

Expanded Wisconsin Fast Forward Program Employee Resource Network Pilot Grant Program

Grant Program Guidelines

The Wisconsin Fast Forward program is a state funded grant program to provide employer-focused worker training grants. The Office of Skills Development (OSD) at the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) administers the grant program. Made possible through 2013 Wisconsin Act 9, the State of Wisconsin's investment in the Wisconsin Fast Forward (WFF) program serves as a national best practice model for assisting hundreds of employers and thousands of employees with addressing the skill gap through customized skills training grants.

The WFF grant program cultivates a strong environment for private sector job creation by helping businesses train highly skilled workers to fill current job openings and meet ongoing skill requirements. As a catalyst for talent development, the program encourages increased collaboration between Wisconsin businesses and workforce training partners for the development and implementation of customized and sustainable short- and medium-term training programs that place workers in long-term positions with opportunities for professional growth and economic advancement. WFF also seeks to fund innovative workforce training solutions at the local and regional level that bring together employers, educators, workforce development entities and economic development organizations to meet area workforce demands.

Under Governor Walker's leadership, Wisconsin has invested over \$200 million over the past four years and over \$140 million in the current biennial budget to support workforce development, including additional support to expand the WFF program. The budget allows OSD to provide for a one-time workforce retention grant opportunity to develop and pilot an Employee Resource Network (ERN). One or more grants will be awarded to a consortium or partnership consisting of Wisconsin employers, local public and/or private economic development agencies, Wisconsin Technical Colleges and business support organizations to leverage resources and develop a targeted pilot program to improve access to job retention services, employment assistance and training opportunities. The primary focus of the program is job retention and advancement, with a strong secondary focus on building the skills and capacities of the existing workforce. While designed to assist entry-level, disadvantaged or employees most at risk for job turnover, the pilot ERN should serve all interested employees. Offered services may include, but are not limited to: Ongoing case management by a case manager or success coach; vocational, basic and soft skills training; and improved access and/or referrals to work and financial supports, such as transportation, earned income tax credits and public benefits, including as food assistance, child care and Medicaid.

Program Overview

Purpose: Job retention is a major challenge for employers and low-wage, low-skill employees. For employers, high staff turnover rates directly impact rehiring and retraining activities and resources and may cost thousands of dollars. Frequent staff turnover also may be detrimental to employee morale. For entry-level, low-wage workers with limited job skills, obtaining a job is less challenging than keeping the job over a sustained period. Public assistance recipients are especially vulnerable during their transition to employment. Furthermore, retaining employment is directly related to their ability to balance work and life commitments and navigate challenges that arise, such as limited funds to address emergencies, lack of education and absence of a strong support network.

ERNs are public/private partnerships with the main goal of uniting businesses and community partners to improve job retention and advancement for entry-level, low-wage and low-skilled workers. A distinguishing feature of an ERN is that participating businesses pay a share of network costs in exchange for membership. These funds are used to fund a case manager or success coach, from the public human services system to locate

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on-site at each business or in a central location. Participating employers expect to experience lower turnover rates and subsequent hiring and training costs, as well as reduced costs related to the loss of productivity associated with worker tardiness and absenteeism. These benefits are expected as workers, facilitated in many cases by the success coach, are better able to focus on their work activity and stay on the job longer.

This WFF grant program provides funding needed to implement an employee resource network pilot or pilots to identify best practices and to determine if the strategy is an effective employee retention tool for Wisconsin employers. The WFF award is not intended to fund long-term ERN operation or maintenance. Successful proposals will include plans for obtaining alternative funding, resources leveraging strategies and non-state project funds to demonstrate sustainability.

