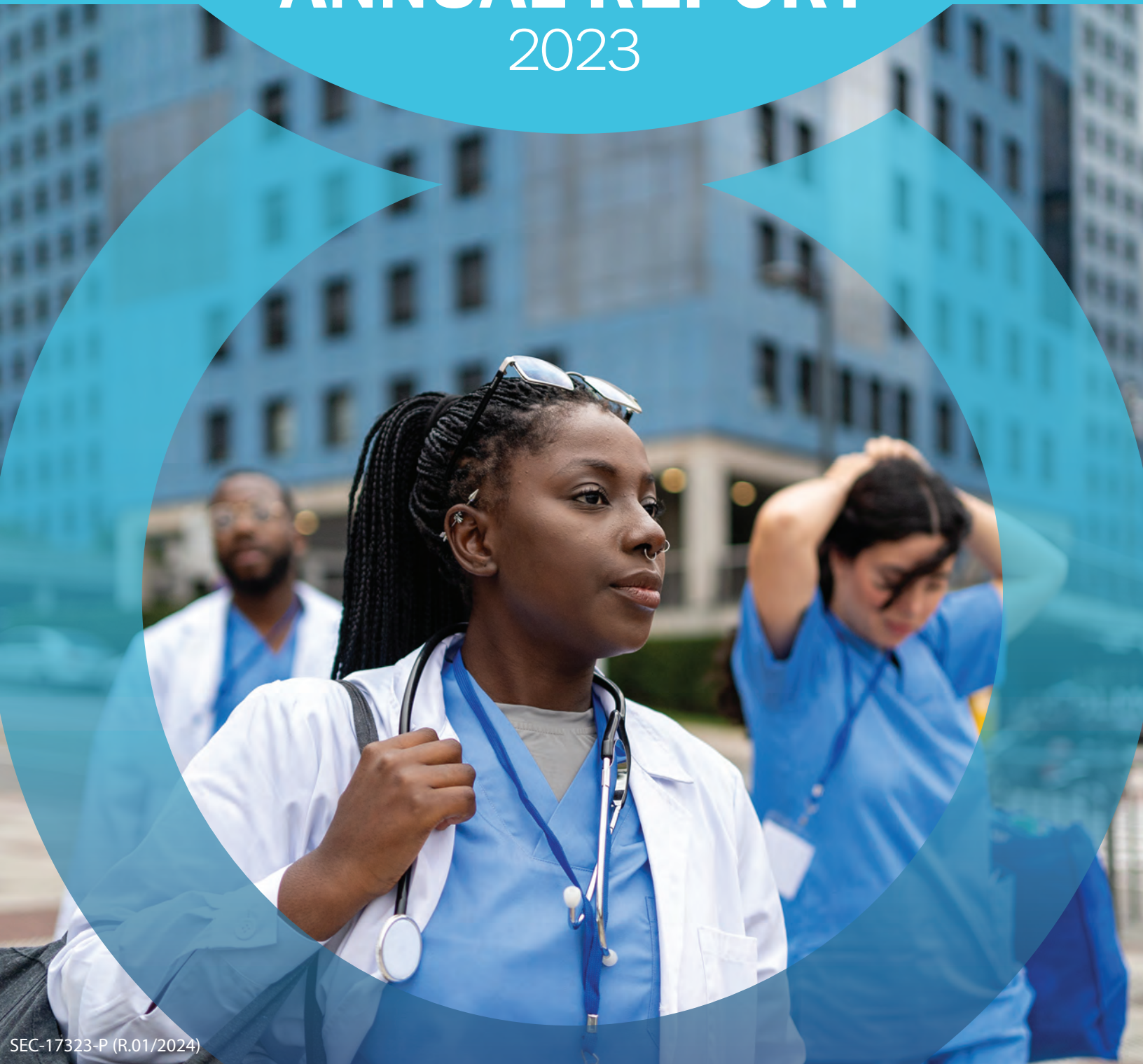




# WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

## **ANNUAL REPORT** 2023



# CONTENTS

---

1 WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

3 DELIVERING HISTORIC RESULTS

4 **ADVANCING WORKERS, EMPLOYERS & JOB SEEKERS**  
Worker Misclassification Campaign  
Winning with Wisconsin's Workforce  
Disability Employment

9 **LEADING, COLLABORATING, INNOVATING**  
Workforce Solutions Initiative  
UI Modernization Mileposts  
Governor's Task Force on Workforce & Artificial Intelligence

13 **2023 WISCONSIN FAST FORWARD GRANTS**

14 **DIVISION UPDATES**  
Administrative Services  
Employment and Training  
Equal Rights  
Unemployment Insurance  
Vocational Rehabilitation  
Worker's Compensation

20 **NOTES**



Dec. 29, 2023

The Honorable Tony Evers  
Governor of the State of Wisconsin  
115 East, State Capitol Building  
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Gov. Evers:

On behalf of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD), I am honored to share news of a record-breaking year, marked by important progress for Wisconsin's workers, employers, and job seekers.

From a new record low unemployment rate of 2.4% in April and May to an all-time high of 3,020,300 nonfarm jobs in November, DWD and its partners efficiently delivered effective and inclusive workforce services to the people of Wisconsin. Highlights of this collaboration among employers, government, educational institutions, and workers included:

- A record high of 16,384 Registered Apprentices enrolled in 2023.<sup>1</sup>
- A record high of 8,357 Youth Apprentices enrolled during the 2022-23 school year, with a record 5,719 employer sponsors participating.
- Record high disability employment, with 178,337 working age individuals with disabilities employed.
- A record high of 136,000 construction jobs in September.
- Continued customer service modernization efforts, with the introduction of a new online work permit application for younger workers, an online case portal for Equal Rights Division consumers, and ongoing security improvements to the Unemployment Insurance system.<sup>2,3</sup>
- An 8.4% decline in worker's compensation insurance rates, the eighth consecutive annual decline, saving Wisconsin employers some \$148 million in premiums.
- Competitive grant awards including \$11.25 million in federal funds to strengthen and modernize the Unemployment Insurance system, \$6.1 million to enroll more individuals in vocational rehabilitation services, and \$806,379 to continue expanding Wisconsin Apprenticeship.<sup>4,5,6</sup>
- A milestone for the Evers' Administration's historic, \$158 million Workforce Solutions Initiative, with workforce training and support services delivered to more than 33,000 Wisconsin residents since inception.

Throughout the year, DWD also expanded its focus on the workforce of the future, launching the Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence and connecting 2,300 employers and community leaders with technology and training resources through the Winning with Wisconsin's Workforce event series. In the spirit of service to the people of Wisconsin, we look forward to continued collaboration, innovation, and achievement in 2024.

Sincerely,



Secretary-designee, Amy Pechacek  
Department of Workforce Development



# WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

## MISSION

DWD efficiently delivers effective and inclusive services to meet Wisconsin's diverse workforce needs, and advocates for the protection and economic advancement of all Wisconsin workers, employers, and job seekers.

## VISION

DWD envisions a thriving Wisconsin economy in which:

- All workers are treated fairly, with dignity and respect;
- Employers, government, educational institutions, and workers collaborate to ensure workforce programs meet current and future needs; and
- Every job provides the wages and benefits necessary to support workers' basic needs, invest in their future, and actively engage with their families and communities.

## ABOUT DWD

DWD is a state agency charged with building and strengthening Wisconsin's workforce in the 21st century and beyond.

The department's primary responsibilities include providing job services, training and employment assistance to people looking for work, while aiding employers in the search for the necessary workers to fill current job openings.

DWD offers a wide variety of employment programs that help connect employers and job seekers, secure jobs for people with disabilities, and assist people with low-incomes and the long-term unemployed in achieving sustainable employment outcomes. The department promotes employment in the state through Wisconsin Job Centers, links youth with jobs of tomorrow, protects and enforces worker's rights, processes unemployment claims, and ensures workers compensation claims are paid in accordance with the law.

