Conard

President
PMI, Inc.

Meredith Dressel

Administrator, Division of
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Shah Haqqi

President/CEO
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Andre Jacque

Senator, Senate District 1
Wisconsin State Legislature

Seth Lentz (ex-officio)

Executive Director
Workforce Development Board of
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Melissa Meschke

Executive Director
St. Croix Economic Development Corp.

Blake Moret

Chairman & CEO
Rockwell Automation

Pravin Raikar

President
Lockstep Solutions LLC

Nora Roughen-Schmidt

Business Consultant
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Michelle Tressler

Co-Founder and Chief Strategy Officer
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Jamie Wall

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Jan Allman

Vice President and General Manager
Fincantieri Bay Shipbuilding

Becky Bartoszek

President/CEO
Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce

David Crowley

County Executive
Milwaukee County

Dr. Eric Fulcomer

President
WI Assoc. of Independent Colleges & Universities

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Ashland Area Development Corporation

Nick Kapsa

VP HR, Food & Consumer Packaging
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Organizer & Business Agent
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Secretary/Chief Executive Officer
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Olivia Otte

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Green County Development Corporation

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Clinical Practice
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Business Representative
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Mark Kessenich

CEO
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Layla Merrifield

President
Wisconsin Technical College System

Thomas Miller

President
Aurora BayCare Medical Center

Jeff Pertl

Secretary
Department of Children and Families

Sara Rogers

Chair
WI Technical College System Board

Shelia Stubbs

Representative, Assembly District 78
Wisconsin State Legislature

Dr. Jill Underly

State Superintendent
Department of Public Instruction

Corey Zetts

Executive Director
Menomonee Valley Partners

BACKGROUND

The CWI advises the governor on innovative strategies to build a dynamic workforce. The council helps employers connect with skilled talent, promotes in-demand career pathways that lead to family-sustaining jobs, and expands access to training for workers learning or advancing their skills through reskilling and upskilling.

In collaboration with state agencies and other partners, the council shapes a statewide workforce development strategy that:

- Anticipates employer labor needs, growing Wisconsin's talent pipeline
- Builds a highly skilled labor force
- Empowers individuals to pursue and retain well-paying careers

As Wisconsin's state workforce board required by WIOA, the CWI has several critical strategic functions to support aligned and effective service delivery and serves to build system capacity. These responsibilities include:

1. Developing, implementing, and modifying a four-year state plan
2. Reviewing statewide policies, programs, and recommendations for comprehensive and streamlined delivery of services
3. Supporting the development and continuous improvement of the workforce system
4. Developing and updating state performance and accountability measures
5. Identifying and disseminating information on best practices
6. Developing and reviewing policies and guidance on one-stop partner roles and resource contributions
7. Developing strategies to improve technology improvements supporting access and quality of service
8. Developing strategies to align technology and data systems
9. Developing local area formula funding allocations
10. Other requirements and responsibilities

The council began work in early 2025 to develop a new four-year strategic plan. They held an all-day strategic planning session focused on understanding the current state of the economy and conditions of Wisconsin's labor market, and reviewing lessons learned and best practices to build on and advance the council's work.

The Executive Committee has maintained four standing committees and tasked each committee to identify one north star metric that will best allow the council to track progress and to build on past success to drive the workforce system to evolve and meet the current needs of both Wisconsin workers and employers.

STANDING COMMITTEES



Education

By the end of WIOA Program Year 2029, increase the number of counties in Wisconsin where 60% of working-age adults living in that county have an industry-recognized credential.



Employers

By the end of WIOA Program Year 2029, achieve a 10% increase in the number of businesses served by the workforce system through the development and implementation of a coordinated industry engagement strategy across the state.



Workforce

Sustain Wisconsin's economic resilience by maintaining the employment-to-population ratio of adults aged 25-54 of at least 80% through program year 2029, mitigating the projected decline in the overall ratio by reducing structural barriers to the workforce.



Governance & Resource Alignment

Achieve passing WIOA performance each program year.

STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Wisconsin reflects broader national trends of a cooling labor market. According to the Current Employment Statistics (CES) program, the state reported a total of 3,045,700 non-farm jobs in November of 2025. Outside of the two most recent recessions, 2025 saw Wisconsin's lowest pace of average monthly job growth since 2003. Data from the Job Openings and Labor Turnover (JOLTS) survey indicates a general slow-down in openings and hirings across the state. The JOLTS three-month moving average shows job openings declining from a peak of roughly 240,000-250,000 in late 2022 to about 130,000-140,000 in late 2025. Over that same period, hiring declined at a more modest rate, from about 115,000 in late 2022 to 90,000-100,000 in late 2025. Despite a cooling labor market, unemployment in Wisconsin hovered around 3% throughout the duration of 2025, lower than the national average.

Additionally, year-over-year wage growth in real average hourly earnings throughout the state flattened in 2025, after strong growth throughout much of 2023 and 2024. January 2025 marked the end of 19 consecutive months of wage gains outpacing inflation, according to data from the Wisconsin CES. Growth in the Midwest consumer price index stood at just 2.7% in December of 2025 despite Federal Reserve policymakers cutting their benchmark rate three times in a latter part of the year, to a level of 3.5 to 3.75%. The Federal Reserve has signaled that it is likely to hold rates at current levels throughout the first half of 2026 as it assesses the impact of these cuts on the health of the labor market and price growth.