Grant Program Highlights:

Total Grant Program	One or more one-year grant awards are available to support the development and operation of a pilot ERN.
Award Amount	Up to \$250,000
Eligible Applicants	Consortia or partnerships consisting of: Wisconsin employers; local public and/or private economic development agencies; Wisconsin Technical Colleges and business support organizations.
Use of Grant funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary and benefit costs for staff providing program services and costs associated with providing direct services, including supplies, equipment, travel and postage • Work supports and case management costs related to contracts devoted entirely to these activities, including incidental administrative costs • No more than 10 percent of the total line-item budget may be expended on administrative expenses
Goals	<p>The goals of the WFF ERN grant program include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leverage consortium or partnership resources to share information and services for the betterment of employees, employers and the community 2. Provide participating employees with access to support staff or a success coach 3. Provide participating employees with access to vocational, job and soft skills training 4. Provide participating employees with referrals or access to personalized services that may include, but are not limited to: ongoing case management by a success coach; vocational, job and soft skills training; and/or improved access and/or referrals to work and financial supports, including transportation, earned income tax credits and other public benefits, such as food assistance, child care and Medicaid
Terms of Award	Grants will be awarded as cost reimbursement contracts, with an anticipated contract start date of June 30, 2018. Upon contract execution, recipients will be allowed to incur costs. Costs, including match, must be incurred between contract execution and end dates. All grant expenditures must be completed by June 30, 2019. The grant award is intended to support twelve months of activity. If additional time is needed to

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	expand the ERN consortium or partnership to the appropriate scale, a timeline extension of one calendar quarter may be considered.
Matching Funds	In the proposal, applicants should detail their ability to leverage financial support for the ERN from participating employers as a demonstration of commitment. Match may be in-kind and/or cash match equal to 100 percent of the grant amount awarded (\$1 applicant match to \$1 WFF award). For example, match may be in the form of participating employers' cost share or financial commitment to support the ERN including: The salary of the success coach; the equivalent monetary value of office space, computer and software for use by the success coach at employer's worksite; the equivalent monetary value of leveraged vocational, job or soft skills training; and the equivalent monetary value of any marketing materials to encourage employee participation.

- A. Target Populations:** The services of the pilot ERN should be available to all employees of the member businesses with the primary focus on employees working in low-skilled, low-wage, entry-level jobs of the member employers. These positions are at risk of high turnover and individuals holding these positions are often eligible for public assistance programs and other work supports.
- B. Application Schedule:** Email complete applications and attachments to wisconsinfastforward@dwd.wisconsin.gov by 3 PM on May 8, 2018.

GPA Released:	March 15, 2018
Deadline:	By 3 PM on May 8, 2018
Projected Grant Awards Announcement:	June 15, 2018
Anticipated Contract Start Date:	June 30, 2018
Funding Disbursement:	Reimbursement of approved contract expenses on a rolling basis
Contract End Date:	June 30, 2019

General Contracting Information

- A. Program Administration:** This program is offered by DWD and funded by State of Wisconsin general program revenues. The grant application process will be administered by OSD under the WFF grant program.
- B. Grant Range and Matching Requirement:** Applicants may request maximum funding of \$250,000 to develop and to pilot an Employee Resource Network. Applicants should secure in-kind and/or cash match equal to 100 percent of the grant amount awarded (\$1 applicant match to \$1 WFF award) from employers or resources other than state funding.

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- C. Eligible Purchases:** The intent of the program is award a grant or grants to eligible entities for the development and implementation of an ERN pilot. The proposed budget will be examined to determine the extent to which expense projections are reasonable, necessary and allowable for the pilot. Priority will be given to budgets that minimize administrative costs in favor of direct program costs.

Allowable costs include:

- Salary and benefit costs for staff providing program services and direct costs associated with providing direct services, such as costs for supplies, equipment, travel and postage
- Work supports and case management, including the costs of contracts devoted entirely to these activities, including incidental administrative costs
- Costs for attendance at conferences or meetings of professional organizations, if attendance is necessary for the project
- Planning and coordination studies
- No more than 10 percent of the total line-item budget may be expended on administrative expenses

Wisconsin Fast Forward funds may not be used for proposal development, the purchase of real estate or other capital assets/equipment, facility construction or remodeling, traditional public or private Kindergarten–12th grade education, tuition or trainee wages, stipends or fringe benefits.

