

Governor's Council on Workforce Investment

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



2025 Annual Report

April 30, 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 an honor to submit the 2025 CWI Annual Report, which highlights the council's activities during 2025.

In 2025, the council continued building on the success of 2024's Year of the Worker to help Wisconsin employers find skilled talent while providing workers and job seekers with the resources and guidance to attain in-demand skills and family-supporting jobs. Wisconsin's labor force participation rate ended the year at 64.2%, which is 1.8 points above the national rate. Total nonfarm jobs in the state increased 6,700 over the year and unemployment held steady at 3.1% which is 1.3 points below the national unemployment rate.¹ Under your leadership, and with the investment of \$168 million into the Workforce Solutions Initiative (WSI), the workforce system created sustainable solutions to clear barriers to work in local communities and strengthened partnerships with stakeholders across the state.

While these ongoing investments in Wisconsin's workforce have resulted in progress, challenges remain. Uncertainty at the federal level in staffing and funding has threatened workforce programs in the state. Long-term demographic trends will make it more challenging for employers to acquire and retain talent. Additionally, as technology rapidly advances, the workforce system needs to identify innovative approaches to expand access to training opportunities, and provide support for dislocated workers.²

Integrated service delivery, innovative practices, and strong business partnerships will help ensure Wisconsin employment rates remain high, that employees earn family-sustaining wages, that youth develop in-demand technical skills, and that businesses choose Wisconsin. We are pleased to share the progress that was made toward the goals in our 2022-26 strategic plan and outline our focus for the coming year.

Kind Regards,



Sachin Shivaram, Chair
Governor's Council on Workforce Investment



Amy Pechacek, Secretary
Department of Workforce Development



CONTENTS

- Overview and Membership 1
- Roles and Responsibilities 3
- Summary of 2025 Meetings..... 3
- 2022-2026 CWI Strategic Plan 5
- CWI Education Committee 6
- CWI Employer Committee..... 9
- CWI Workforce Committee11
- CWI WIOA Governance & Resource Alignment Committee 13
- Looking Ahead to 2026 14
- Contact CWI 15
- Notes..... 16

GOVERNOR’S COUNCIL ON WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

The Governor’s Council on Workforce Investment (CWI) is Wisconsin’s federally mandated state workforce board under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) that assists 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 to 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 #182.³

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. Staff 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 Gov. Evers’ 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 2025 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

Kathi Seifert
Immediate Past Chair, Education Committee
President
Katapult, LLC

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

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



Council Members

(as of December 31, 2025)

Tony Evers

Governor
State of Wisconsin

Masood Akhtar

President & Founder
CleanTech Partners, Inc.

Lindsay Blumer

President & CEO
WRTP | BIG STEP

Bob Davis

President & Founder
Inspire Early Childhood

Julie Gilbert

President & CEO
Destination Door County

Carver Harries

Executive Director
Ashland Area Development
Corporation

Andre Jacques

Senator, Senate District 1
Wisconsin State Legislature

Seth Lentz (ex-officio)

Executive Director
Workforce Development Board of
South Central Wisconsin

Melissa Meschke

Executive Director
St. Croix Economic Development
Corporation

Olivia Otte

Executive Director
Green County Development
Corporation

Sara Rogers

Business Services Manager
Employ Milwaukee

Michelle Tressler

Co-Founder and Chief Strategy Officer
Hinterland Brewery

Ann Zenk

Senior Vice President, Workforce and
Clinical Practice
Wisconsin Hospital Association

Jan Allman

Vice President and General Manager
Fincantieri Bay Shipbuilding

Becky Bartoszek

President/CEO
Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce

Christopher Conard

President
PMI, Inc.

Meredith Dressel

Administrator, Division of
Vocational Rehabilitation
Department of Workforce Development

LeighAnn Hanrahan

Vice President of Human Resources
Centers for Independence

Amanda Hoefling

Executive Vice President, Human Resources
Dairyland Power Cooperative

Nick Kapsa

VP Human Resources, Food &
Consumer Packaging
Ahlstrom

Shaun McHugh

Organizer & Business Agent
International Union of Operating Engineers

Thomas Miller

President
Aurora BayCare Medical Center

Jeff Pertl

Secretary
Department of Children and Families

Nora Roughen-Schmidt

Business Consultant
Wisconsin Small Business Development Center

Dr. Jill Underly

State Superintendent
Department of Public Instruction

Corey Zetts

Executive Director
Menomonee Valley Partners

Jonathan Abraham

Business Representative
North Central States Regional
Council of Carpenters

Shiva Bidar-Siellaff

Vice President
UW Health

David Crowley

County Executive
Milwaukee County

Dr. Eric Fulcomer

President
Wisconsin Association of
Independent Colleges & Universities

Shah Haqqi

President/CEO
S&L Global Consulting USA

Missy Hughes (resigned Sept. 2025)

Secretary/CEO
Wisconsin Economic Development
Corporation

Mark Kessenich

CEO
Associated General Contractors of
Greater Milwaukee

Layla Merrifield

President
Wisconsin Technical College System

Blake Moret

Chairman & CEO
Rockwell Automation

Pravin Raikar

President
Lockstep Solutions LLC

Shelia Stubbs

Representative, Assembly District 78
Wisconsin State Legislature

Jamie Wall

Senator, Senate District 30
Wisconsin State Legislature

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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, tactical roles 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 update state performance and accountability measures.
5. Identifying and disseminate information on best practices.
6. Developing and review 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.