As of March 2026, Wisconsin's labor force participation rate of 64.4% remains higher than the national rate of 61.9%. However, the state still faces labor quantity challenges. Data from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services show state birth rates continuing to decline, dropping to 10 live births per 1,000 population in 2024, below that of the U.S. average. Aside from natural changes, research from the Wisconsin Policy Forum shows that net migration rose in recent years. Since July 2021, the state saw a total population increase of 81,605 residents from net migration – three-fourths from international migration. This surpassed the total amount of net migration between 2004-2021. Wisconsin ranked second among 12 Midwest states in per capita rates of net migration between 2021-2024.

National policy shifts continue to cloud the state's economic outlook. The Trump administration's tariff actions on countries such as Canada, China, and Mexico are estimated to impact about half of the state's imports and exports. Other actions from the administration, such as changes in immigration policy, have resulted in a dramatic slowdown in net migration to the U.S. The Brookings Institute estimates net migration between -295,000 and -10,000 in 2025, and projects this to remain negative in 2026.

LABOR FORCE AND EMPLOYMENT

Wisconsin's labor force and employment increased through 2023 and 2024 (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS)). Average monthly gains in labor force and

Wisconsin's Workforce:

RE-ENTRY POPULATION

As of May 2026, the Department of Corrections (DOC) has just over 23,000 people in custody. This population averages 41 years of age. Of them, 65% currently have less than five years of prison time remaining, and 75% have an education at the high school level or below. Wisconsin currently has 17 institution-based job labs and two community-based job labs allowing participants to apply for jobs, conduct phone and virtual interviews and schedule in-person interviews for when they are released from the institution. One year after release, 76.3% of job lab participants were employed. DOC also partners with the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) to offer training academies that occur on WTCS campuses or within the DOC facility using mobile classrooms. In addition, DOC partners with the 11 Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) to provide Windows to Work, a pre-release program made up of five core components:

- Cognitive Intervention
- General Work Skills and Expectations
- Financial Literacy
- Community Resources
- Job Seeking, Applications, and Resumes



employment in 2023 were 4,200 and 3,300, respectively. Growth rates slowed in 2024, with average monthly gains of 1,800 (labor force) and 1,200 (employment). Both labor force and employment experienced declines in 2025 (Figure 1). Strengthening the workforce requires continued targeted initiatives to remove employment barriers, connect employers with underutilized talent pools, expand access to in-demand training, and promote workforce participation.

According to 2025 Current Population Survey data (11-month average, no October 2025), 1.73 million or 35.7% of the Wisconsin civilian, non-institutionalized population aged 16 and over did not participate in the labor market. The large majority of this population (94.6%) indicated that they did not want a job, though barriers may exist that, if addressed, could decrease the “non want a job” share. Those not participating in the labor force includes:

- 206,200 residents between the ages of 16 and 24 (many of who are full-time students)
- 293,700 residents between the ages of 25 and 54
- 1,232,700 residents aged 55 and over

EDUCATION AND SKILL LEVELS OF THE WORKFORCE

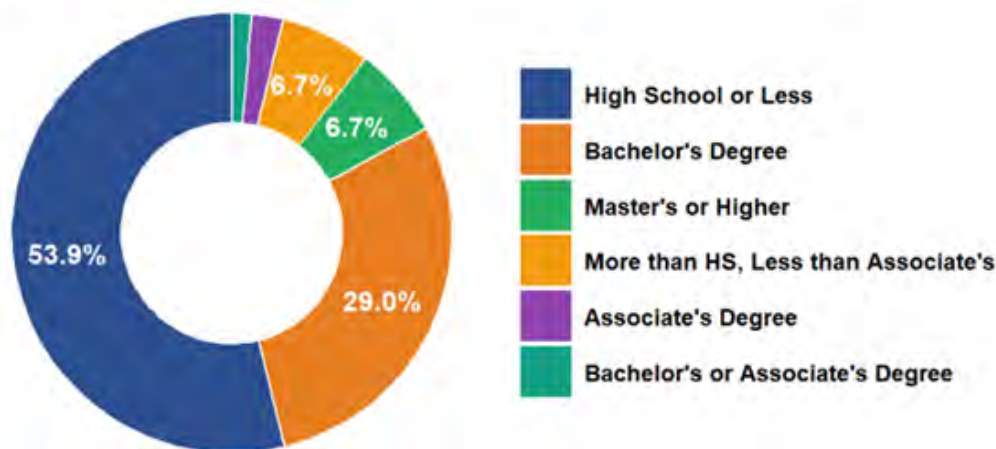
To fill open jobs in the state, worker skills must align with the in-demand skills of Wisconsin’s employers. It is crucial to train the current and future workforce as baby boomers to retire and leave the labor market. Figure 2 shows the composition of projected annual growth in openings by education needed for entry. The apparent ‘skills gaps’ is a two-part challenge for the state. First, Wisconsin is facing a worker quantity challenge. Second, the worker quantity challenge foretells the ‘skills gap’ challenge – without enough workers, all industries and occupations will have too few appropriately skilled job candidates.

