

December 23, 2025

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

Senator Howard Marklein
Co-Chair, Joint Finance Committee
Room 316 East, State Capitol Building
Madison, WI 53707

Representative Mark Born
Co-Chair, Joint Finance Committee
Room 308 East, State Capitol Building
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Governor Evers, Senator Marklein, and Representative Born:

On behalf of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD), I am pleased to submit the 2025 Wisconsin Fast Forward (WFF) Annual Report. DWD appreciates your continued, shared support of the WFF program and ongoing recognition of its success in supporting employers to build a skilled workforce that helps advance Wisconsin's economy.

The WFF program helps Wisconsin employers offer workforce training to build the tailored job skills needed to succeed in a modern economy. WFF funding helps hundreds of organizations across Wisconsin. These organizations train thousands of workers to perform in-demand jobs, advance in the workplace, and earn higher wages.

In the attached 2025 WFF Annual Report, DWD provides details on program activities that occurred during state fiscal year (SFY) 2025 (July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025). During this reporting period, DWD collaborated with employers, training providers, and educational stakeholders to award training grants totaling \$5.25 million.

Thank you for your consideration of this report.



Amy Pechacek, Secretary
Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

WISCONSIN FAST FORWARD OVERVIEW

The WFF program is an innovative talent development solution driven by Wisconsin businesses to train and retain highly skilled workers. Since 2013, DWD's Office of Skills Development (OSD) has partnered with organizations statewide to advance the skills of thousands of workers so that they can perform in-demand jobs, earn higher wages, and advance a thriving Wisconsin economy.

Training grants and administration of WFF, as well as other programs authorized by statute, including Reentry Initiatives and Project SEARCH, are supported by funds appropriated under Wis. Stat. s. 20.445(1)(b) and s. 20.445(1)(bm) respectively. Figure 1 shows SFY 2025 amounts allocated and expended by appropriation.

In SFY 2025 (July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025), 32 organizations received a total of \$3,974,200 in WFF standard grants to provide training to 1,825 individuals. Wage data for trainees who completed training in SFY 2025 demonstrates impressive wage gains as worker skills and productivity increased. Wages for underemployed workers increased by an average of \$2.95 per hour, while incumbent workers' wages rose by an average of \$2.13 per hour. After training, formerly unemployed workers earned an average hourly wage of \$20, while incumbent workers saw earnings rise to \$31.32 per hour.

Reentry Initiatives Grants, designed to support instruction costs for upkeep and maintenance of mobile classrooms, totaled \$1,025,800. Project SEARCH, which provides students with disabilities immersive workforce experiences, received an allocation of \$250,000 during SFY 2025. The Department of Corrections (DOC) provided instruction in welding, computer numerical control (CNC) machining, and mechatronics through mobile labs to 138 justice involved participants in SFY 2025.

Figure 1

Budget Reference	Program Reference	Statutory Reference and Description	Count of Awards	Amount Allocated SFY 2025	Amount Expended SFY 2025*
20.445(1)(b)	106.27(1)	Workforce Training	32	\$3,974,200	\$2,197,148.48
20.445(1)(b)	106.27(1j)	Reentry Initiatives Grants	2	\$1,025,800	\$977,826.71
20.445(1)(b)	106.27(1u)	Shipbuilders	-	-	\$0
20.445(1)(b)	106.27(1r)	UW System Internships Grant	-	-	-
20.445(1)(b)	47.07	Project SEARCH	-	\$250,000	\$250,000
20.445(1)(b)	106.27(1)(a)	Industry-recognized Certifications	-	-	\$638,732.28
20.445(1)(b)	106.27(1)(b)	Training Teachers for Dual Enrollment	-	-	\$0
20.445(1)(b)	106.27(1g)(c)	Commute to Careers	-	-	-
20.445(1)(b)	106.27(1g)	Wisconsin Technical College System	-	-	\$282,525.81
Total				\$5,250,000	\$4,346,233.28
20.445(1)(bm)	106.27(1)	Workforce Training Programs Administration	-	-	\$1,649,374.37
20.445(1)(bm)	106.27(1r)	Wisconsin's Internship Initiative	-	-	\$160,788.10
20.445(1)(bm)	106	Apprenticeship Administration	-	-	\$2,299,637.96
Subchapter I			-	-	
20.445(1)(bm)	106.27(1m)	Labor Market Information System Administration	-	-	\$376,806.11
Total				-	\$4,486,606.54

*Includes expenditures in SFY 2025 from both SFY 2025 awards and prior fiscal year awards.

WISCONSIN FAST FORWARD ACTIVITIES

Workforce Training

Wis. Stat. s.106.27(1)

WFF standard training grants provide employers with resources to attract and retain workers who need specialized skills to succeed in the workplace. WFF grantees may offer a single training or multiple trainings to meet their business objectives and employee training needs. Organizations are awarded two-year grants to train existing employees or to train unemployed and underemployed workers. Organizations share in the training costs through a 50% match of grant dollars. In SFY 2025, 32 organizations received a total of \$3,974,200 in WFF standard grants to provide training to 1,825 individuals. Worker trainee success is measured in three categories: (1) unemployed workers obtaining a job, (2) underemployed workers advancing their careers, and (3) incumbent workers increasing their skills and salaries.