SUMMARY OF 2025 MEETINGS

The CWI convened quarterly as a full council in 2025. Additionally, the Executive Committee and four standing committees met between the full council meetings to work on committee-focused goals. Full council meetings were held in-person with virtual options available to members. Meetings of the CWI and its committees were open to members of the public and materials and minutes are publicly available on the [CWI website](#). To further advance its mission, throughout the year, the council reflected on progress achieved under its [2022–2026 Strategic Plan](#), engaged in a strategic planning session in August, and began shaping its next four-year strategic plan. The CWI convened on the following dates:

- Tuesday, Feb. 4, 2025
- Tuesday, May 13, 2025
- Tuesday, Aug. 19, 2025
- Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2025

The full council meetings were held at sites of interests that are relevant to the CWI's strategic priorities across Wisconsin, including WRTP | BIG STEP, an apprenticeship training center in Milwaukee, Inspire Early Childhood Center in the Madison area, and Miron Construction headquartered in the Fox Cities region.

In her role as the CWI Executive Director, DWD Secretary Amy Pechacek represented the council and Wisconsin on a panel discussion at the National Governors Association (NGA) 2025 Winter Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. The session title, Equipping Workers with the Tools Required for



an AI-Powered Economy, explored what governors have done to make AI training accessible to workers, including those within state government, areas where technology can enhance public sector systems, and early outcomes of AI task forces established by executive order. The panel also featured Allyson Knox, Microsoft senior director of education and workforce policy, and was moderated by Timothy Blute, director of the NGA Center for Best Practices. Sec. Pechacek provided an overview of Wisconsin's work in AI readiness, highlighting Gov. Tony Evers' [Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence](#), which brought together labor, employers, government, and educational leaders to find solutions to connect more workers with AI skills, boost the competitive advantage of Wisconsin employers, and advance economic opportunity through a series of strategic principles and policies. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that everyone in Wisconsin, especially young people, has access to the resources and skills-training needed to succeed in the tech-driven workforce. Other key points from the discussion included:

- Ensuring teachers have the tools and upskilling needed to pass on to the youth.
- Defining "AI literacy" across states.
- Embracing AI for its benefits while prioritizing critical thinking skills.
- Incentivizing employers to provide AI literacy training.
- Implementing the "worker voice" into policy decisions.
- Encouraging private-sector collaboration around best practices.



DWD Secretary Amy Pechacek, Gov. Tony Evers, and CWI Chair Sachin Shivaram at CWI's February 2025 council meeting at Inspire Early Childhood Center.



L to R: CWI Chair Sachin Shivaram, Chief Strategy Officer and Co-owner of Hinterland Brewery Michelle Tressler, President of Aurora BayCare Medical Center Thomas Miller, VP of Human Resources Food & Consumer Packaging for Ahlstrom Nick Kapsa join a panel discussion, "Workforce Development Priorities," at CWI's strategic planning session in August, 2025.



Council members experience the interactive learning environment at Inspire Early Childhood Center, which includes a variety of exotic animals.



2022-2026 CWI STRATEGIC PLAN

The CWI is charged with aligning Wisconsin's workforce needs with its economic development goals and strategies. In 2025, CWI continued to build on historic investment in the state's workforce by helping 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.

The strategic plan is built on four focus areas:



Education

Reinvigorate Wisconsin's culture and value of education and innovation to fuel ideas, businesses, people, and the next generation for future economic well-being, and ensure that individuals from all backgrounds have access to the education, training, and support they need to achieve their full potential.



Employers

Engage all employers to drive, build, and use Wisconsin's workforce development system.



Workforce

Increase Wisconsin's workforce participation by promoting infrastructure to improve access to job opportunities, incentivize workforce participation, and by improving the sustainability of work for individuals and families.



Organization & Resource Alignment

Advocate for resource alignment to maximize return on investment and use data for continuous improvement of the workforce system.

The CWI Executive Committee delegated one of the strategic priorities to each of the four standing committees, enabling a targeted approach to achieve the strategic plan goals. The following section provides information on the CWI committees and reports on the progress made by each committee. An interactive [dashboard](#) with updated metrics and progress can be found on the CWI website.