Figure 1: Wisconsin’s Labor Force and Employment (seasonally adjusted)



Source: Office of Economic Advisors, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

Figure 2: Education Needed for Entry: Annual Growth Openings 2022-2032 – Percent of Total



Source: Office of Economic Advisors, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

ADDITIONAL FACTORS IMPACTING THE WORKFORCE

In addition to the analysis of the state's economic conditions and labor market trends, the council discussed two additional issues that have impacted and will continue to effect Wisconsin's workforce in the foreseeable future – insufficient access to child care and the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the workplace.

Wisconsin is facing a child care crisis. Providers operate on razor thin margins, the industry is labor-intensive, and child care requires a high level of staffing to ensure children are safe, healthy, and in a developmentally appropriate environment. High turnover and staffing shortages leave classrooms empty. Led by the Department of Children & Families (DCF), Wisconsin has taken these steps to ensure all families have access to quality, affordable care: ⁱⁱⁱ

- Supported child care providers serving four-year-olds through Get Kids Ready, Wisconsin's first-ever child care program funded solely by general purpose revenue.
- Created Large Family Child Care, allowing family child care providers to increase the number of children they serve from eight to a maximum of 12 with sufficient staff and space.
- Made more families eligible for the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy by raising the initial eligibility threshold.
- Simplified Wisconsin Shares by changing the rate structure, covering registration fees, and shrinking the benefit cliff for families.

DWD has also taken steps to address workforce challenges in the child care sector. Access to high-quality, affordable child care is necessary for many parents to go to work. As part of the Workforce Solutions Initiative, a number of grantees were awarded funding to address child care challenges in their local community. These projects led to the construction of five child care facilities, the creation of 195 child care slots, and the distribution of over 200 Early Childhood Educator scholarships. Additionally, DWD's Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards expanded the Early Childhood Educator apprenticeship pathway. The pilot program was developed with 10 technical colleges, has 29 active employer sponsors, and 14 completions since 2020. A three-year grant will allow the program to advance by providing tuition reimbursement, entrepreneurship support for startups, and mentor support and training. These investments will have a long-term impact that will only grow as more students complete educational programs and join the workforce in the years to come.

Another workforce impact the CWI discussed was the rapid adoption and implementation of AI in the workplace. AI is profoundly shaping the nature of work, altering the skills workers need for success, changing the competitive landscape for employers, and forcing educational and workforce development systems to overhaul their offerings to sustain a thriving Wisconsin economy. Gov. Tony Evers signed Executive Order #211, creating the Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence. Led by DWD and in coordination with the Department of Administration (DOA) and Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), the task force met six times over 10 months, bringing together private and public sector leaders to identify policies and investments that will continue to advance Wisconsin workers, employers, and job seekers through this technological transformation. As noted in the task force's AI Advisory Action Plan, AI adoption will have broad impacts on Wisconsin's labor market. Specifically, the report emphasizes that AI will create demand for new skills in data analytics, human-AI collaboration, cybersecurity, and digital systems integration. These shifts risk exacerbating workforce shortages if training systems are not rapidly modernized.

Employers use AI for data analytics, customer service, and marketing, among many other applications. DWD was awarded \$7.3 million in Industry-Driven Skills Training Fund grants from the U.S. Department of Labor that will focus on the emerging fields of advanced manufacturing and AI, building on the success of Gov. Tony Evers' Workforce Solutions Initiative and aligned with recommendations of the task force. DWD is also exploring the impact of AI on Wisconsin's 'Hot Jobs,' specifically on jobs held within key business sectors prevalent throughout the state. These informed predictions will ensure the state responds quickly to any changes and ensure Wisconsinites have the essential skills needed for this technological transition.

Wisconsin's Workforce:

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) actively supports individuals with disabilities to help them get a job, keep a job, or get a better job. There are 759,018 individuals in the civilian, non-institutionalized population in Wisconsin that self-identify as having a significant disability, according to the 2024 American Community Survey. Slightly under half (369,760) are of working age, defined as between the ages of 18 and 64. This constitutes 10.5% of the state's total working age population. Of this number, 119,742 individuals are employed and an additional 16,426 reported being unemployed. This results in a 7.9% unemployment rate within this group, a rate that is over double the overall unemployment rate for those age 18 to 64.

RECOMMENDED GOALS

The CWI is pleased to recommend the following goals, which seek to strengthen alignment and resources to ensure all Wisconsin job seekers and businesses have the tools to thrive and grow. Each standing committee has identified one primary goal for their focus area and will provide annual updates to the governor. The following section provides background on each goal, key partners, and relevant baseline data when available. The WIOA Combined State Plan core programs and partner programs are coordinated through the following state agencies: Department of Workforce Development (DWD), Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), Department of Children and Families (DCF), and the Department of Health Services (DHS). These goals provide a vision for Wisconsin's workforce and education systems and are responsive to the current and anticipated economic needs of the state. It is important to note that these goals are not all inclusive of the meaningful work that is happening across the state.