DWD measures success by a completed trainee's employment status and hourly wage after training. Examples of successful training programs during SFY 2025 include:

Watco Companies LLC (FF243TL14061) – \$212,978

Program Title: Watco's Advancing Engineering Pathways

Description: Watco Companies LLC, located in Dane County will provide training to 53 incumbent workers. The project will advance engineering pathways through classroom and on-the-job training, which will result in certifications, dual certifications, wage increases, and job advancements.

Award Dates: Jan. 3, 2025, to Dec. 31, 2026

Status: Training is ongoing, 47 trainees in the WFF system. Training in Q1 2025 included: Locomotive Engineer Annual Certification, Engineer Recertification Classroom Training, and Initial Engineer Classroom Training

Note: Watco Companies also has a Commercial Driver Training grant with OSD

Sellars Absorbent Materials Inc. (FF231ML13938) – \$237,295

Program Title: Sellars Manufacturing Training Program

Description: Sellars Absorbent Materials, located in Milwaukee County, will provide training to 27 new trainees and 24 incumbent workers through a partnership with MRA and MATC Workforce Solutions. Training will include fundamentals of manufacturing maintenance and an MRA train the trainer course. Incumbent trainees could receive a wage increase of \$1 or more per hour.

Award Dates: May 19, 2023, to June 30, 2025

Status: Training is complete, 64 trainees are in the WFF system, which exceeded the contract deliverable of 51 trainees. Incumbent trainees received an average wage increase of \$4.44/hour. Underemployed trainees received an average wage increase of \$2.32/hour (Courses: Essentials of FLEX, JRT, and TLT; MATC: Basic Control Systems, and others)

Parker Plastics, Inc. (FF231ML13956) – \$33,770

Title: Blow Mold Mechanic Training

Description: Parker Plastics Inc., located in Kenosha County, is partnering with the College of Lake County and Sipa North America to provide training to six employees to build a robust program to support their blow molding mechanics positions. With this training, employees will gain job-specific and technical skills to move into higher paying positions within the company. Following the training, the incumbent workers could receive a wage increase of \$2.10 or more per hour.

Award Dates: May 23, 2023, to June 30, 2025

Status: Completed. Grantee met contract deliverables. Six trainees were contracted and six were trained. Cost per trainee placed was met.

Lippert (FF233ML13999) – \$400,000

Program Title: Lippert Fast Track Welding & Lippert Scholars

Description: Lippert, located in Eau Claire County, is partnering with Chippewa Valley Technical College to provide training to 280 trainees for upskilling individuals into high-paying, skilled welding positions in the region.

Award Dates: Feb. 23, 2024, to March 31, 2026

Status: 33 trainees in the WFF system (Courses: Advanced Manufacturing, Mig Pulse Welding, and others)

Training Teachers to Teach Dual Enrollment

Wis. Stat. s.106.27(1)(b)

Grants to technical colleges provided training to high school teachers in school districts throughout the state.

The training aimed to meet the accreditation standards needed to teach dual enrollment courses. In SFY 2024, 14 teacher-students were trained with funding from a prior year award. No grants were active during SFY 2025.

Universities of Wisconsin Internships Grant

Wis. Stat. s.106.27(1r)

In SFY 2022, DWD awarded \$1,133,821 to the Universities of Wisconsin (UW) to increase opportunities and access to internships for students in high-demand fields. UW is using the WFF funds to promote student internship opportunities and to incentivize private sector businesses in high demand fields to provide paid internships to Wisconsin students across multiple campuses. The projects below continued through Sept. 30, 2025.

UW-River Falls received \$244,426 to create innovative experiences in agriculture for students. Through this effort, UW-River Falls set a goal of placing 20 students in summer or academic year internships. Recruitment and placement of interns during the grant period resulted in 41 completed internships, surpassing the initial goal of 20 placements.

To address cybersecurity talent shortages, UW-Stout used a \$298,771 grant to establish an internship program, placing students in paid roles with industry partners. Interns worked 20 to 40 hours per week for a minimum of three months. The internship project ended September 30, 2025 with 27 students completing internships.

UW-Milwaukee received \$382,000 to expand paid internships in Wisconsin's renewable energy and clean water industries. Partnering with local businesses, the university set out to place 42 interns in three-month paid positions. As of June 2025, 45 interns have successfully completed internships. UW-Milwaukee also received \$208,624 to create paid internship opportunities for students in humanities, social sciences, and other fields where unpaid intern positions are common. The program accepts applications from all interested students and offers internships lasting three, six, or nine months, based on employer needs and academic schedules. To date, 34 students have completed paid internships, surpassing the initial goal of 20 placements.