CWI EDUCATION COMMITTEE

CHAIR: BRENT SMITH, JOHNS, FLAHERTY & COLLINS, SC

FORMER CHAIR: KATHI SEIFERT, KATAPULT LLC

VICE CHAIR: VACANT

The CWI Education Committee is working to ensure that individuals from all backgrounds have access to the education, training, and support they need to achieve their full potential. The committee is focused on initiatives related to career pathways, early childhood education, and preparing individuals for entrepreneurship.

Early Childhood Education

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. At their May 2025 meeting, members familiarized themselves with initiatives happening at the state level to address different aspects of the child care crisis. Led by the Department of Children & Families (DCF), Wisconsin has taken these steps to ensure all families have access to quality, affordable care:⁴

- Invested in Child Care Counts to provide child care programs with revenue for operating and staffing expenses, allowing them to keep costs down for families.
- 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 making the benefits cliff for families less steep.
- Covered child care costs for children with development delays.
- Increased and expanded child care tax credits.
- Partnered with businesses to help pay for employees' child care costs.
- Increased the supply of child care where it's most needed by offering supports for aspiring child care providers in the high-need regions of the state.
- Supported child care business operations through a shared services model.
- Grew the workforce of early educators via free Child Care Foundational Trainings and increased scholarships and wage stipends.

In partnership with DWD, DCF, and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the council supported specific efforts to ensure all Wisconsin families have access to high-quality, affordable, local early care and educational opportunities.

- In 2025, DWD's Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards (BAS) expanded the **Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Apprenticeship Pathway** where participants earn while they learn through a traditional apprenticeship model. The Registered Apprenticeship (RA) pathway was developed with 10 technical colleges, has 29 active employer sponsors, and 14 completions since 2020. The Youth Apprenticeship (YA) pathway has 207 participating employers. A three-year grant will allow the program to advance by providing tuition reimbursement, entrepreneurship supports for startups, and mentor support and training.
- **YoungStar**, Wisconsin's child care quality rating and improvement system, gives parents and caregivers the tools and information they need to find quality child care that fits their needs. Additionally, the program provides thousands of hours of direct consultation and coaching services to help programs with quality improvement. In 2025, 169 new programs joined YoungStar and over 37,000 children received Wisconsin Shares. Through the YoungStar evaluation process, programs can be evaluated for having key high-quality practices.⁵
- **Quality Jobs, Equity, Strategy, and Training (QUEST) Disaster Recovery National Dislocated Worker Grant**, a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, was awarded to DWD to address deficiencies in the child care economy related to access, quality, affordability, and wages. The QUEST grant funded services to 915 participants by providing training, supportive services, business engagement, and entrepreneurial skills development. Additionally, DWD worked with a vendor to develop an employer education video series about the importance of child care, along with outreach materials and media campaigns encouraging individuals to explore child care as a career.
- Through the **Workforce Innovation Grant (WIG) program**, part of the \$168 million [Workforce Solutions Initiative](#), a number of grantees were awarded funding to address child care challenges in their local community.

- ▶ **United Way of Door County** was awarded funds to make changes to existing child care facilities in Door County. One child care facility has been remodeled, and an additional facility has been constructed, creating 220 child care slots for Door County families. Six students received child care training and 16 employees took advantage of professional development opportunities to encourage long-term career pathways in child care. The project also supported the development of workforce housing in Door County with units reserved for child care workers. Two of three affordable homes have been completed and sold, and a buyer had been identified for the remaining home.
- ▶ In Milwaukee County, 199 early childhood education (ECE) providers have closed since the pandemic, resulting in the estimated loss of 642 jobs and the loss of child care for 6,000 families – losses disproportionately felt in underserved neighborhoods. The problem is compounded by the lack of affordable housing for ECE workers, who typically spend more than half of their income on housing. The **Local Initiatives Support Coalition** (LISC) is building 40 affordable homes for ECE teachers in Milwaukee near child care centers. By fall 2025, 42 homes were either finished or under construction, and nine had been sold. LISC had a waitlist of 240 ECE workers interested in purchasing the homes, which had a price tag of roughly \$105,000.
- ▶ The **Green County Family YMCA** used funds to facilitate the addition of a daycare and preschool wing in their new facility for licensed programs and classes. The daycare center and youth development center construction projects are complete, with 100 children currently enrolled. The crucial child care infrastructure is providing support to working families in southern Wisconsin where child care demand far outstrips supply.
- ▶ **Madison College** is bolstering the pipeline of high-quality child care professionals, supporting local child care providers with continuing education and networking opportunities, an increasing access to child care in the south Madison community. To date, over 200 students have taken early childhood education courses, with nearly 40 having earned childhood education credentials. The WIG funding also supported the development of a new child care facility, opening more child care slots and educational opportunities for ECE students.