FOCUS AREA #1: EDUCATION

Goal: By the end of WIOA Program Year 2029, increase the number of counties in Wisconsin where 60% of working-age adults living in that county have an industry-recognized credential.

Background: Education, from K-12 and beyond, plays a critical role in ensuring Wisconsinites can find good jobs, earn family sustaining wages, and strengthen their community. In the past four years Wisconsin has made significant progress in ensuring individuals have equal access to educational programs. Across the nation, rising costs of tuition, uncertainty about job opportunities, and the influence of AI have caused people to question the value of traditional degrees and credentials. Wisconsin must ensure students have access to education and training that delivers meaningful outcomes including higher wages and career advancement. The state must also implement strategies that ensure equal access to these opportunities for everyone and are responsive to current needs, including support for students with family responsibilities, addressing mental health challenges, providing financial assistance for education and training, and ensuring programs provide value to both students and communities. Industry-recognized credentials are portable and not tied to a single employer, are sought or required by employers for recruiting and hiring, and prove an individual has the knowledge and skills needed for a job, which are verified through a skills assessment. They can include professional licenses, apprentice journeyworker cards, degrees, and industry-specific certifications.

Non-degree credentials (NDCs) are a relatively new, quickly growing part of the postsecondary education landscape. They are credentials that do not result in a specific degree, can vary in program length, credits earned, and postsecondary provider. They can include apprenticeships, bootcamps, certificates, digital badges, industry certifications, micro-credentials, and technical diplomas. While many institutions across Wisconsin offer NDCs, the landscape is fragmented with no central registry, no standardized measure of quality, and limited data. Cataloging credentials in a registry makes it easier for learners and jobseekers to understand, compare, and choose an NDC, for the state to measure quality, to collect data, and for employers and educational institutions to understand the landscape.

Baseline Data: In 2024, 59.2% of Wisconsin adults aged 25-64 had an industry-recognized credential (including short-term credentials), 49.7% had an associate degree or higher and 9.5% had a short-term credential. However, only three of Wisconsin's 72 counties have reached the 60% threshold, showing discrepancies in progress and access across the state.

Responsible Partners: WIOA Combined State Plan partners, Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Universities of Wisconsin (UW), Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU).

Wisconsin's Workforce: VETERANS

Providing workforce development services to Wisconsin's veteran population is a recognized priority to support their participation in the labor force. DWD's Office of Veteran Employment Services conducts outreach in local communities to engage veterans and employers. According to 2024 American Community Service data, there are 272,410 military veterans in Wisconsin. More than a third, 38%, of veterans are between the ages 35 and 64. There are 122,747 veterans of working age (between 18 and 64) in Wisconsin, representing another vital potential workforce resource. The unemployment rate of the state's age 18 to 64 veteran population is slightly lower than that of the overall population (2.8% compared to 3%), though the labor force participation rate is about three points lower.

To achieve this goal, the Education Committee has put forth three objectives.

Objective 1a: Strengthen alignment between educational institutions, training programs, and industry to ensure education and training outcomes match employer needs, help individuals earn higher wages and build meaningful careers, and teach both job-specific skills and necessary soft skills that will prepare Wisconsinites for the future. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ **Support effective Academic and Career Planning and Career and Technical Education** implementation in every school district to equip students and their families with the tools necessary to make informed choices about postsecondary education, training, and careers for life after high school. Increase work-based learning participation, industry recognized credential attainment, advanced course and dual enrollment, and career and technical education concentrators.
- ▶ **Grow effective career pathways** that begin in high school and lead youth and adults to high-demand, high-growth careers including pathways like certified pre-apprenticeship and youth apprenticeship, other forms of work-based learning, and registered apprenticeship. Strengthen connections between youth and registered apprenticeship and support bridging between programs.
- ▶ Engage with DPI in establishing a statewide **‘Portrait of a Graduate’** initiative that aligns education and workforce priorities by defining a shared vision for the knowledge, skills, and mindsets students need for success after high school. This effort will identify and prioritize the durable skills most valued by employers and examine policies or misconceptions that may create barriers to employment, ensuring stronger connections between K-12 education, postsecondary pathways, and workforce needs.
- ▶ **Promote Integrated Education and Training** to Wisconsin job seekers, increasing opportunities for eligible populations. Increase the number of technical skills attainment assessments completed and credits awarded for relevant education experience or training.

Objective 1b: Enhance Wisconsin’s training ecosystem to grow effective pathways, improve outcome reporting, increase equitable access, and increase the availability of a skilled workforce. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Establish a comprehensive framework for **non-degree credentials** in Wisconsin that integrates apprenticeship pathways with a broader ecosystem, ensuring all learners can earn high-demand, employer recognized skills. Apply quality standards and improve data collection and reporting on all credentials to support informed decision making that accelerates workforce readiness and career mobility.
- ▶ Implement **Workforce Pell** in Wisconsin which will expand federal Pell grant eligibility to short-term training programs that lead to high-wage, high-skill or in-demand industries.
- ▶ **Support non-tuition supportive services** (e.g., transportation, child care, nutrition assistance, housing) to encourage participation, close enrollment gaps, and increase completion rates.
- ▶ **Increase transparency** of all program outcomes including credential attainment rates, employment outcomes, and wages to promote consumer informed choice.

