



A large, dark blue silhouette of the state of Wisconsin is positioned on the right side of the page. To its left, there are decorative elements: a horizontal gold bar at the top, a grid of small blue dots, and a stylized icon of three people.

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

MAKING STRONG CONNECTIONS

The logo for the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, featuring a stylized 'in' inside a circle with a Wisconsin map outline.

WISCONSIN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



Working with Wisconsin's businesses and communities to build an economy **that works for everyone**

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Front cover, clockwise from top left: Sherman Phoenix (Milwaukee), Sweet Pea's Pies (Mayville), Mosinee Brewing Co. (Mosinee), Milky Way Tech Hub (Milwaukee), Waterfront Hotel (Prairie du Chien), A&A Transportation (Wauwatosa). Back cover, top to bottom: Plush Clothing (Racine) and Whole Trees (Madison).



CAPITAL INVESTMENT

\$857 billion

The benefits of WEDC's investments do not end with the capital investment made by the company receiving financial assistance. When a company spends millions of dollars on an expansion project, for example, much of that money is pumped into the local economy through the direct purchasing of contractor services.

30,772*  **TOTAL BUSINESSES ASSISTED**
FY21 GOAL: 3,762

 **158**  **COMMUNITIES ASSISTED**
FY21 GOAL: 128

 **74** **PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS ASSISTED**
FY21 GOAL: 84

* This number includes businesses assisted by one-time COVID-19 response programs.



2021 HIGHLIGHTS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS



The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) employs a variety of measures to gauge the effects of its economic development investments, which range from tax credits for investments in early-stage companies to export readiness programs, industry cluster advancement strategies and downtown redevelopment financing. Tallied here are the total measurable outcomes of WEDC's FY21 economic development investments, including capital investment and job impact data.


2,930
JOBS TO BE CREATED


9,275
JOBS TO BE RETAINED


12,205
TOTAL JOBS IMPACTED*

Not all WEDC financial assistance contracts include a jobs impact requirement. For those that do, this measurement reflects the number of jobs that will be either created or retained as a direct result of the investment. That jobs impact number is recorded in the contract and the award is contingent upon its attainment. It takes time—sometimes years—for the positive direct effects of a WEDC investment to be realized. The question, then, is when are the jobs in question actually impacted? And when do they get counted? WEDC reports the total impact of the jobs in the year the contract is executed and tracks progress to that impact goal throughout the life of the project. Typically, a contract with job creation goals lasts five years.

*Jobs impacted totals are derived from contracts executed between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021. These include executed contracts from both current and previous year commitments and agreements with Key Strategic Partners.





TONY EVERS GOVERNOR

State of Wisconsin



Since the start of the pandemic, WEDC has been at the forefront of those efforts, assisting nearly 100,000 small businesses with more than \$524 million in grants to help cover lost revenues and other costs, encourage innovation and help new businesses get a foothold in communities throughout our state.



*In Wisconsin, one of our best qualities is how we pull together in the face of a big challenge. When hard times knock us down, we find ways to come back even stronger. **And we always succeed—together.***

In Wisconsin, one of our best qualities is how we pull together in the face of a big challenge. When hard times knock us down, we find ways to come back even stronger. And we always succeed—together.

In 2021, our state pulled together to continue the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. We saw some businesses pivot to make personal protective equipment for our first responders and health care providers. Others discovered innovative and flexible ways to stay open while keeping workers, customers and our communities safe.

As vaccines became available, millions of Wisconsinites rolled up their sleeves to protect themselves, their families and their communities. Our state expanded its prevention efforts and folks found ways to safely return to work, school and everyday activities.

At the same time, our state was working hard to help our businesses and workers recover and thrive. Since the start of the pandemic, the WEDC has been at the forefront of those efforts, assisting nearly 100,000 small businesses with more than \$524 million in grants to help cover lost revenues and other costs, encourage innovation and help new businesses get a foothold in communities throughout our state.

As one of the many efforts to help rejuvenate downtowns throughout our state, WEDC established the Wisconsin Tomorrow Main Street Bounceback Grant program, with \$50 million in grants to support up to 5,000 businesses that move into vacant commercial spaces. Nearly 2,400 new businesses had opened in communities from Washburn to Prairie du Sac in 2021, with hundreds more joining them so far in the new year.