Career Pathways

The Wisconsin Career Pathways model provides a structured framework aligning education with workforce needs, allowing students to earn industry-recognized credentials, dual college credits, participate in work-based learning experiences, and access related career and technical student organizations. Studies have consistently shown that these approaches improve rates of high school completion and credit accumulation to meet workforce needs by providing efficient transitions for students between sectors, saving time and money.⁶

DUAL ENROLLMENT	WORK-BASED LEARNING	INDUSTRY RECOGNIZED CREDENTIALS	ADVANCED COURSES
26.6% of high school students took a dual-credit course, up 0.9 percentage points from the previous year.	8% of high school students participated in work-based learning, down 0.5 percentage points from the previous year.	5.5% of high school students earned an industry-recognized credential, up 0.8 percentage points from the previous year.	20.3% of high school students completed an Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate course, down 0.8 percentage points from the previous year.
Data from the 2024-25 school year ⁷			

Career and Technical Education (CTE) prepares youth and adults for high-demand careers by combining academic instruction with technical, hands-on skills. In Wisconsin, 421 school districts, 16 technical colleges, two tribal colleges, and more than 500 CTE programs serve over 88,000 secondary students and 120,000 postsecondary students.

POST-PROGRAM PLACEMENT	CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT	CONCENTRATION IN NONTRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS	CTE INCENTIVE GRANTS
91.23% of program completers are placed in employment, education or advanced training six months following graduation, down 0.7 percentage points from the previous year.	73.94% of CTE concentrators complete their program within the cohort period, up 0.9 percentage points from the previous year.	17.55% of concentrators were enrolled in a program where they were considered a minority within the national workforce, up 0.1 percentage points from the previous year.	11,209 CTE Incentive Grants were awarded, up over 2,000 from the previous year.
Data from program year 2024 ⁸			

Youth & Registered Apprenticeship

Wisconsin started the first state registered apprenticeship system in the United States in 1911, and this model continues to be a cornerstone of Wisconsin’s skilled workforce development. Apprenticeships offer a unique blend of hands-on experience and classroom learning in which students earn a wage while acquiring industry-specific skills. Established in 1991, Wisconsin’s Youth Apprenticeship program offers pathways to junior and seniors in high school. In 2025, Wisconsin enrollment in youth and registered apprenticeships reached a record high.⁹

NUMBER OF APPRENTICES	YA BRIDGE TO RA	YA 2024-2025	REGIONAL YA CONSORTIA
18,533 participants	635 bridging from YA to RA	11,344 Students 7,447 Employers	40 Consortia 83 Occupational Pathways

Credential Attainment Rate

In 2024, the most recent year with data available, 59.2% of adults in Wisconsin aged 25-64 had a post-high school credential, representing an increase of +21 percentage points since 2009 and +1.2 percentage points since 2023. Three out of 72 counties in Wisconsin have reached 60% attainment.¹⁰ The council is focused on supporting the efforts of educational institutions to reach 60% postsecondary credential attainment statewide. Credential attainment rate is one primary indicator of performance of WIOA core programs, except for Title III.

During PY 2024, the Title I and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) programs included credential data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSCH) Tracker service. This agreement allows for the automation of some credential collection and reporting. Wisconsin’s Performance Advisory Committee (PAC) developed and delivered performance technical assistance and training via webinars as part of a WIOA Data and Reporting Lifecycle Training Series. The PAC also launched two new cross-agency advisory groups: the Education & Training Advisory Group and the Employment, Wages, and Business Services Advisory Group. These efforts ensure local areas have accurate data for credential attainment rates.

Workforce Innovation Grants (WIG): As part of over \$168 million invested in local solutions, a number of grantees used grant funding to bolster entrepreneurship in their local areas, such as:

- The city of **Kenosha** partnered with gener8tor to bring an entrepreneurship skilling program to the city, specifically to work with startup founders of color and women in Kenosha. The program provided coaching, mentorship, and networking for entrepreneurs to build strong, sustainable companies. In all, 33 entrepreneurs received training, generating \$320K in follow-on venture capital per cohort or an average of \$49,379 in follow-on financing per startup. The project has resulted in 76 job opportunities with participating startups.
- The **Careerforce Build Up! Program** in Madison engaged youth and young adults in a skilled trades program for those interested in careers as electricians, plumbers, carpenters, and HVAC specialists. The program included entrepreneurial classes to show youth how they can build their own businesses to generate transformational change for underrepresented and underserved families. The program trained 272 youth and placed 72 in apprenticeships.



CWI EMPLOYER COMMITTEE

CHAIR: ANN FRANZ, NEW MANUFACTURING ALLIANCE

VICE CHAIR: AMANDA HOEFLING, DAIRYLAND POWER COOPERATIVE

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 for the Employer Committee.

DWD's Bureau of Workforce Information and Technical Support (BWITS) Office of Economic Advisors (OEA) 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 the 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.

Additionally, engaging with employers ensures resources and program development meet real-world demand.