Top: DWD Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek takes a lesson in welding basics from Northwood Technical College Mobile Welding Lab Instructor Keith Burns at the lab's ribbon cutting event in Webster on May 9. Middle: A Chippewa Valley Technical College student provides a welding demonstration at a mobile lab launch event in Bloomer on Oct. 9. Bottom: A high school student practices using a welding simulator at a Teens in Trades event held at Case High School in Racine on Oct. 6.



**PREPARING THE WORKFORCE**



**OF TODAY**



**AND TOMORROW**





## DWD by the Numbers

**58**

TOTAL NUMBER OF  
LOCATIONS

**1,600+\***

FULL-TIME  
EQUIVALENT POSITIONS

**\$615+ million\***

BUDGET

**\$340+ million\***

ACTIVE FEDERAL GRANTS

**\$31+ million\***

GRANT FUNDS AWARDED

AMY PECHACEK, SECRETARY-DESIGNEE

*\*Positions, locations, budget, and grants as of November 2023*

## SECRETARY'S OFFICE OVERVIEW

The Office of the Secretary is responsible for the day-to-day management of the department. This includes promoting the department's mission and carrying out its vision through the work of six agency divisions. The DWD Secretary's Office includes:

### Office of Legislative Affairs

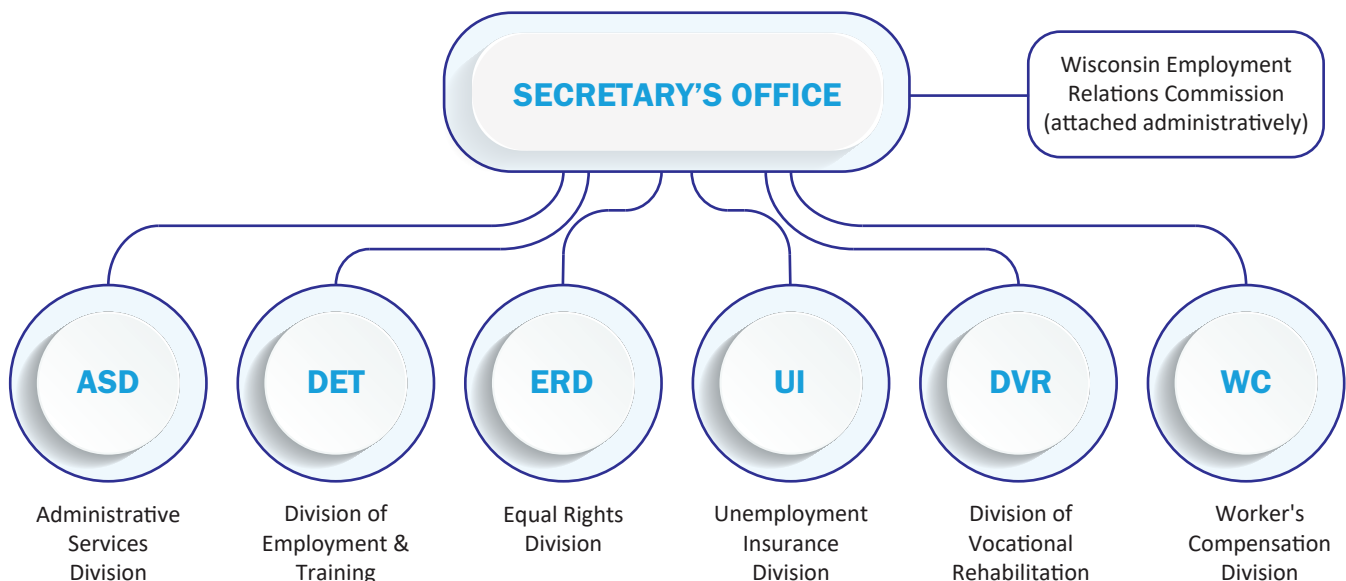
The Office of Legislative Affairs is the agency's primary contact for the state's 132 legislators and Congressional delegation. The office includes a legislative liaison and deputy legislative liaison, who respond to legislative inquiries made on behalf of Wisconsin's residents. The office tracks legislation that has the potential to affect the agency and meets with lawmakers and other stakeholders to share information about DWD's mission and services.

### Office of Communications

The Office of Communications shares department information and responds to requests for information from the news media in an accurate, timely, and comprehensive fashion. The office also works with the divisions to build awareness of the many programs, innovations, achievements, and issues related to DWD.

### Office of Chief Legal Counsel

The Office of Legal Counsel provides legal advice to the Office of the Secretary and the department's program managers, acts as legal custodian for public records, and oversees rulemaking for the department. The office also represents the department before administrative tribunals and acts as the department's litigation contact with the Department of Justice.



# DELIVERING HISTORIC RESULTS

From record low unemployment to record high participation in key workforce programming, DWD delivered historic results in 2023. Highlights include:

## UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

All-time low **2.4%** Wisconsin  
unemployment rate in April and May 2023



All-time high **3,020,300**  
nonfarm jobs in November 2023  
*(with previous new state record highs four months in a row,  
June-July-August-September 2023)*



All-time low **73,000** Wisconsin  
workers unemployed in April 2023  
*(since data collection began in January 1994)*



State record **16,384**  
Registered Apprentices enrolled in 2023 is  
an all-time high *(as of November 2023)*



State record high **8,357** Wisconsin  
Youth Apprentices enrolled during  
2022-23 school year



State record **5,719** employer  
sponsors for Youth Apprenticeship  
program during 2022-23 school year



**\$7,378,205** record high  
collections from illegally uninsured employers for  
the Uninsured Employers Fund *(as of December 2023)*

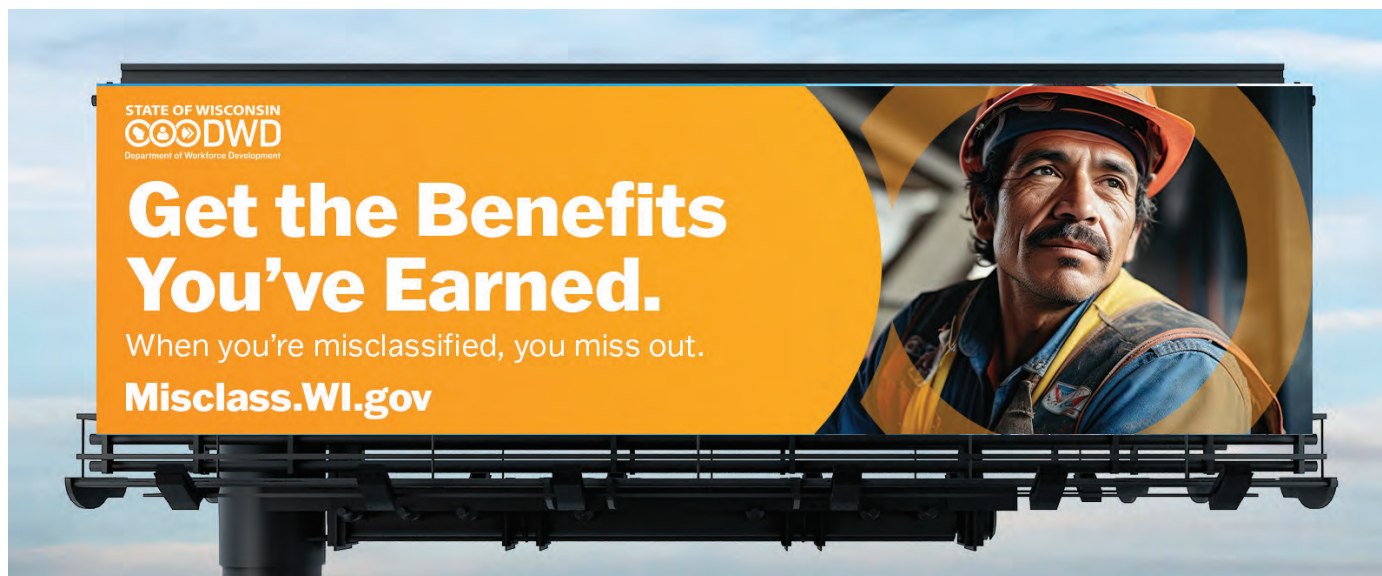


Record high **178,337**  
working age individuals with  
disabilities employed in Wisconsin  
*(reported in 2023, based on ACS 2022 data)*



# ADVANCING WORKERS, EMPLOYERS & JOB SEEKERS

## WORKER MISCLASSIFICATION CAMPAIGN



When workers are misclassified, everyone loses. Proper worker classification assures workers receive the benefits and protections they've earned while supporting employers who play by the rules.