WEDC also partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development to administer up to \$100 million in Workforce Innovation Grants. Among the projects funded in the first round are public-private partnerships to train and attract health care workers throughout rural Wisconsin; develop next-generation advanced manufacturing employees in west-central and southeast Wisconsin; expand

affordable, high-quality child care in Door County, Green County and south-central Wisconsin; create pipelines of young, educated workers in Milwaukee; train construction and skilled craft workers throughout the state; foster a culture of entrepreneurship in Kenosha; and enable incarcerated individuals to earn undergraduate degrees from the University of Wisconsin. So far, 12 regional organizations have qualified for up to \$59.5 million in grants to address their communities' unique current and future workforce needs.

In its second Wisconsin Tomorrow report, WEDC laid out a strategy to guide the state's long-term growth that places economic well-being at the center of all our efforts. As the report notes, economic well-being is unique to each person's needs and goals, but common elements include financial stability; access to health care and lifelong learning; and community resources such as child care and a clean environment. The investments we've made in these priorities are already paying off as we see new businesses popping up and communities being revitalized in the wake of a difficult two years.

I'm pleased to note that in addition to leading our post-pandemic economic recovery efforts, WEDC continues to fulfill its traditional responsibilities in the areas of business and community development, support for entrepreneurship and innovation and the pursuit of global trade and investment. WEDC has also committed to supporting our diverse businesses as our state continues to develop a more equitable, inclusive and resilient economy.

I want to thank Secretary Hughes and her team for their hard work on behalf of the people of Wisconsin. **Although we have a long road ahead of us, I am reminded every day of the grit and determination of Wisconsinites and the resilience we share when we all work together. Our best days are still ahead of us. Forward!**

Tony Evers, Governor
State of Wisconsin



New models for both business and economic development are emerging as Wisconsin recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

MISSY HUGHES

Secretary and CEO

New models for both business and economic development are emerging as Wisconsin recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers are learning that to be successful, they must recognize and support their workers' needs and aspirations, whether it's helping them secure child care or transportation to get to work or ensuring they get needed education and training. At the state level, we are recognizing that economic development requires a comprehensive vision so Wisconsinites in every corner of our state can achieve their full potential.

In the second of WEDC's Wisconsin Tomorrow reports, we noted that the path to a more forward-looking, sustainable and inclusive economy requires our state to prioritize every resident's economic well-being.

While each of us may define economic well-being differently, there are five common elements that will build successful businesses, successful communities and a successful state:

- » **Fuel financial stability.** Simply put, it's difficult for workers and families to thrive if they don't have the financial basics in place and if they can't see a path to additional opportunity ahead.
- » **Educate everyone** by embracing continuous learning to prepare for the future of work and to help residents realize their personal potential.
- » **Support healthy living** to achieve better health outcomes, to improve productivity, to increase individual earnings and to encourage a better quality of life. Reducing health disparities, both in quality and in access, is key to overall economic growth.
- » **Reinforce community infrastructure** by supporting people with the essentials—housing, child care, schools, libraries, arts and recreation—plus the connections we all need to live, learn and work. This includes buildings, transportation, roads and high-speed internet access.
- » **Respect the environment** by reducing pollutants, ensuring clean water and intentionally clearing unsafe conditions. This makes good business sense as our resources fuel global leadership in key industries. It also means that all residents can continue to access the benefits of the outdoors.



To keep our communities strong, WEDC continued to help small businesses recover from the economic effects of the pandemic by providing more than \$540 million to nearly 100,000 small businesses.



These principles helped shape WEDC's investments in Wisconsin during fiscal year 2021 (FY21). To keep our communities strong, WEDC continued to help small businesses recover from the economic effects of the pandemic by providing more than \$540 million to nearly 100,000 small businesses. Assistance came in the form of \$303 million through Wisconsin Tomorrow Small Business Recovery Grants, as well as more than \$240 million for We're All In Small Business Grants and \$3 million for grants through the We're All Innovating Contest.

WEDC also launched two recovery initiatives in 2021 that will have enduring impacts on Wisconsin communities. In April, Governor Evers announced WEDC and the Department of Workforce Development will provide up to \$100 million in federal recovery funds for Workforce Innovation Grants. In December, the governor announced 12 regional projects had qualified for a total of nearly \$59.5 million; a second round of grants will be announced in 2022.

Meanwhile, new businesses began moving into previously vacant commercial spaces throughout the state, supported in part by \$10,000 Wisconsin Tomorrow Main Street Bounceback Grants. By the end of 2021, more than 2,400 businesses had received grants totaling more than \$20 million—but the real impact is the sense of excitement in many communities that accompanies the opening of these new enterprises.