Objective 1c: Increase awareness and knowledge of high-demand industries, required skills, and career pathways targeting students, parents, teachers, workforce professionals, and working-age adults. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Enhance and promote **effective career exploration tools** to increase job seeker awareness of local opportunities including effective career pathways. Explore building a community of practice across WIOA partners.
- ▶ Enhance and promote **effective Career Navigation and service delivery** to increase job seeker awareness of local opportunities including effective career pathways. Explore building a community of practice across WIOA partners.
- ▶ Analyze enrollment patterns by student population and geographic location and identify opportunities to **increase access** across programs. Increase awareness of WIOA services across targeted populations. Identify and promote best practices.
- ▶ Enhance the **customer satisfaction** survey process to analyze results and develop continuous improvement plans to improve high impact issues.



FOCUS AREA #2: EMPLOYER

Goal: By the end of WIOA Program Year 2029, achieve a 10% increase in the number of businesses served by the workforce system through the development and implementation of a coordinated industry engagement strategy across the state.

Background: Wisconsin is home to many vibrant industry sectors, and it is critical for workforce development programs to engage with employers to fill their skilled labor needs. Building knowledge of industries and occupations, helping participants gain appropriate skills and experience, establishing credibility and access to employer networks, and generating resources for the organization continue to be a top priority. DWD's Bureau of Workforce Information and Technical Support Office of Economic Advisors published new County Profiles in May 2025 to build knowledge and support the alignment of training and in-demand occupations. The information provided in the reports supports local and regional workforce development initiatives. In addition to County Profiles, the bureau produces Employment Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Hot Jobs, and 10-Year Industry and Occupational Projections. This information is available for employers and workforce development professionals as they make informed decisions to grow their business and anticipate workforce needs.

Wisconsin's business services teams (BSTs) coordinate activities and resources to provide comprehensive, high-quality, customer-centered services to employers. Teams provide services that include, but are not limited to, recruitment, human resources consultation, workforce incentive information and resources, training programs, tailored labor market information, and access to a deep labor pool. BSTs use a shared platform as a system of record for all business services reporting and business customer management. Information entered and tracked informs and guides services focused on employer's specific needs. In addition, skills matching functions provide great benefit to employers searching for candidates. DWD's Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards also works closely with employer sponsors to develop effective youth and registered apprenticeship career pathways to strategically develop programs to meet projected workforce demand in Wisconsin.

Baseline Data: In 2025, 12,404 businesses received services from a business service consultant. 3,103 employers sponsored a registered apprenticeship, and 7,475 employers sponsored a youth apprenticeship.

Responsible Partners: WIOA Combined State Plan partners, UW, WEDC, and DHS

To achieve this goal, the Education Committee has put forth three objectives.

Objective 2a: Build on lessons learned and develop a coordinated employer engagement strategy to implement throughout the state and across industries to increase awareness of workforce programs and resources. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Develop an **employer engagement framework** for Wisconsin and identify consistent performance metrics to measure success across programs and regions. Develop strategies to engage employers not typically connected to the workforce system.
- ▶ Conduct a **Business Climate Survey** every two years to measure awareness and utilization of the workforce development system. Incorporate occupational surveys that occur around the state and engage key stakeholders to solicit ongoing feedback and develop action plans as necessary.
- ▶ Develop **employer resource guides** that define the business case for workforce programs and resources including cost savings, innovation, and retention. Include stories from peer companies and host workshops for further information sharing.
- ▶ Promote **entrepreneurship** in Wisconsin by making it easier to navigate the process of starting and growing a business and teaching entrepreneurial skills in K-12 and higher education and workforce pathways. Report and track the progress of startup activity, jobs created by startups, and the impact of new enterprises.

Objective 2b: Promote employer-driven workforce programming through industry partnerships and feedback loops. Partner across agencies and programs to coordinate efforts to meet employer needs. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Promote and **expand effective workforce development programs** by expanding into emerging or in-demand industries, increasing the number of small businesses utilizing these programs, and increasing implementation in workforce development areas with lower use rates.

- ▶ Promote and **expand career exploration opportunities** by increasing the number of employers offering work-based learning, career exploration, and internships. Identify opportunities for employers to engage with education, training, and workforce programs to build community networks and strengthen talent pipelines.
- ▶ Promote and **expand industry-validated education and customized training** available to job seekers. Advocate for increased funding to grow the number of programs and promote customized training to meet employer needs.

Objective 2c: Successfully implement statewide, industry-specific, employer-led training grants. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Implement the **Wisconsin Training for Resilient Advanced Industry Needs (WisTRAIN)** initiative to close critical workforce gaps in high-growth industries. Deliver employer-driven, occupational skills training with a focus on advanced manufacturing and generative AI.