DWD launched a worker misclassification campaign in October 2023 to build awareness of and help combat worker misclassification, a practice in which employees are incorrectly and illegally treated as independent contractors.<sup>7</sup> Under the law, workers are presumed to be employees unless an employer demonstrates the workers meet the legal criteria to be independent contractors.

As part of the campaign, DWD developed marketing and collateral materials in English and Spanish targeting audiences statewide, with a strong focus on Milwaukee, Madison, and Green Bay. Among the campaign highlights:

- Over **50%** of website traffic from Spanish language ads.
- Over **50%** of website traffic from the Milwaukee area.
- **400,000+** social media impressions resulting from top performing Spanish language ads.
- **21%** engagement rate for Spanish language digital display ads.
- Both **DIGITAL DISPLAYS** and **FACEBOOK ADS** resulted in click through rates higher than the industry standard.

**NEW** Worker Misclassification Webpage  
[dwd.wi.gov/misclassification](https://dwd.wi.gov/misclassification)

**6,156**  
Views

**4,914**  
Unique Visitors

*Data collected over duration of DWD worker misclassification campaign, Oct. 1 through Dec. 15, 2023.*





# ADVANCING WORKERS, EMPLOYERS & JOB SEEKERS WINNING WITH WISCONSIN'S WORKFORCE

In January 2023, DWD joined Gov. Evers in announcing "Winning with Wisconsin's Workforce," a statewide series of forums designed to highlight workforce development investments, available funding, resources to aid competitiveness, and local successes with worker recruitment and retention.<sup>8</sup>

The first round of free events provided an overview of key resources and labor market data, while the second quarter addressed employment barriers including affordable childcare, transportation, and housing. Third quarter events focused on promoting workforce participation through innovative workforce programming including Wisconsin Apprenticeship and employment services for veterans, teens, individuals with disabilities, and justice-involved individuals. The final round of 2023 focused on technical education and training programs, including the Wisconsin Fast Forward grant program.



**2,300+**

REGISTERED ATTENDEES



**27**

EVENTS IN 2023

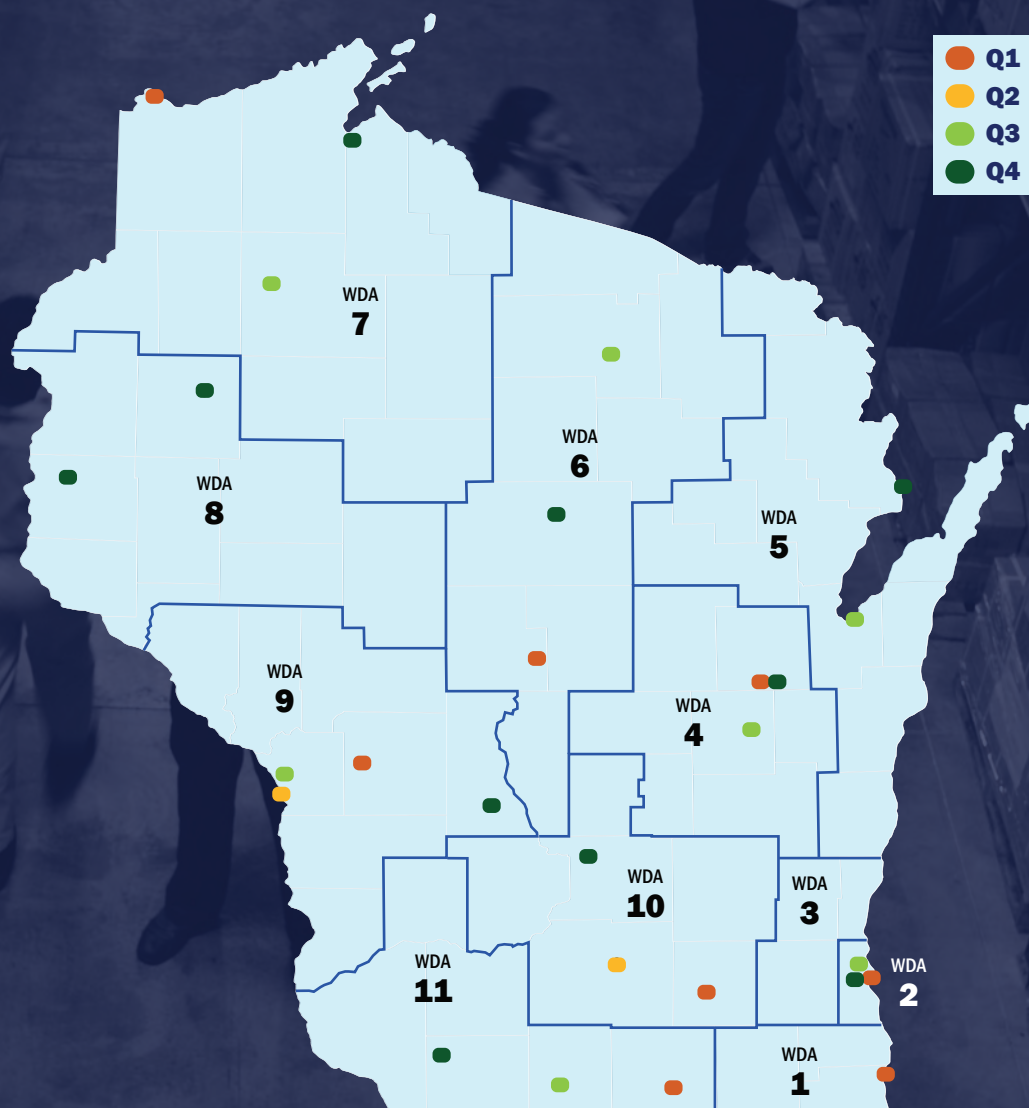


Event organizers and presenters pose for a group photo at the Winning with Wisconsin's Workforce forum held at the Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee on March 8, 2023. Left to right: DWD Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek, Employ Milwaukee Business Solutions Specialist Jeff McAlister, Employ Milwaukee Board Chair Carla Cross, Employ Milwaukee CEO Chytania Brown, Milwaukee World Festival President Sarah Panheri, Pabst Theater Group Executive Director Gary Witt, Wisconsin Restaurant Association President and CEO Kristine Hillmer, DWD Chief Economist Dennis Winters.



# REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

The Winning with Wisconsin's Workforce series was organized and implemented in partnership with the state's 11 regional workforce development boards, which include Southeastern Works, Employ Milwaukee, Inc., WOW Workforce Development Board, Fox Valley Workforce Development Board, Bay Area Workforce Development Board, North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board, Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board, West Central Works, Western Wisconsin Workforce Development Board, Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin, and the Southwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Board.