Wisconsin's Technical College System (WTCS) regularly engages with employers to provide a variety of services to ensure employers have the skilled workforce they need, including:

- **Industry-validated curriculum** are technical college degrees and certificate programs which have enrolled students and advisory committees comprised of local employers and employees in a relevant occupation. These committees provide input on equipment, course materials, instructional methods, and career guidance counseling to ensure relevance to current industry standards. As of August 2025, there were 5,710 Industry-Validated Programs in Wisconsin.¹¹
- Customized training or **Workforce Training Credits** help businesses increase efficiency, productivity, and worker safety. More than 500,000 Workforce Training Credits have been delivered since the 2021-22 school year, increasing more than 20% between 2021-22 and 2023-24.
- Among **2024 WTCS graduates**, 92% of survey respondents were employed six months after graduation and 93% were employed within the state. Also, 70.4% were in fields with the most acute talent needs in the state.

Helping participants gain appropriate skills to meet the demands of **Wisconsin employers, the Wisconsin Fast Forward (WFF) Industry Sectors Worker Training Grant program** incentivizes applicants that propose to train targeted populations. WFF provides reimbursement for specialized, customized training that prepares workers to do specific jobs employers have available and/or puts them on a career ladder to success.

- Funded with state General Purpose Revenue funds.
- \$3.97 million for Industry Sector Worker Training Grants.
- \$1 million for Reentry Initiatives Grants, designed to support instruction costs for upkeep and maintenance of mobile classrooms.
- At the end of state fiscal year (SFY) 2025, 32 organizations provided training to 1,825 individuals. On average, wages increased \$2.13 per hour after training for incumbent workers and \$2.95 for underemployed workers.

In program year (PY) 2025, DWD had approved waivers of WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker program requirements that helped Wisconsin businesses to find the talent they need.

- Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) six-month Employment Requirement Waiver: Eliminates the six-month employment requirement in its definition of incumbent worker.
- On-the-Job Training (OJT) Employer Reimbursement Rate Limit Waiver: Increases the on-the-job training employer reimbursement up to 90% from 75% for businesses with 50 or fewer employees.

Improve Employer Awareness and System Use

The CWI Employer Committee continued to engage all Wisconsin employers to drive, build, and use the workforce development system, and advance the goals in the WIOA state plan that are centered around work-based learning and employer engagement with the workforce system.

Dedicated Business Services Teams (BSTs) throughout the state include specialists across the workforce system who are trained to provide individualized support to employers including training solutions and recruitment services. This cross-program business engagement coordinated by BSTs reduced duplication and improved employer access to services. DWD's Bureau of Job Service implemented a new strategic plan on July 1, 2025. The plan outlines goals that align with DWD's mission to efficiently deliver effective and inclusive services to meet Wisconsin's diverse workforce needs, and advocate for the protection and economic advancement of all Wisconsin workers, employers, and job seekers.¹²

- **Strengthen employer relationships:** Develop deeper, ongoing connections with Wisconsin employers to understand their unique workforce needs and challenges.
- **Provide access to tailored workforce solutions:** Ensure that employers have access to workforce development programs and customized solutions that meet their specific needs.
- **Build strong partnerships, business outreach, and engagement:** Foster relationships with workforce development organizations, educational institutions, community partners, and employers to create a strong, supportive network and increase business engagement.
- **Enhance knowledge and awareness of workforce programs:** Empower both employers and staff with the knowledge and tools they need to navigate workforce programs effectively.
- **Leverage the JobCenterofWisconsin.com platform:** Promote and maximize the use of jobcenterofwisconsin.com to connect employers with job seekers.

Each of Wisconsin's 11 [Workforce Development Boards](#) develop and lead regional plans in alignment with the WIOA state plan to address challenges, coordinate resources, and develop individualized solutions for their workforce area. Local board members make strategic connections among stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of the system. Members represent local business leaders, educational institutions, economic development agencies, and other community-based organizations.

DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) business services consultants are focused on supporting and developing an inclusive workforce, conducting outreach to over 3,474 employers in PY 2025, and providing over 8,000 services. These services include Windmills Training, a disability-awareness curriculum presented to employer membership groups and employers to support their hiring of people with disabilities. Topics focus on hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities, providing accommodations, and educating about how DVR can help with retaining and upskilling current employees with disabilities.

BSTs document information and services using a shared web-based platform, jobcenterofwisconsin.com, and members have access to real-time information regarding services delivered to businesses in each region. In PY 2025, 170,741 available jobs were posted by 7,854 employers.

Entrepreneurship

The Office of Business & Entrepreneurship, administered by the Universities of Wisconsin, offers several programs that benefit entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial support entities. It offers educational and no-cost, confidential business consultation services for Wisconsin-based small business owners and entrepreneurs. It partners with other state agencies and focuses on access and inclusion, eliminating barriers and providing quality solutions for those they serve, including through online content and resources, classes, and in-person clinics to support employers.¹³



CWI WORKFORCE COMMITTEE

CHAIR: JAKE GORGES, WISCONSIN LITERACY, INC.