WisTRAIN

Employer-Led Training Grant

- ▶ Support the Department of Health Services (DHS) [Rural Health Transformation Program](#) by empowering communities to develop regionally driven solutions through competitive grants. Build on lessons learned from the Workforce Innovation Grants to promote local solutions to workforce challenges.
- ▶ Implement demand-driven **Workforce Pell** grant program by identifying program eligibility, data collection, and outcome transparency. Align programs with the state's Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and grow the list of eligible programs.





FOCUS AREA #3: WORKFORCE

Goal: Sustain Wisconsin's economic resilience by maintaining the employment-to-population ratio of adults aged 25-54 of at least 80% through program year 2029, mitigating the projected decline in the overall ratio by reducing structural barriers to the workforce.

Background: Wisconsin faces an ongoing workforce quantity challenge as baby boomers retire and leave the workforce and there aren't enough skilled workers to take their place. Every industry, region, and occupation shares the common challenge of finding qualified workers to fill open roles. The state must engage every available Wisconsinite of working age and support them in overcoming barriers and accessing training to meet employer needs. According to 2025 Current Population Survey data (11-month average, no October 2025), 293,700 non-institutionalized residents between the ages of 25 and 54 did not participate in the labor market. Additionally, there were 106,300 unemployed people in Wisconsin. Out of that total, 39,300 people were unemployed less than five weeks, 30,700 people were unemployed between five and 14 weeks, 19,100 people were unemployed between 15 and 26 weeks, and 17,200 people were unemployed 27 weeks or more. Wisconsin maintains a relatively low unemployment rate, suggesting that most people who enter the labor force successfully find jobs. Targeting initiatives to remove employment barriers, connect employers with underutilized talent pools, and expand access to in-demand training may help reach those who have not been successful in finding and maintaining employment.

Several groups within this larger population, including individuals with disabilities, veterans, individuals who are justice-involved, and individuals who are low-income, face more significant barriers to employment and require special services, such as those provided under WIOA. A process evaluation of the Worker Connection Program conducted in December 2024 found that building a strong network of community partners increased the enrollment number of individuals with significant barriers to employment, and individualized career navigation resulted in high participant engagement, increased employment rates, increased employment stability, and higher earnings. Another study evaluated the return on investment of the WIOA Title I-B Adult Program in Wisconsin. Participants experienced statistically significant wage increases compared to both the comparison group and projected inflation. Further analysis indicated that the combined effect of support, career, and training services was consistently associated with wage growth. The analysis found that this wage growth was higher than program costs, suggesting that the WIOA Title I-B Adult Program in Wisconsin is effectively helping individuals, including those with significant barriers to employment, work towards economic self-sufficiency. Wisconsin can continue to see a high return on investment and high employment rates by building on these evidence-based practices and developing communities of practice.

Baseline Data: At the end of December 2025, Wisconsin's employment-to-population ratio of adults aged 25-54 was 80%.

Responsible Partners: WIOA Combined State Plan partners and DOC

To achieve this goal, the Workforce Committee has put forth four objectives.

Objective 3a: Increase the number of individuals accessing workforce and career services through innovative approaches that meet the needs of the local community. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Conduct **targeted outreach** to underused talent pools to increase engagement and awareness of available services. Increase awareness of best practices to reach individuals and monitor emerging populations (i.e. some college no degree, older adults).
- ▶ Increase awareness and use of **innovative service delivery models** (e.g. mobile career labs, library job pods, virtual services, Individual Placement and Support (IPS)).
- ▶ Develop strategic partnerships with community-based organizations that provide **wrap-around support** to targeted populations.

Objective 3b: Promote evidence-based practices that match job seekers with a quality job that aligns with their conditions of work. Build a community of practice across WIOA partners. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Enhance effective **career navigation** and service delivery by developing a community of practice.
- ▶ Support **innovative local solutions** and continuous improvement projects. Scale successful practices across the state and program area as appropriate.

Objective 3c: Promote human-centered service delivery, incorporating stakeholder feedback to ensure services effectively meet their needs. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Increase awareness and understanding of the unique challenges underutilized talent pools face to enter and/or remain in the workforce. Identify **policy recommendations** to reduce barriers to participation.
- ▶ Analyze current WIOA programming's **outreach** to underutilized talent pools and their outcomes. Identify opportunities to enhance services to improve outcomes.
- ▶ Identify opportunities to incorporate **stakeholder perspective** into program development.

Objective 3d: Advocate for policies and supportive services that encourage people to enter and remain in the workforce (e.g., transportation, housing, broadband access, child care), incorporating stakeholder perspective. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Through DWD's **Ending Worker Exploitation Initiative**, conduct outreach and education to help workers and employers understand their rights and responsibilities and enforce minimum wage and overtime laws, discrimination laws, unemployment insurance laws, worker's compensation laws, migrant labor laws, and more.
- ▶ Review the **Customer Feedback** User Guide developed by the WIOA Peer Learning Cohort to assess the current customer feedback process. Develop a standard use of customer feedback to identify areas of success and improvement and make informed decisions to improve products and services.
- ▶ Develop methods to **increase efficiencies** and remove obstacles to improve access to services for eligible participants.