DWD Division of Employment and Training Administrator Michele Carter works to capture input from stakeholders during a small group discussion on workforce priorities and veterans' initiatives. SHARON VANORNY PHOTO



Some 200 workforce experts, employers, and educators are shown joining Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek, Wisconsin Technical College System President Morna K. Foy; and nine other cabinet agency leaders as part of a Winning with Wisconsin's Workforce event focused on workforce priorities and removing barriers. SHARON VANORNY PHOTO

# ADVANCING WORKERS, EMPLOYERS & JOB SEEKERS DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT

## Project SEARCH

Developed at Cincinnati Children's Hospital in 1996, Project SEARCH is a collaborative effort among state vocational rehabilitation agencies, area schools, local employers, and long-term care organizations to help young adults with disabilities gain marketable, competitive, and transferable skills that lead to employment.<sup>9</sup> Now offered at more than 600 unique sites across the U.S. and internationally, Wisconsin Project SEARCH currently offers programs at 28 business sites statewide.



Graduates from Froedtert Hospital Milwaukee's Project SEARCH program celebrated with DWD Deputy Secretary Pamela McGillivray on June 29.

Project SEARCH Sites	City
Andis Company	Sturtevant
Ascension Mercy Medical Center	Oshkosh
Ascension St. Elizabeth Hospital	Appleton
Aspirus Rhinelander Hospital	Rhinelander
Aspirus Riverview Hospital	Wisconsin Rapids
Aspirus Wausau Hospital	Wausau
Aurora BayCare Medical Center	Green Bay
Bellin/HSBS St. Vincent Hospital	Green Bay
Children's Wisconsin	Milwaukee
Essentia Health St. Mary's Hospital	Superior
Froedtert Hospital	Milwaukee
Gundersen Health System	La Crosse
Kalahari Resort	Baraboo
Marquardt Village	Watertown
Marshfield Clinic	Marshfield
Mayo Clinic Health	Eau Claire
Mercyhealth Hospital and Trauma Center	Janesville
Milwaukee County Zoo	Milwaukee
Mitchell International Airport	Milwaukee
ProHealth Waukesha Memorial Hospital	Waukesha
Rice Lake Weighing Systems	Rice Lake
River Falls Area Hospital	River Falls
ThedaCare Regional Medical Center	Appleton
West Bend Mutual Insurance	West Bend
UW Health/Madison VA Hospital	Madison
UW-Platteville	Platteville
UW-Stevens Point	Stevens Point
UW-Stout	Menomonie

2023 NDEAM Award Recipient	City
Angel's Pet World	River Falls
Barry Richardson Farms	Milladore
Bay Area Rural Transit	Ashland
Canteen Vending Services	Appleton
Chartwells Higher Education	River Falls
Conagra Brands	Beaver Dam
Culver's-Burlington	Burlington
Ducommun	Appleton
Duluth Trading Company-La Crosse	La Crosse
Festival Foods-Portage	Portage
Fleet Farm	Antigo
Fond du Lac County Historical Society	Fond du Lac
Hansen's IGA Markets	Black River Falls
Heritage Lake Country	Hartland
Lakeshore Chinooks	Menomonee Falls
McDonald's SKCO	West Allis
Medford Motors, Inc.	Medford
Meijer	Sheboygan
Milaeger's	Sturtevant
Milton Senior Living	Milton
New Perspectives Senior Living Center	Howard
Panera Bread	West Bend
Red Robin-Greenfield	Greenfield
Saputo USA	Lancaster
T. J. Maxx	Sturgeon Bay
Tractor Supply Company-Viroqua	Viroqua

## National Disability Employment Awareness Month

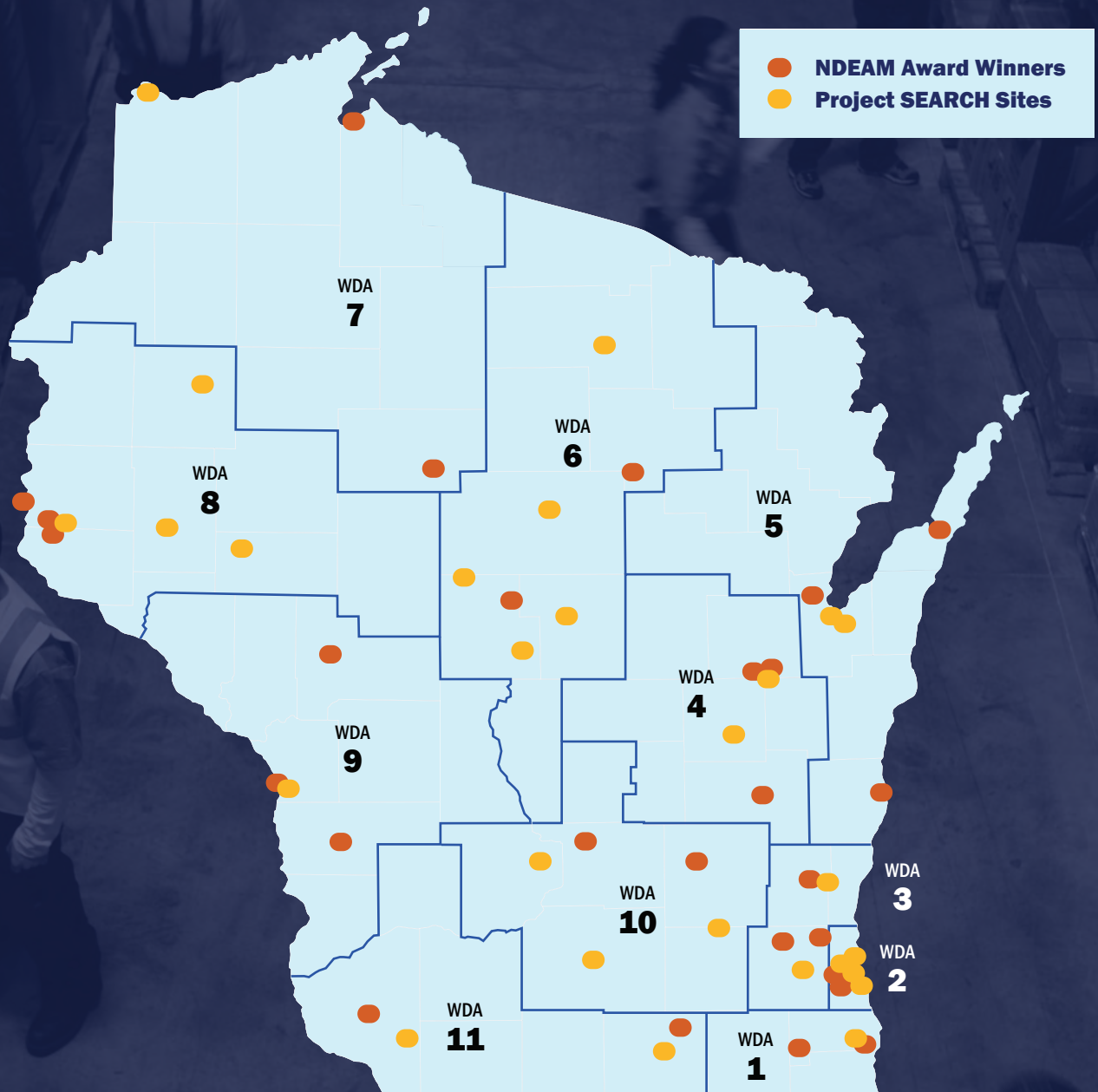
Gov. Tony Evers proclaimed October 2023 National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) in Wisconsin to acknowledge the vital role people with disabilities play in supporting and enhancing the state's economy. Observed each October, NDEAM celebrates the contributions of America's workers with disabilities and showcases supportive, inclusive employment practices that benefit employers and employees. This year, DWD joined Gov. Evers in presenting NDEAM Exemplary Employer Awards to 26 Wisconsin businesses for their outstanding efforts to recruit and hire workers with disabilities.



Dustin Phillips, far left, and Michael Paulson, far right, were hired to work at Medford Motors and helped the company celebrate receiving Gov. Evers' Exemplary Employer Award at an NDEAM recognition event on Oct. 10.