VICE CHAIR: LINDSAY BLUMER, WRTP | BIG STEP

Wisconsin employers continue to express challenges finding workers. In a survey of Wisconsin employers conducted by the council in July 2025, 35% of respondents listed the availability of workers in general as a critical resource constraint, and 58% listed the availability of workers with an appropriate skill set as a critical resource constraint. Dating back to 2000, there are not enough young workers to fill the jobs being vacated by the generation of baby boomers leaving the workforce, or to fulfill the increased demand for workers associated with economic growth.¹⁴ Additionally, worker skills must align with skills demanded by the position, which is increasingly challenging as technology advances. For Wisconsin to successfully compete in the global economy, the state needs to attract and retain every worker it can and educate and train them to match the requirements of the new technologies. The CWI strategic plan focuses on increasing Wisconsin's labor force participation rates through incentivizing participation, providing innovative supports to special populations, and supporting policies that promote resilience in incumbent workers.

Adult Education

The Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) provides adult education programs that provide students an opportunity to fully participate in Wisconsin's workforce to better themselves economically. These programs help adult learners attain high school equivalency, achieve English proficiency, pursue post-secondary education, and attain and maintain meaningful employment opportunities. They also support the justice-involved population through these programs and financial literacy and employability courses. Over 59,000 students participated in adult education services at technical colleges over the past three years.¹⁵

Justice-Involved Population

Employment is an important element in successfully transitioning individuals from incarceration to the community and preventing recidivism. The Department of Corrections (DOC), in partnership with DWD, opened nine new job lab locations within correctional facilities and initiated the Job Lab Tracking application – a structured application for job lab staff to track data metrics for usage including services provided, applications submitted, and interviews within the labs. This brings the total to 17 institution-based job labs and two community-based job labs. Since the system was implemented, 1,561 participants visited institution-based job labs with 9,382 recorded visits. Additionally, participants were able to conduct phone and virtual interviews with employers in DOC job labs and schedule in-person interviews for when they are released from the institution.

In SFY 2025, there were 347 interviews completed within the institutions, with 29 job offers received prior to an individual's release. 76.3% of job lab participants were employed one year after release, compared to 70% of the control group. Three years after release, 89% of job lab participants are employed, compared to 77.1% of the control group. This indicates receiving pre-release employment services at a job lab can have lasting positive effects on long-term employment.¹⁶

DOC also partners with WTCS to offer training academies that occur on WTCS campuses or within the DOC facility using mobile classrooms. Individuals receiving training may earn a technical diploma or certificate in a high-demand field. Upon completion of an academy, individuals can earn work release opportunities while incarcerated. In SFY 2025, 157 individuals completed academies and 101 of those earned work release employment, earning an average wage of \$18.74 per hour. Finally, DOC partners with the 11 Workforce Development Boards to provide Windows to Work, a pre-release programming is made up of five core components:

1. Cognitive Intervention
2. General Work Skills and Expectations
3. Financial Literacy
4. Community Resources
5. Job Seeking, Applications, and Resumes



After release, the individual continues to receive support for approximately 12 months or until they find employment and stability in their community. During SFY 2025, there were 177 participants who successfully completed the Windows to Work program, an increase of 48 over SFY 2024. 82.1% of Windows to Work participants were employed one year

after release, compared to 73.4% of the control group. Three years after release, 91% of participants were employed compared to 80.6% of the control group. This indicates that the Windows to Work program is successful in helping individuals to maintain long-term employment after incarceration.¹⁷

The Worker Connection Program pilot, part of the Workforce Solutions Initiative, facilitated connections across the workforce system and local communities to amplify, expand, and activate opportunities for people-centered services to help Wisconsinites advance in their careers or find a new job. This program used a skills-based discovery process for developing career plans and targeted populations most likely to be unemployed or under-employed. Initially providing services in two Workforce Development Areas, the program surpassed its goal and served over 3,500 people. In June 2025, additional funding was allocated to hire career navigators to work across the state. Career Navigators partner with local organizations and businesses to support their workforce needs. To date, over 70% of program enrollments were referred by a partner organization, underscoring the importance of strong partnerships to support a robust workforce. A [process evaluation](#) completed by the Innovative Partnership for Advancing Rehabilitation Research and Training (IPARTT) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, was published in December 2024.