Reentry Initiatives

Wis. Stat. s.106.27(1j)

DWD awarded \$74,745 to the Bay Area Workforce Development Board in SFY 2021 to assist 20 justice-involved individuals in Manitowoc County and Sheboygan County jails. The project, led by a consortium composed of Lakeshore Technical College and the Great Lakes Training and Development Corp., equipped justice-involved individuals with welding skills, transitional support, and career services, empowering them to reintegrate successfully into the workforce. The project was completed in SFY 2024 with 20 justice-involved individuals participating.

In response to the critical and growing need for workforce training and career preparation for the populations in the Department of Corrections care, particularly among individuals preparing for reentry into the community, support of instructional costs (\$975,800) and maintenance expenses for mobile classrooms (\$50,000) continued in SFY 2025. In SFY 2025, 138 participants were enrolled into a mobile classroom and 96 participants completed instructional programming.

Wisconsin's Internship Initiative

Wis. Stat. s.106.27(1r)

Outreach efforts continued on college campuses thanks to the Wisconsin Internship Initiative that began in 2016. DWD staff efforts included discussing the concept of returnships, promoting UW Internship Grants, and recommending Limited Term Employment positions as potential internship placements.

Returnships are a structured program for adults who have not participated in the workforce to learn new skills, gain experience, and reduce barriers workers face after an extended period of time spent out of the labor market. Large

employers such as JP Morgan, Goldman Sachs, and Amazon have formal returnship programs.

DWD staff remained active in SFY 2025 in the Wisconsin Career Development Association and the Center for College-Workforce Transitions. Activities included:

- 53 outreach efforts to academic program chairs, deans, chancellors, and presidents
- 4,888 Wisconsin businesses using WisConnect to post available jobs and opportunities
- 24,595 Wisconsin-based internships posted on WisConnect
- 8,516 direct student contacts at job and internship fairs
- Approximately 98% of posted internships on WisConnect are paid internships

It should be noted that many employers post their internship opportunities on their websites and instruct students to apply directly in response to those postings. This makes it impossible to determine the origin of the application process and, therefore, information on the number of internship connections made through WisConnect is not available.

Workforce Training Programs Administration

Wis. Stat. s.20.445(1)(bm)

In addition to the workforce training programs listed above, WFF funds supported the administration of Youth and Registered Apprenticeship programs, Youth Summer Jobs Program, Wisconsin Employment Transit Assistance Program, Career and Technical Education program, Technical Education Equipment Grants, and the Wisconsin Internship Initiative during SFY 2025.

Wisconsin Technical College System Board Project

Wis. Stat. s.106.27(1g)

DWD executed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) Board to allocate \$791,204 in SFY 2023 funds aimed at reducing waiting lists for enrollment in high-demand programs and courses, including healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) related occupations. The services and employment fields addressed under this MOU are determined collaboratively by DWD and WTCS, focusing on areas with the greatest workforce need. This project will continue through its end date of Dec. 31, 2025.

In 2024, WTCS conducted an evaluation of waitlist admission processes across all 16 technical colleges. The evaluation revealed significant inconsistencies in how colleges managed their waitlists. To address these findings, WTCS shared the evaluation results with all colleges to identify barriers affecting students' access to programs. In June 2024, representatives from all colleges convened to review WTCS guidance on Wis. Admin. Code s. TCS 10.07(5).

Wis. Admin. Code s. TCS 10.07(5) requires technical college districts to maintain waitlists for program admissions and stipulates that district and non-district residents denied admission due to capacity limitations must be offered the option to join a waitlist. Applicants on these waitlists must be prioritized for admission based on the order of their original application. The June 2024 meeting ensured that all colleges understood these requirements and aligned their policies with the administrative code.

To promote equity and consistency statewide, WTCS issued guidance eliminating competitive petition processes, which had created barriers to access. This change aims to reduce waitlist times and enable full enrollment in program cohorts at all colleges. To support these efforts, 15 colleges received grant funding totaling \$693,000 to begin addressing the identified barriers and implementing streamlined waitlist procedures.

As of June 30, 2025, all WTCS colleges have submitted policies that are compliant with state administrative code. These policies provide transparency to students navigating waitlists through updated website information and changes to program orientations and materials. The new policies for all 16 colleges have been approved by individual college boards as well as WTCS.



OTHER ACTIVITIES

Project SEARCH

Wis. Stat. s.47.07

Project SEARCH, established under Wis. Stat. s.47.07, is administered by DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and is a business-led collaboration. It helps young adults with disabilities gain and maintain employment through training and career exploration. During SFY 2025, contract funding and SFY 2025 state general purpose revenue (GPR) supported 29 sites and 210 interns.

TRAINEE OUTCOMES SFY 2025

Figure 2

The following unemployment and wage results are for trainees who completed training in SFY 2025 (July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025):

Trainees Who Completed Training	1,827
Unemployed to Gainful Employment	836
Average Wages Before	Not Applicable
Average Wages After	\$20.00
Underemployed to New Employment	7
Average Wages Before	\$22.50
Average Wages After	\$25.45
Incumbent Increased Wages	734
Average Wages Before	\$29.19
Average Wages After	\$31.32



Among the 1,827 trainees who completed training, three secured seasonal positions, nine obtained temporary roles, and 59 found part-time employment.



Department of Workforce Development

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