# PROJECT SEARCH & NDEAM ACROSS WISCONSIN



In July 2023, Wisconsin proudly hosted the 16th Annual Project SEARCH National Conference. Held in Milwaukee, the conference attracted over 800 Project SEARCH site coordinators and support staff from across the country.



# LEADING, COLLABORATING, INNOVATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS INITIATIVE

The Workforce Solutions Initiative, a groundbreaking \$158 million investment by Gov. Tony Evers to address the state's workforce needs and support innovative pandemic recovery efforts, includes three programs: Workforce Innovation Grants, Worker Advancement Initiative, and Worker Connection Program.<sup>10</sup> Throughout 2023, these programs have delivered workforce training and supportive services to tens of thousands of Wisconsin residents.

## 33,000+

WISCONSIN RESIDENTS REACHED THROUGH THE  
WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS INITIATIVE

## Workforce Innovation Grants

The \$128 million Workforce Innovation Grant Program is a collaboration between DWD and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). The program provides up to \$10 million grants to regional organizations to design and implement innovative plans to tackle pressing, regional workforce challenges.<sup>10</sup> Together with WEDC, DWD has awarded 27 Workforce Innovation Grants across the state focusing on improvements to childcare, housing, transportation, and workforce training.

## Workforce Innovation Grant Success Story

Bringing to life a key component of a more than \$4.2 million Workforce Innovation Grant (WIG) awarded in June 2022, MobilISE and Employ Milwaukee are working to improve access to reliable and affordable transportation and childcare. The innovative FlexRide for Working Parents is an expansion of FlexRide Milwaukee, which provides Milwaukee families free rides from home to daycare, daycare to work, and back. Eligible program participants also receive subsidies to reduce the cost of childcare.

The expanded service comes amid continued growth for FlexRide Milwaukee, which MobilISE began operating in March 2023. Fueled by funding through WIG and other partners, FlexRide is now providing more than 3,500 rides per month, delivering a convenient and affordable “last mile” transportation solution for those without easy access to a car or working at employers beyond the reach of transit. Rides are \$3 or less each way and free to and from “transit hubs” at select Milwaukee County Transit System bus stops.

FlexRide for Working Parents, an extension of the FlexRide Milwaukee program, officially launched with a ribbon cutting ceremony on Sept. 18. Pictured from left to right: MobilISE Chair Kathy Ehley, Employ Milwaukee CEO Chytania Brown, Malaika Early Learning Center Executive Director Tamara Johnson, MobilISE Executive Director Dave Steele, DWD Assistant Deputy Secretary Jennifer Sereno, WEDC Deputy Secretary Sam Ridders, and Wisconsin State Senator LaTonya Johnson.



## Worker Advancement Initiative Highlights

Administered by DWD and managed by Wisconsin's 11 workforce development boards, the \$20 million Worker Advancement Initiative is designed to serve Wisconsinites whose employment was negatively impacted by the pandemic, as well as those who were not attached to or not successful in the labor market prior to the pandemic.<sup>10</sup> The initiative offers subsidized employment and skills training opportunities with local employers. As of November 2023, the program had served more than 3,800 program participants statewide.

### Worker Advancement Success Story

When war broke out in Ukraine in February 2022, Yevhen Stanishevskiy was residing with his wife and two teenage daughters in the capital city of Kyiv. His parents had legally immigrated to the United States in 2000 and had settled in Milwaukee. Stanishevskiy was able to secure work authorization for himself and his wife, and his family moved to Milwaukee in spring 2022 and began looking for work.

Stanishevskiy was a branch network manager with a bank in Ukraine but didn't have experience in the U.S. banking system. When he saw the BankWork\$ training on Employ Milwaukee's website, he quickly signed up for a pre-screening interview and was accepted into the program in April 2023. Supported through the Worker Advancement Initiative-funded Skillful Transitions program, he successfully completed the BankWork\$ certified preapprenticeship training in June.



Yevhen Stanishevskiy (left) and Jovo Potkonjak (right)

"I was so impressed with the diversity of the students in my class," Stanishevskiy said. "The instructor brought banking experience to her teaching role, and the staff helped me find other resources to help me succeed...I am really looking forward to rebuilding my life here and using my banking skills".

"Yevhen was so eager to translate his previous banking skills to the U.S. financial job market," said Jovo Potkonjak, BankWork\$ Manager. "There's no doubt he will be successful here."

### Worker Connection Program Highlights

The \$10 million Worker Connection Program provides support for individuals working to re-engage in the workforce post-pandemic.<sup>10</sup> Operating in 11 Wisconsin counties in the Milwaukee and Green Bay areas, the program is designed to match job seekers with training and work opportunities in sectors with higher wages and demand by connecting them with career navigators. Targeted employment sectors include transportation, distribution and logistics, business and professional services, and information technology. As of December 2023, Worker Connection has served nearly 2,500 area residents.



Delfino Zamora

### Worker Connection Success Story

In August 2023, Delfino Zamora met DWD Career Navigator Ashley Hartjes at his local public library in Sheboygan. Zamora had worked in manufacturing for many years when a health issue limited his ability to perform physical labor. Without other work history or education, he searched for a new job on his own but ultimately faced long-term unemployment. Following an initial assessment, Hartjes connected Zamora to the Worker Connection Program to provide him additional employment services and support.

While engaging in Worker Connection's guided discovery process, a tool used by the program to match participants to jobs that best suit their strengths and values, Zamora identified an interest in truck driving. Hartjes shared local labor market information, including details on training programs offered locally through the program, and determined Zamora would benefit from enrolling in CDL training, to which he agreed. Following completion of his training, Zamora obtained his Class A license on Sept. 15, 2023. Soon after, he interviewed for and was offered a new job driving between Wisconsin and Texas.

"I am very thankful that I get this chance to better myself," Zamora said. "I am taking the opportunity to make a better way of living and I will encourage others as well."



# LEADING, COLLABORATING, INNOVATING UI MODERNIZATION MILEPOSTS

DWD continued its comprehensive modernization efforts throughout 2023, building on efforts launched in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the largest of modernization efforts is the replacement of a 1970's era COBOL-based mainframe with a modern, secure, and agile system to process Unemployment Insurance (UI) claims. In addition to previously awarded federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act, in September 2023, DWD was awarded \$11.25 million from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to further strengthen and modernize its UI system.<sup>4</sup> Since 2021, DWD has received more than \$28 million from DOL to improve equity, reduce fraud and modernize the state's UI system.

In December 2023, a major upgrade to UI's Employer Portal was initiated to modernize the portal's design and functionality, including secure messaging and document upload features. Additional examples for 2023 include:

- **Benefit Calculation and Liability Engine:** The benefit calculation and liability engine will determine the amount of benefits an individual claimant should receive. Throughout 2023, work focused on identifying all necessary components to process a claim in the modern system.
- **Adjudication Workflow Prototype:** This is a guided workflow for cases that need manual review and intervention, including a decision by an adjudicator, to ensure all steps and documentation have been completed. The workflow walks the adjudicator through the process step-by-step and prompts the adjudicator to provide the appropriate supporting materials for that item. Additional development work to establish the full process will continue into 2024.
- **Adjudication Scheduler:** The adjudication scheduler is a tool that allows automatic case assignment and routing based on the issue type, adjudicator skill level, and resource availability. Development was completed in 2023, with testing under way near the end of 2023 and plans to roll this out in 2024.
- **Accessibility Assessments to Improve User Experience:** DWD adjusted contrast on the UI claimant login page to increase accessibility for people experiencing color blindness or low vision. Additional changes to the underlying information of the webpage have made content more accessible through screen readers.
- **Streamlined Processes:** Wisconsin took steps toward implementing a knowledge-based tool that, once in production, will centralize policy and process so it is more searchable and accessible to staff at all levels within UI. In 2023, UI completed three of four phases toward implementing a dashboard to house a comprehensive repository of UI identity fraud scan investigation results and adapt to newly identified trends in identity fraud schemes.