Career Pathways Advancement (CPA) Initiative Grant

DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) offers individualized services to eligible people with disabilities who want to work. DVR has seen its highest demand for services in 10 years and has helped Wisconsin reach record high employment rates for individuals with disabilities. DVR applied for a United States Department of Education Career Pathways Advancement (CPA) Initiative grant in spring 2021 and was awarded \$14 million in September 2021. DVR was awarded an additional \$6.1 million in September 2023 to expand the program to support 300 more job seekers. Through June 2025, DVR has enrolled 1,071 individuals in the CPA, and 170 individuals who participated have exited DVR successfully employed. These individuals earn an average wage of \$21 per hour and work an average of 30 hours per week.¹⁸

In federal fiscal year 2025, DVR received 33,687 requests for services. Of those receiving support with finding or maintaining employment, 3,429 successfully maintained employment for at least 90 days and 242 consumers transitioned off federal benefits. 3,852 students, ages 14 to 21, received Pre-Employment Transition Services.

Veteran Employment

In 2025, it was announced that Wisconsin ranked fourth in 2024 in the Uniform National Threshold Entered Employment Rate (UNTEER) for veterans and eligible persons for the second consecutive year.¹⁹ These standards measure how effective states are in providing employment services to veterans and includes services delivered by DWD's Office of Veterans Employment Services through the Jobs for Veterans State Grants program and the Wagner-Peyser funded Employment Services. The office administered the Vets Ready Employer Initiative, which recognizes Wisconsin employers that have gone above and beyond to hire and support veterans and their families. In 2025, 25 employers received the distinction, including eight first-time recipients.



Ending Worker Exploitation Initiative

Wisconsin has a rich history of advocating for the protection and economic advancement of all of the state's workers, employers, and job seekers. Worker exploitation poses a threat to Wisconsin workers and their families and hurts Wisconsin's economy by creating a disadvantage for employers who follow the rules. In 2025, DWD launched an Ending Worker Exploitation Initiative aimed at:

- Conducting outreach and education to help workers and employers understand their rights and responsibilities.
- Providing training and resources to combat human trafficking and other forms of worker exploitation.
- Strengthening partnerships to identify and address challenges facing vulnerable workers.
- Collaborating across divisions to enhance enforcement of minimum wage and overtime laws, discrimination laws, unemployment insurance laws, worker's compensation laws, migrant labor laws, and more.

CWI WIOA GOVERNANCE & RESOURCE ALIGNMENT COMMITTEE

CHAIR: AMY PECHACEK, SECRETARY DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

VICE CHAIR: VACANT

The CWI WIOA Governance & Resource Alignment Committee not only assists the governor in carrying out the statutory requirements in compliance with federal WIOA guidelines, but it advocates for resource alignment and the use of data for continuous improvement of the workforce system. In response to considerations and recommendations proposed in Wisconsin's PY 2024-27 WIOA combined state plan, this committee consolidated two previously separate entities dedicated to WIOA governance into one committee under CWI. To further support this initiative and improve efficiency, the Integrated Service Delivery teams, or the subgroups under the committee, were bolstered so that the appropriate personnel from all WIOA Titles and partner programs are engaged to foster more efficient decisions and progress.

Standard Procedure for Referrals

Effective May 2025, program areas within DWD's Division of Employment and Training (DET) and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) can submit and receive electronic referrals. Available program area referral options are Title I Adult, Title I Dislocated Worker, Title I Youth, Title III Wagner Peyser, TAA, OVES/JVSG and Reemployment Services (RESEA). Additionally, staff have a new case management view to see their case load at a glance and upcoming activities or deadlines. This allows staff to quickly refer individuals to other programs, increasing co-enrollment and improving the quality of services individuals receive.

Business Climate Survey

The CWI conducted a Business Climate Survey in July 2025 to gather insight from Wisconsin businesses to help shape strategic planning activities. The survey was previously conducted in 2021. Over 1,400 business representatives responded to the survey, and almost 75% of respondents represent a business with fewer than 50 employees. Key findings include:

- Finding workers with the appropriate skill set is a top constraint for employers, followed by finding workers in general. While soft skills continue to be a priority for employers, the need for workers to have industry-specific knowledge or technical skills has increased in the last four years.
- Awareness of workforce services and business resources has increased since 2021, however employer confidence in navigating these programs and resources remains low.
- Employers identified email blasts, employer assistance events, and employer or industry organizations as top avenues for engagement.

Customer Feedback Loop

The WIOA Evaluation Peer Learning Cohort brought together WIOA program and partner staff to improve coordination of Wisconsin WIOA evaluation activities, including to identify methods to improve customer feedback loops to better assess program effectiveness and increase customer satisfaction. The workgroup identified current practices and gathered information from the research literature, other states, and federal partners. The workgroup developed a Customer Feedback User Guide that outlines what customer feedback is, why gathering it is important, what successful customer feedback looks like, and technology tips for implementation. The guide will be published in 2026 for WIOA programs and partners.