D. Reimbursement

- a. Upon submission of complete invoices with proper documentation, payments will be disbursed via Automated Clearing House (ACH) transactions.
- b. In compliance with the Office of the State Comptroller rules and regulations, no grant recipient shall expend grant funds until a contract has been fully executed with OSD. Upon contract execution, recipients will be allowed to incur costs. Costs must be incurred from the date of contract execution through June 30, 2019. No expenses incurred after June 30, 2019 will be reimbursed by this program. Requests for reimbursement may be submitted to WFF no later than September 30, 2019.
- c. Grantees will forfeit any remaining funds that are unused after the contract expires. WFF shall give due consideration to any extenuating circumstances presented in writing by the applicant and may waive this restriction at its discretion.
- d. As a condition of funding, OSD will require that the awardee report data and information about participation, partnerships, supportive services, program referrals and placements for the next three fiscal years for both auditing and pilot evaluation purposes.

Grant Program Details

A. Eligibility

Consortia or partnerships consisting of Wisconsin employers; local, public and/or private economic development agencies; Wisconsin Technical Colleges or other organizations providing workforce support may apply. Applicant organizations may not apply independently, but must apply as the lead organization of a consortium of several local employers and private, public and nonprofit organizations. Proposals submitted on behalf of a consortium of providers must include in the application a description of the roles and responsibilities of the lead applicant and each co-applicant.

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B. Review of Applications

The department and an impartial evaluation committee will evaluate grant applications for compliance with grant guidelines and specifications cited in this document and assign a score based on the selection criteria.

C. Selection Criteria

Applications will be selected based on overall scores in the following areas, with a possible total of 100 base points and 10 bonus points.

Selection Criteria	Base Points	Bonus Points
Statement of Need	10	NA
Demand-Driven, based on labor market data and the needs of member employers	20	NA
Participant Recruitment Strategies for employers and employees	10	Up to 5 additional points if proposal includes letters of commitment from employers
Partnerships with member employers & leveraging non-state matching funds	20	Up to 5 additional points: Describe any existing program-related partnerships and roles with businesses, service or training providers in the region
Optimizes the provision of resources and services, as validated by member employers	20	NA
Startup/Development and Implementation/Performance Plans	10	NA
Demonstrates Sustainability	10	NA

- A. **Demand-driven:** Applicants should show strong evidence that an ERN pilot will meet the needs of employers in their region to enhance employee job retention and job success. Strong evidence includes regional labor market data available from DWD, research-based report or study, a letter of support from the Regional Workforce Development Board confirming the need for an ERN or letters of support from two or more employers confirming a workforce need and the role (s) they will play in partnering activities.
- B. **Leverages Partnerships and Matching Funds:** Applicants should show that they have or can leverage matching dollars (\$1 applicant match to \$1 WFF award) to enhance the impact of program efforts. Applicants should explain how the proposed funding will complement or leverage other funding. Additionally, applicants must demonstrate in-kind or cash match to support programs supported by the grant request.
- C. **Pilots the ERN in Local Businesses:** Applicants must explain how the grant funding will
 - a. Support the retention and training of Wisconsin employees
 - b. Identify unmet employer skills needs and employee needs, and show how the proposed program will address these needs

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- c. Leverage the resources and efforts of employers and private, public and nonprofit organizations to support workforce retention as well as the development, advancement and security of low-wage, low-skilled, entry-level employees
 - d. Expand the range of resources available to employees through public and private partnerships, collaborative arrangements and leveraged funding
- D. **Builds on Proven Programs:** Applicants should demonstrate that their proposal will provide high quality and consistent results, high participation or respond to the needs of participating employers, or that the program is based on other programs that have achieved such results as demonstrated by accreditation or evaluation by a third party to determine its effectiveness. The applicant should also demonstrate the ability to successfully implement the ERN pilot and expend grant funding on a timely basis.
- E. **Demonstrates Sustainability:** WFF is providing the money necessary to implement an ERN pilot or pilots in Wisconsin to determine if employee resource networks are an effective employee retention tool for Wisconsin employers and to identify best practices. Applicants should show evidence of the ability to provide resources to maintain and operate the program after the pilot or a plan to transfer the ERN to another entity for long-term operation and support. As the funding made available through the WFF grant will not provide for long-term maintenance of the ERN, the awarded applicant must have a leveraging strategy in place that demonstrates the ability to contribute non-State funds to the project, including but not limited to, employer cost shares from ERN business members, the applicant, philanthropic support, partnering with training and educational partners, social services district(s) and other community-based organization, etc. to provide funds/or benefits.