The screenshot shows the login page for Wisconsin Unemployment Insurance. The header includes the DWD logo and the text "Wisconsin Unemployment Insurance" and "Department of Workforce Development". Below the header, the page title is "Wisconsin Unemployment Insurance Benefit Services". The main content area has a light blue background. It includes a login form with fields for "Username" and "Password", a "Forgot your Username/Password?" link, and a "Log In" button. To the right of the login form, there is a section titled "Online services are available at the following times:" which lists the hours of operation for different days of the week.

This screenshot shows the same login page as the one above, but with a dark orange background. The layout and content are identical, including the DWD logo, the page title, the login form, and the online services availability section.

DWD adjusted contrast on the UI claimant login page to increase accessibility for people experiencing color blindness or low vision. The new design, top, features a light blue background; the old, bottom, had a dark orange hue.

# LEADING, COLLABORATING, INNOVATING GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE ON WORKFORCE & ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

In August 2023, Gov. Tony Evers issued an Executive Order creating the Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence.

The effort brings together 30 leaders from business, agriculture, education, technology, labor, workforce development, and government to identify policies and investments that will advance equity and economic opportunity for Wisconsin workers, employers, and job seekers by harnessing the power of artificial intelligence (AI). The task force is led by DWD Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek with additional leadership from Department of Administration Secretary Kathy Blumenfeld and Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes. The task force heard from some of the world's foremost AI experts at its first meeting on Oct. 30 in Madison, followed by subcommittee meetings on Nov. 20. The group met again Dec. 4 in Milwaukee and heard from additional experts before completing additional subcommittee work. The group is working to develop recommendations for Gov. Evers to consider as he crafts the state's next biennial budget.



The Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence convened for its inaugural meeting at the Concourse Hotel in Madison on Monday, Oct. 30, 2023. Top left: DWD Assistant Deputy Secretary Jennifer Sereno speaks with Task Force member Charles Isbell. Top right: WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes, DWD Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek, and Wisconsin Technical College System President Morna Foy share notes from the meeting. Bottom: Task Force members gather for a group photo. Back row (left to right): Karl Reichenberger, Kaushal Chari, Jack Salzwedel, Tyler Clark, Trina Zanow, Charles Isbell, Morna Foy, Israel Squires, Dave Mickelson, Tim Fiocchi, Keyanna Conner. Front row (left to right): Ann Franz, Nadiyah Johnson, Stephanie Bloomingdale, Missy Hughes, Amy Pechacek, Kathy Blumenfeld, Jeri Koester. SHARON VANORNY PHOTO



# 2023 WISCONSIN FAST FORWARD GRANTS

The Wisconsin Fast Forward (WFF) program is an innovative talent development solution driven by Wisconsin businesses to train and retain highly skilled workers. The WFF standard grant program awards funds to Wisconsin businesses to reimburse costs associated with occupational training. The grants cover training costs for those who are unemployed or underemployed, as well as for incumbent workers.

The WFF expanded grant program reimburses school districts for the costs of technical education equipment used in vocational training for advanced manufacturing fields. The grant program helps students transition from high school into the workforce by supporting technical education and reduces higher education costs by providing dual enrollment credits and technical endorsements on high school diplomas.

## Expanded Grants

**\$700,699**

DOLLARS AWARDED

**21**

AWARDS GRANTED

**3,932**

STUDENTS IMPACTED

## Standard Grants

**\$2,143,896**

DOLLARS AWARDED

**17**

AWARDS GRANTED

**934**

WORKERS TRAINED

### Wisconsin Fast Forward Expanded Grants

Name	Award Amount	Award Amount
<b>February 2023 Recipients</b>		
Arrowhead Union High School	\$20,750	Hartland
Cedar Grove-Belgium School District	\$50,000	Cedar Grove
Cornell School District	\$50,000	Cornell
Elmbrook Schools	\$14,542	Brookfield
Gilman School District	\$50,000	Gilman
Grafton School District	\$35,097	Grafton
Mukwonago Area School District	\$34,925	Mukwonago
Muskego-Norway School District	\$50,000	Muskego
Nicolet Union High School District	\$21,190	Glendale
Pardeeville School District	\$8,885	Pardeeville
School District of Superior	\$50,000	Superior
School District of West De Pere	\$34,760	De Pere
Watertown Unified School District	\$42,530	Watertown
Whitewater Unified School District	\$10,500	Whitewater

### May 2023 Recipients

Edgerton School District	\$10,000	Edgerton
Lake Geneva-Genoa City Union H.S. District	\$47,877	Lake Geneva
Muskego-Norway School District	\$49,839	Muskego
Peshtigo School District	\$40,575	Peshtigo
St. Francis School District	\$50,000	St. Francis
Tomah Area School District	\$13,334	Tomah
Williams Bay School District	\$15,895	Williams Bay

### Wisconsin Fast Forward Standard Grants

Name	Award Amount	Award Amount
<b>January 2023 Recipients</b>		
Elevate Medical Solutions	\$10,595	Madison
Fincantieri Marine Group, LLC	\$313,340	Green Bay
Green Bay Area Public Schools	\$217,800	Green Bay
Latitude Corp.	\$43,125	Verona
SSM Health Wisconsin	\$266,530	Madison
<b>July 2023 Recipients</b>		
Accord Manufacturing, Inc.	\$52,500	Jackson
Arla Foods, Inc.	\$178,936	Kaukauna
Building Automation Products, Inc.	\$60,575	Gays Mills
Custom Service Plastics, Inc.	\$49,240	Lake Geneva
Mitotec Precision, Inc.	\$41,250	Necedah
Mueller Sports Medicine, Inc.	\$145,950	Prairie du Sac
Parker Plastics, Inc.	\$33,770	Pleasant Prairie
Sellars Absorbent Materials, Inc.	\$237,295	Milwaukee
SMC Ltd.	\$20,500	Menomonie
TCLAD Inc.	\$195,720	Prescott
Teel Plastics, LLC	\$147,320	Baraboo
Westby Cooperative Creamery	\$129,450	Westby



# DIVISION UPDATES

## ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

The Administrative Services Division (ASD) provides management and program support to DWD's divisions, including budget, facilities, finance, information technology, purchasing and procurement, project management services and solutions, and incident management and continuity of operations.

In 2023, ASD:

- Completed 43 IT projects.
- Supported numerous improvements, including UI Modernization, Job Center of Wisconsin (JCW) Modernization, and the ERD case portal with MyWisconsin ID.
- Created and implemented dashboards and reports providing DWD's divisions with more performance information, increased accessibility to data and visualizations, and more.
- Processed over 125,000 pieces of mail monthly, well over 1 million pieces for the year.
- Gained recognition for two ASD leaders – Neeraj Kulkarni and Margaret McGrath – who earned Patriot Awards from the U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) program. The award reflects efforts to support citizen soldiers and airmen through measures including flexible schedules, time off prior to and after deployment, and granting leaves of absence if needed.

### Engagement Survey Highlights

DWD created and distributed an Employee Engagement Survey in February. With some 70% of staff responding, the survey showed further growth in many areas of engagement. Staff identified further career development opportunities as a top priority, with other areas noted. All areas will be addressed in the 2023-2024 Employee Engagement Action Plan.

### Staff Development Initiative

DWD's Employee Engagement Team created the DWD Training Calendar in response to employee engagement survey results. Courses are updated quarterly and selected based on results of the 2023 Training Needs Assessment. In 2023, 14 classes were curated and offered to DWD staff based on the assessment.