2025 WIOA Roundtable Series

DWD, in partnership with WIOA partners, hosted information sessions and events in 2025 to promote cross-agency and cross-program familiarity of WIOA programs. The events aimed to increase familiarity and collaboration to more effectively coordinate and align policy and successfully implement WIOA initiatives at state and local levels. An initial virtual event was held in the summer of 2025 with an in-person event held in the fall tailored toward WIOA program managers and lead workers. Attendees were intended to take the information they learned at the event back to their local program areas and educate additional staff. This series is more cost-effective than WIOA Roundtable conferences held in the past and allows for more relevant conversation and integration of ideas.

Additional details on the CWI progress towards its strategic goals and related metrics can be found on the CWI Strategic Plan Dashboard: <https://cwi.wisconsin.gov/dashboard/>.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026

In August 2025, the council held an all-day strategic planning session focused on understanding the current labor market and reviewing lessons learned and best practices to build on and advance the workforce system. Wisconsin is building on the success of the past three years to further advance our mission to connect Wisconsinites to jobs. In a time of uncertainty on the federal level, the CWI looks to build a new four-year strategic plan that focuses on advancing the strength of Wisconsin's workforce development system and building on opportunities for innovation and growth.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Advancing AI requires innovative approaches to remove employment and training barriers, expand access to training opportunities, and ensure that workers share in the benefits of the AI transformation. Wisconsin must be ready to enhance current training infrastructure to include technological advances upskill current workers to continue to meet evolving employer needs, and continue to reduce the digital divide. DWD must continue to collect and share data on AI's impact on the workforce to enhance layoff aversion programs and increase outreach to those workers displaced or otherwise affected by AI in the workplace.²⁰



Workforce Pell Implementation (H.R. 1): Effective July 1, 2026, Federal Pell Grant eligibility will expand to include high-quality, short-term education and training programs that prepare students for in-demand jobs.²¹ This initiative aims to make career advancement more affordable and accessible for adult learners. The CWI will play an important role by determining that programs provide education aligned with the requirements of high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industry sectors or occupations, meet the hiring requirements of potential employers, and satisfy educational prerequisites for professional licensing or certification in the state.



WisTRAIN

Employer-Led Training Grant

Wisconsin Training for Resilient Advanced Industry Needs (WisTRAIN): Wisconsin received a \$7.3 million WIOA Dislocated Worker National Reserve Demonstration grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to implement a statewide initiative designed to close workforce gaps in high-growth industries: advanced manufacturing and AI. The WisTRAIN grant program funds will be used to address shortages in digital literacy, cybersecurity, project management, robotics, and AI-enabled systems to build the talent pipeline needed for statewide competitiveness.

In 2026 the council will finalize its next four-year strategic plan and will set out to implement those key strategies immediately. The Executive Committee has maintained the four standing committees and tasked each with building on past success to drive the workforce system to evolve and meet the current needs of both Wisconsin workers and employers. To maintain and surpass the levels of success we have seen in the past four years, continued engagement with Wisconsin's business, government, education leaders, and workforce is needed.

The CWI holds public meetings at least once per quarter. Members of the public are able and encouraged to view in person or online, and meeting materials, and minutes are publicly available on the [CWI website](#).

- Tuesday, Feb. 24, 2026
- Thursday, June 4, 2026
- Tuesday, Aug. 18, 2026
- Tuesday, Nov. 17, 2026



DWD Secretary Amy Pechacek speaks at a CWI council meeting.

BECOME A CWI MEMBER

HOW TO JOIN

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.

CONTACT CWI

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.

NOTES

- ¹ <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/press/unemployment/2026/260122-december-state.pdf>
- ² <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf>
- ³ [https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/EO/EO182-RecreatingNonStatCommittees%20\(002\).pdf](https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/EO/EO182-RecreatingNonStatCommittees%20(002).pdf)
- ⁴ <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5805.pdf>
- ⁵ <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/program/impact>
- ⁶ <https://collegeinhighschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/The-Benefits-of-Dual-Enrollment-2025-Update.pdf>
- ⁷ <https://dpi.wi.gov/accountability/report-cards>
- ⁸ <https://www.wtcsystem.edu/impact/publications/strengthening-career-and-technical-education-in-the-21st-century-act/>
- ⁹ <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/apprenticeship/facts-data.htm>
- ¹⁰ [Educational Attainment | Stronger Nation](#)
- ¹¹ <https://www.wtcsystem.edu/assets/WTCS-Outcomes-Based-Funding-2024-25.pdf>
- ¹² <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/business-services/>
- ¹³ <https://business.wisconsin.edu>
- ¹⁴ <https://jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/pub/countyprofiles>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.wtcsystem.edu/assets/WTCS-Outcomes-Based-Funding-2024-25.pdf>
- ¹⁶ [BY Report FY25 FINAL.pdf](#)
- ¹⁷ [BY Report FY25 FINAL.pdf](#)
- ¹⁸ <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dwd/publications/dvr/pdf/dvr-19625-2025-p.pdf>
- ¹⁹ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/grants/state/jvsg/unteer>
- ²⁰ <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf>
- ²¹ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1>



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