FOCUS AREA #4: WIOA GOVERNANCE & RESOURCE ALIGNMENT COMMITTEE

Goal: Achieve passing WIOA performance each program year.

Background: The Wisconsin WIOA Combined State Plan outlines a coordinated, data-driven strategy to strengthen the competitiveness of workers, job seekers, and employers and to ensure a resilient, responsive workforce system. The plan aligns Wisconsin's workforce, education, and economic development systems. Wisconsin has 11 local workforce development areas (WDAs). Each area's certified local Workforce Development Board (WDB) serves as a strategic convener to promote and broker effective relationships between the elected officials and economic, education and workforce partners in the local area.

Wisconsin has 22 American Job Centers across the state, including 12 comprehensive and 10 affiliate job centers. Partners within the one-stop delivery system make services available on-site, via the use of technology, and/or via formalized referral processes. In addition to coordination at the leadership level among the core program entities and at the local level, there are cross-agency WIOA Integrated Service Delivery Teams that work to ensure the coordinated implementation and alignment of the WIOA programs. The teams are responsible for carrying out the project work that WIOA leadership agreed upon. The purpose of these teams is to identify and analyze current policies and best practices to improve the effectiveness and accessibility of the system, to establish a communication strategy for all WIOA Title and partner programs, and to coordinate and operationalize how programs organize and prioritize activities to ensure data is trusted, understood, and fosters accountability.

Baseline Data: For PY2024, Wisconsin was above the failure threshold for overall and individual indicator scores and either met or exceeded adjusted levels for all programs overall.

Responsible Partners: WIOA Combined State Plan partners

To achieve this goal, the WIOA Governance & Resource Alignment Committee has put forth three objectives.

Objective 4a: Enhance the Integrated Service Delivery structure to address system-wide issues, implement change, and improve collaboration and accountability. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Establish effective **Integrated Service Delivery teams** with representation from all WIOA titles and partner programs.
- ▶ Identify, develop, and **recommend policies and practices** that promote aligned, accessible, and equitable workforce services.
- ▶ Develop and implement **WIOA Training and Professional Development** series to increase compliance, consistency, and effectiveness of our service delivery.
- ▶ **Modernize case management, service provider, and employer systems** by replacing the ASSET case management system, the IRIS service provider portal, and modernizing the Job Center of Wisconsin website.

Objective 4b: Continue developing a longitudinal data system to improve data governance, identify opportunities for collaboration, and expand capacity to support evidence-based decision making. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Assess the **effectiveness** of established career pathways in leading to good, local jobs with family-sustainable wages.
- ▶ Assess **future workforce needs** by understanding the impacts of advancing technologies, the impact on workforce trends, how the labor force is changing over time, and how services and systems can support job seekers.
- ▶ Improve **customer service and service alignment** by measuring impact to under-resourced and underutilized talent pools, better connecting job seekers to effective services and improving collaboration and data sharing to better assess outcomes.

Objective 4c: Define and create an effective state and local partner communication strategy to increase awareness of workforce services and build a stronger, more coordinated relationship. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Develop and implement a plan for **enhancing communication** across the workforce system.
- ▶ **Promote services** to partners within the workforce system including educational providers, community-based organizations, business partners, and other stakeholders.
- ▶ Develop the **2028-31 WIOA Combined State Plan**. Assess the state's current partner programs and identify opportunities to expand and strengthen partnerships for a more unified workforce strategic plan.
- ▶ Invite new partners from relevant groups to participate in CWI committees to **increase knowledge sharing and provide expertise**.



AD HOC: CHILD CARE

Background: A lack of adequate child care options forces many parents to reduce their hours, take less-demanding jobs, or leave the workforce entirely. According to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, the average price of center-based child care for one infant exceeds \$16,000 per year, equivalent to about 21% of median household income in the state. Survey research from the Wisconsin Institute of

Research on Poverty shows that in June of 2025, approximately half of all surveyed respondents reported that someone in their family missed at least one day of work or school in the previous year due to child care. Just over 12% reported leaving the workforce due to issues with child care. This was more common among females and non-white Hispanic individuals, as well as for respondents with children six years or under and those with household incomes below seventy thousand.

Several factors may contribute to a lack of access to child care. Some areas are child care ‘deserts’ defined as areas with more than three times as many children as regulated child care slots. Other areas have licensed capacity but lack the skilled workforce to allow them to operate at full capacity. One thing is clear: Access to quality, affordable child care options helps businesses across Wisconsin attract and retain employees, ensures that parents can remain in the workforce, and increases the prospects for an educated, skilled workforce in the future. YoungStar, the state’s quality rating and improvement system, gives parents and caregivers the tools and information they need to find quality child care that fits their needs. In 2025, 159 new programs joined YoungStar and over 37,000 children attending child care programs that participate in YoungStar received the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy.

Responsible Partners: Department of Workforce Development (DWD), Department of Children and Families (DCF), Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA).