DWD celebrated Take Your Child to Work Day on April 27, 2023, with events focused on "Building a Better Child Care Center." Events were held at GEF I in Madison and at DWD locations in Appleton and Menomonee Falls. Children in attendance learned about DWD's work to help Wisconsin job seekers connect with new skills and overcome barriers, including lack of child care.

# EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

The Division of Employment and Training (DET) oversees the majority of workforce services administered by DWD, including the state labor exchange system and the Job Center of Wisconsin, analyzes and distributes labor market information, monitors migrant worker services, manages the Wisconsin Fast Forward grant program, and operates state apprenticeship programs.<sup>11</sup>

## Wisconsin Apprenticeship Launches RN, Ophthalmic Assistant Apprenticeships

In April 2023, Wisconsin Apprenticeship announced the launch of the nation's first registered nurse apprenticeship focused on certifying individuals who enter the apprenticeship with no previous nursing certification.<sup>1</sup> The four-year program incorporates an associate degree as well as compliance with rigorous nursing industry certification standards. UW Health of Madison is piloting the registered nurse apprenticeship with Madison College.

Also during the year, Wisconsin had the nation's first registered apprentices enter an ophthalmic assistant pathway through a partnership with SSM Health in Madison and Madison College. The registered nurse and ophthalmic assistant apprenticeships follow other successful healthcare pathways in Registered Apprenticeship, including medical assistant and pharmacy technician.

Both programs helped Wisconsin Apprenticeship reach an all-time high of 16,384 apprentices as of November 2023.



Wisconsin's first ever class of Registered Nurse apprentices celebrate with a program kick off ceremony held at UW Health in Madison on Aug. 24.

WI APPRENTICESHIP KEY METRICS <sup>1</sup>	2022	2023*
Active Registered Apprentices	15,972	16,797
New Apprentices	4,567	4,623
Active DOC Apprentices	53	48
Apprenticeship Employers	3,002	2,984
Certified Pre-Apprenticeship Programs	19	25

\*2023 data as of 12/19/2023. Figures may increase as additional contract actions are tallied for 2023.

## Vets Ready Employer Initiative

Gov. Tony Evers in November announced an unprecedented 17 employers participating in the Vets Ready Employer Initiative for the year.<sup>12</sup> The initiative encourages employers to build a support system within their workplace, hire and retain more veterans, and connect to veterans in the community and their families. DWD's Office of Veteran Employment Services reviews annual nominations and recognizes businesses that meet certain criteria with either a gold or silver certification in one of three categories: small, medium, and large. Award program partners include the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, Wisconsin Department of Disabled American Veterans, and the Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce.



DWD Deputy Secretary Pamela McGillivray (far right) and DWD Division of Employment and Training Administrator Michele Carter (far left) recognize six of the state's 17 Vets Ready Initiative 2023 award winners at a ceremony held in Milwaukee on Nov. 8.



**55,500+**

JOB CENTER VISITORS  
STATEWIDE

**530**

JOB CENTER EVENTS  
HOSTED ACROSS THE STATE

**16,650+**

ATTENDEES AT  
JOB CENTER EVENTS

**1,170**

INDIVIDUALS SERVED BY  
JOB CENTER STAFF AT  
WISCONSIN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

## 2023 KEY METRICS



# EQUAL RIGHTS

The Equal Rights Division (ERD) continues to be one of the most productive fair employment practices agencies in the nation, investigating, mediating, and adjudicating complaints under 40 different laws, including laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations, family and medical leave, wage and hour rights, employment of minors, and business closings.

## Welcome to the Workforce

To celebrate Welcome to the Workforce month as proclaimed by Gov. Evers in April 2023, DWD's Equal Rights Division (ERD) hosted a panel discussion featuring representatives from Wisconsin's Youth Apprenticeship program, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Throughout the month, ERD staff delivered virtual and in-person events discussing minor labor and the rights and responsibilities of employers of minor workers with stakeholders across the state. ERD also released two new Welcome to the Workforce videos in 2023.

## Online Work Permit Application System

DWD in May 2023 launched a new online work permit application for young workers, eliminating the need to travel to brick-and-mortar locations to obtain permits. In all, 32,616 work permits were issued from Jan. 1 through Oct. 31, 2023. The online system has increased accessibility in underserved areas or locations without nearby access to brick-and-mortar sites where work permits were issued prior to the launch of the online system.



Matthew White, Director of the Bureau of Investigations in DWD's Equal Rights Division, spoke with parents and students about minor worker rights at a Welcome to the Workforce Month event in April 2023.

## Modernized Tools

- ERD expanded its online research portal in 2023 to include data on lost wages that the division collects on behalf of Wisconsin workers. The wage collection report shows DWD collected more than \$5.6 million in lost wages over the past five years.
- In June, DWD published the 2023 Equal Rights Decision Digest online with updated case law and new search features to ease navigation through the more than 600-page publication.
- ERD added six new videos to its online video library in 2023. In total, ERD's Welcome to the Workforce and 60-second Questions videos have attracted more than 6,500 views.

## EQUAL RIGHTS DIVISION

## 2023 KEY METRICS

**32,600+**

WORK PERMITS ISSUED  
STATEWIDE

**56%**

OF ALL COMPLAINTS  
FILED ONLINE  
(COMPARED TO 49% IN 2022)

**\$700,600+**

IN WAGES RECOVERED  
STATEWIDE

**4%**

INCREASE IN  
SUCCESSFUL MEDIATIONS

# UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

The Unemployment Insurance (UI) program's primary roles are to provide temporary economic assistance to individuals who find themselves unemployed through no fault of their own and who are actively seeking work and provide economic stability in the community during periods of economic downturn. The UI program is financed by federal and state taxes paid by employers who are subject to federal and state UI laws.<sup>13</sup> In 1932, Wisconsin was the first state to enact a UI law to mitigate the adverse effects of the Great Depression.

## UI Community Partner Toolkit

The UI Division continued to work closely in 2023 with the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) Center for Employment Security Education and Research Inc. to expand access to UI services for people with challenges including limited internet availability, limited digital literacy, and limited English proficiency.

This work reached a major milestone in 2023 with the completion and rollout of an online toolkit for nonprofits and other community partners that help people overcome barriers and access services. The project will continue in 2024 with financial support from a U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Tiger Team grant funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).<sup>14</sup> Wisconsin was one of the first states in the nation to apply for this technical support in 2021.

## Wisconsin Exceeds UI Navigator Grant Performance Standards

In June 2022, DWD received \$3 million in competitive grant funding from DOL to increase equitable access to Wisconsin's UI program.<sup>2</sup> DWD partnered with United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS) to support improved access for those shown to face barriers in receiving UI benefits, including migrant and seasonal farmworkers, individuals with limited English proficiency, and individuals living in rural and urban areas who have been historically underserved.

As of Sept. 30, 2023, the project deliverables required over the 36-month Navigator Grant period have been surpassed across the following categories.

**4,246**

PARTICIPANTS SERVED,  
SURPASSING GRANT  
REQUIREMENT OF **2,100**

**203**

COMMUNITY OUTREACH  
ACTIVITIES, SURPASSING  
GRANT REQUIREMENT OF **60**

**8,517**

PRINT MATERIALS  
DISTRIBUTED, SURPASSING  
GRANT REQUIREMENT OF **4,065**





# VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) helps individuals with disabilities achieve their employment potential – including finding a job, keeping a job, or getting a better job – by providing services and supports to overcome employment barriers.<sup>15</sup>

## Key Metrics

In state fiscal year 2023 (July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023), DVR helped 3,124 Wisconsin residents with disabilities achieve successful DVR case closure. DVR successfully closes a case once the consumer has maintained employment for at least 90 days in a position they agree meets their chosen career goal. Additional metrics can be found in the table.

DVR OUTCOMES DATA <sup>15</sup>	SFY 2022	SFY 2023
Applicants for DVR Services	10,160	11,563
Average Hourly Wage	\$14.26	\$15.65
Average Hours per Week	24.92	24.54
Eligibility Determinations Completed	9,042	10,243

## Competitive Integrated Employment Study Findings

DWD partnered with the state Department of Health Services and Department of Public Instruction to publish the Competitive Integrated Employment SFY 2023 Report. The report shows that collaboration among the three agencies is supporting higher employment rates for Wisconsin residents with disabilities working in competitive settings.

Under 2017 Wisconsin Act 178, the three state agencies collaborate in the development of a joint plan and annual reporting to increase Competitive Integrated Employment opportunities. CIE is defined as an individual with disability working in a full or part-time position with individuals without a disability.

## Career Pathways Advancement Initiative

During the year, DVR successfully met its five-year goal of enrolling 500 individuals into the Career Pathways Advancement (CPA) Initiative grant.<sup>5</sup> A career pathway is a roadmap that can include a series of jobs that help a person advance in their career, including training and education that can occur in steps.

Wisconsin was one of eight states to receive a CPA grant from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). The original \$14 million grant was awarded to DVR in 2021 to help individuals with disabilities advance in a career in one of four career pathways: construction, healthcare, information technology, and manufacturing. DVR met its enrollment goal quickly, prompting DOE to award DVR an additional \$6.1 million in 2023 to enroll additional individuals in the program, which helped DVR avoid placing job seekers on a waitlist for DVR services.<sup>5</sup>

DVR also used CPA grant funding to create an Accommodation Training Library to help employers successfully hire and retain employees with disabilities. The online training library and more information about the grant can be found online at [dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/career-pathways](http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/career-pathways).

## CPA BY THE NUMBERS (as of November 2023)

**541**

DVR consumers are enrolled as participants in the CPA program:

- Healthcare – 54%
- Information Technology – 25%
- Manufacturing – 12%
- Construction – 9%

**464**

participants have started a training program

**32%**

of participants are co-enrolled in another WIOA program

**260**

participants have obtained a measurable skill gain, such as a report card or other milestone that shows progress in a training or educational program

# WORKER'S COMPENSATION

The Worker's Compensation Division (WC) administers programs designed to advance worker protections by ensuring that injured workers receive prompt payment of required benefits from private insurance companies or self-insured employers. The division also encourages rehabilitation and reemployment for injured workers and promotes the reduction of work-related injuries, illnesses, and deaths.

## Council Passage of Agreed-Upon Bills

On Nov. 29, the Worker's Compensation Advisory Council voted to send two agreed-upon bills to the Wisconsin Legislature. Since 1911, a citizen advisory council has existed to assist the department and Wisconsin Legislature in amending the state Worker's Compensation Act, which has served as a national model. Statutory language referencing the council on worker's compensation and its role to advise the department and submit amendments each session of the Legislature went into effect more than a half-century ago, in 1968. The bills put forth in 2023 now head to the Wisconsin Legislature for review. Gov. Tony Evers signed the most recently adopted agreed-upon bill in April 2022.

### Uninsured Employers Fund Reaches \$100 Million Milestone

Collected from illegally uninsured employers by the DWD Worker's Compensation Division, the Uninsured Employers Fund (UEF) was established in 1990 to pay worker's compensation benefits on valid claims filed by employees injured while working for illegally uninsured Wisconsin employers.

## \$100+ MILLION

IN TOTAL UEF COLLECTIONS SINCE 1990

(\$100 MILLION TOTAL ALL-TIME COLLECTIONS REACHED IN JULY 2023)

## Worker's Compensation Insurance Premiums Decline Again

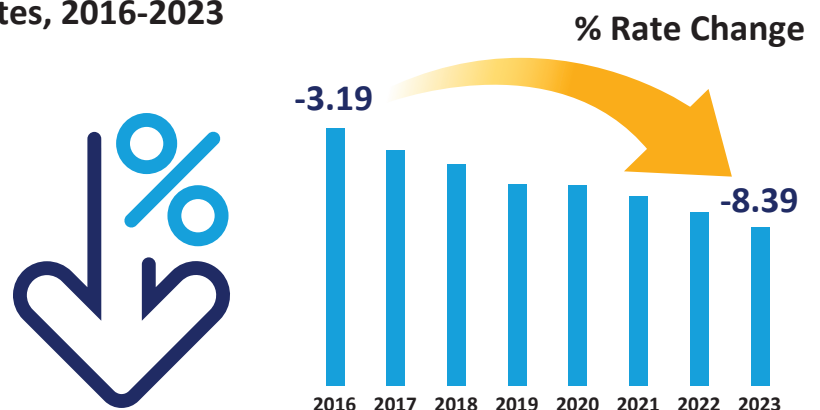
Wisconsin companies started paying 8.4% less in worker's compensation insurance rates as of Oct. 1. The 2023 rate decrease marked the eighth year in a row worker's compensation insurance premiums have declined in Wisconsin. The actual rates that inform premium amounts vary by employer based on factors such as injury risk exposure. The latest reduction in premiums is expected to save Wisconsin employers some \$148 million on policies beginning Oct. 1, 2023.

The rates are adjusted annually by a committee of actuaries from members of the Wisconsin Compensation Rating Bureau. This independent body examines and selects the methodology and trends that produce the proposed rate adjustment, which is then reviewed and approved by the Wisconsin Commissioner of Insurance. While the overall rate level decreased by 8.4%, the impact to policyholders varies based on specific circumstances.

## Worker's Compensation Insurance Rates, 2016-2023

Worker's Compensation Insurance rates have declined every year since 2016, reflecting Wisconsin employers' attention to workplace safety for the benefit of workers and employers alike.

Wisconsin's commitment to workplaces that are fair, just, and safe help communities thrive while supporting the competitiveness of employers statewide.





## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The Registered Apprenticeship Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 57% of the Registered Apprenticeship Program is financed with federal funds, and 43% is funded by other sources.
- <sup>2</sup> The Navigator Grant is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the Navigator Grant is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>3</sup> The Equity Grant is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the Equity Grant is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>4</sup> The IT Modernization Grant is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the grant award is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>5</sup> The Career Pathways Advancement Initiative is supported by the U.S. Department of Education. A total of 100% of the Career Pathways Advancement Initiative is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>6</sup> The Apprenticeship Expansion Grant is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the Apprenticeship Expansion Grant is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>7</sup> Worker Misclassification efforts are supported through an Equity Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the Equity Grant is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>8</sup> Winning with Wisconsin's Workforce was supported through WIOA Title I funding from the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of WIOA Title I is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>9</sup> The Project SEARCH program is supported by the U.S. Department of Education. A total of 93% of the Project SEARCH program is financed with federal funds, and 7% is funded by other sources.
- <sup>10</sup> This project is being supported, in whole or in part, by federal award number SLFRP0135 awarded to the Department of Workforce Development via the Wisconsin Department of Administration by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.
- <sup>11</sup> The Job Service Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the Job Service Program is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>12</sup> The Vets Ready Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the Vets Ready Program is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>13</sup> The UI Administration Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the UI Administration Program is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>14</sup> The Tiger Team grant is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the Tiger Team grant is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>15</sup> The Wisconsin Vocational Rehabilitation Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Education. A total of 78.7% of the Wisconsin Vocational Rehabilitation Program is financed with federal funds, and 21.3% is funded by other sources.

**STATE OF WISCONSIN**



**Department of Workforce Development**

**201 E. Washington Ave.**

**Madison, WI 53703**

**608-266-3131 | [dwd.wisconsin.gov](http://dwd.wisconsin.gov)**



[YouTube.com/WIWorkforce](https://www.youtube.com/WIWorkforce)



[Twitter.com/WIWorkforce](https://twitter.com/WIWorkforce)



[Facebook.com/WIWorkforce](https://www.facebook.com/WIWorkforce)



[LinkedIn.com/company/WIWorkforce](https://www.linkedin.com/company/WIWorkforce)