Objective 5a: Increase business engagement in and awareness of early care and education solutions in their local community. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Develop a plan to conduct **education and outreach to employers**, targeting child care deserts in the state. Support employers in understanding the cost and availability of local child care and promote the Wisconsin Shares Program.
- ▶ **Promote business engagement** in early care and education. Support employers’ efforts to assess their current policies, gather employee input, and identify resources and potential partners.
- ▶ Support employers in offering **innovative supports** to working parents through low- or no-cost resources, flexible workflows, adaptive approaches to scheduling, employer sponsored dependent care benefits, on-site child care, or partnering with existing child care programs in the area.

Objective 5b: Grow the early childhood educator workforce to meet demand and increase access for Wisconsin parents. To meet this objective, we will:

- ▶ Promote and expand steady **career pathways** and increase opportunities for dual enrollment, work-based learning, and registered apprenticeship.
- ▶ Advocate for T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Wisconsin and the return of subsidies for child care foundational training to ensure students have the **support and resources** they need to enter the workforce and engage in ongoing professional development.
- ▶ Promote available resources on starting and running a **certified child care business** including the benefits of certification, training requirements, and workforce training grants.
- ▶ Support owners/operators’ efforts to **sustain and increase capacity** by investing in business and administration education, as well as mentorship programs.

NEXT STEPS

The five focus areas and strategic objectives developed and approved by the council will strengthen Wisconsin's workforce development system to ensure alignment with both current and future labor market needs. From increasing credential attainment and ensuring employers have the skilled workforce they need, to expanding effective programs like registered apprenticeship and offering evidence-based interventions and supports to populations experiencing significant barriers, Wisconsin can continue to be a workforce leader in the nation.

The next phase of the council's work will focus on developing clear, actionable strategies to achieve these objectives over the next four years. This focused work includes establishing and implementing roadmaps, defining measurable milestones, and aligning resources across agencies and partners. For each goal, the council will work closely with responsible partners to identify needs in order to accelerate progress. The council will actively engage businesses, trade associations, chambers of commerce, workforce development boards, educational institutions, and other key stakeholders across the state to ensure strategies remain aligned with the real needs of industries and communities. The council will submit an annual report to the governor to share key progress made, challenges encountered, and priority areas for the upcoming year. This will ensure accountability across all partners. Additionally, the council will regularly update the CWI Dashboard to monitor progress.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

The CWI welcomes and appreciates input from the public and uses feedback to advise its work and direct initiatives. Contact us with questions or comments about this report or CWI's work, email CWIADMIN@dwd.wisconsin.gov.

Consider Joining:

Members of the council are appointed by the governor. The council may forward recommendations to the governor after soliciting recommendations from organizations and business representatives. Members serve for a term of three years and may be reappointed for successive terms.

- The majority, 51%, must be represented by individuals from businesses in the local area.
- Not less than 20% must represent the workforce within the state, including labor organizations, registered apprenticeships, and organizations representing individuals with barriers to employment including out-of-school youth.
- Government representatives include lead state officials for core programs, two or more chief elected officials, and those who represent economic development, tribal organizations, and education programs in the state.

Learn more and see the current membership at the [CWI website](#). Send a resume and cover letter expressing your interest in joining the council to CWIADMIN@dwd.wisconsin.gov.

NOTES

¹ [https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/EO/EO182-RecreatingNonStatCommittees%20\(002\).pdf](https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/EO/EO182-RecreatingNonStatCommittees%20(002).pdf)

Accessed 7/26

² CWI - Governor's Council on Workforce Investment Council Members. <https://cwi.wisconsin.gov>

Accessed 7/26

³ *Breaking Down the Child Care Crisis*, DCF-P-5805. <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5805.pdf>

Accessed 7/26

⁴ https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/WIGOV/2023/08/23/file_attachments/2591849/Evers_EO211.pdf

Accessed 7/26

⁵ *Workforce Solutions Initiative*. <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/workforce-solutions/>

Accessed 7/26

⁶ *The Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence Advisory Action Plan*. <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf>

Accessed 7/26

⁷ *A bold vision for a prosperous future*. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-views/a-bold-vision-for-a-prosperous-future/>

Accessed 7/26

⁸ *Educational Attainment | Stronger Nation*. <https://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/attainment/wisconsin>

Accessed 7/26

⁹ While the general Labor Force Participation Rate and total Employment-to-Population Ratio provide broad snapshots of economic activity, they are increasingly susceptible to demographic changes caused by the accelerating rate of retirement among the baby boomer generation. Tracking the employment-to-population ratio of adults ages 25-54 as a measure of the core workforce that is successfully secured in employment will highlight structural barriers to employment such as child care access and skills gaps independent of the unavoidable demographic shifts associated with an aging population.

¹⁰ <https://iparrt.org/projects/worker-connection-process-evaluation/>

Accessed 7/26

¹¹ <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/wdis/pdf/250710-wioa-title-1b-adult-report.pdf>

Accessed 7/26

¹² *America's Licensed Child Care Deserts - Center for American Progress*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/americas-licensed-child-care-deserts/>

Accessed 7/26

¹³ *Breaking Down the Child Care Crisis | Wisconsin Department of Children and Families*. <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/efforts>

Accessed 7/26



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GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

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