Additionally, our Office of Rural Prosperity led a multi-agency effort to help identify and target assistance to our state's most environmentally vulnerable communities and has launched ruralwi.com, a website dubbed "rural Wisconsin's front porch" that is dedicated to helping residents share information, best practices and inspiration for their communities.

These initiatives came as WEDC continued its legacy work of attracting new businesses to Wisconsin and helping existing businesses expand, promoting foreign investment and global trade and supporting entrepreneurship and innovation. All told, in FY21, WEDC assisted more than 70,000 businesses, 158 communities and 74 partner organizations throughout the state of Wisconsin.

On behalf of the dedicated staff of WEDC, I want to thank the many business and community leaders who have worked with us to meet the challenges of the past year and reaffirm WEDC's commitment to ensuring a more innovative, sustainable and inclusive economy for Wisconsin.

Melissa L. Hughes, Secretary and CEO



BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE POST-PANDEMIC ECONOMY

As the COVID-19 pandemic stretched on, WEDC's efforts turned from addressing the initial acute effects to helping Wisconsin's businesses, communities and people weather a multi-year event with health, social and economic impacts. As the pandemic has exacerbated some preexisting disparities, it's provided an opportunity to forge a path to economic well-being for all and create a post-pandemic economy that is even stronger and more sustainable than what came before.



The emergency pandemic relief WEDC provided to hundreds of small businesses across Wisconsin during FY20 was followed in FY21 by programs with greater funding and broader reach, offering support to a diverse swath of businesses spanning geographies and business sectors across the state. Initiatives included:

- » **the Main Street Marketplace website**, which provided a central place for retailers to sell their offerings online;
- » **the We're All In Small Business Grant Program**, which distributed \$240 million to more than 40,000 small businesses over the course of three grant rounds;
- » **the We're All Innovating Contest**, which awarded \$3 million to 231 companies with innovative ideas related to pandemic response and recovery;
- » **Wisconsin Tomorrow Small Business Recovery Grants**, which distributed \$303 million to more than 60,000 businesses; and
- » **the Wisconsin Tomorrow Main Street Bounceback Grant Program**, which has \$50 million in funding earmarked for businesses moving into vacant commercial spaces in downtowns and commercial corridors. With more than 3,000 grants awarded already, the program is still open for applications through June 2022.

LOS AMIGOS RECEIVED A
\$10,000
MAIN STREET BOUNCEBACK GRANT FROM WEDC



Success Story

PANDEMIC SHORTAGES PROMPT NEW VENTURES

A Mexican restaurant without tortillas? It's as impossible to imagine as a sandwich shop without bread.

But that's what German "Carlos" Vasquez Hernandez and Carolina Martinez faced when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the shutdown of the tortilla supplier for their two Los Amigos restaurants in Platteville and Richland Center and their grocery store in Platteville. They had to drive to Chicago every week and wait all night in a line of trucks for a chance to buy even a meager portion of what they needed.

The husband-and-wife restaurateurs decided the best way to ensure they would be able to cook up their burritos, enchiladas and other Mexican dishes would be to make the tortillas themselves. They bought equipment from Mexico that can produce as many as 3,000 tortillas an hour and rented space in the Platteville business incubator to house the operation. A \$10,000 Main Street Bounceback Grant from WEDC is helping to fund the project. The couple also received a We're All In Small Business Grant from WEDC and the Wisconsin Department of Revenue in 2020.

When the pandemic caused an interruption in the supply of tortillas for Los Amigos restaurants, owners German "Carlos" Vasquez Hernandez (left) and Carolina Martinez (not pictured) seized the opportunity to produce their own tortillas to supply other restaurants as well as their own.



The state business programs have been "a lot of help. They're very involved with the business community. They're there when we need them."

– German "Carlos" Vasquez Hernandez, Co-owner, Los Amigos

The state business programs have been "a lot of help," Vasquez Hernandez says. "They're very involved with the business community. They're there when we need them."

Now, Vasquez Hernandez and Martinez have their sights set even higher. They plan to become a tortilla supplier themselves, not only for their two restaurants and grocery store but also for other restaurants and businesses in the area, turning their pandemic crunch into a culinary conquest.



After closing at the onset of the pandemic, the Sweet Tooth reopened in May 2020 in a larger location across the street, bringing to life a childhood dream of co-owner Crystal Priebe.

THE SWEET TOOTH RECEIVED A



\$2,500

WISCONSIN TOMORROW SMALL BUSINESS RECOVERY GRANT



Success Story

TAKING A SWEET STEP FORWARD

Crystal Priebe had fond memories from her childhood of saving her pennies for a trip to the local candy store. Her well-ingrained sweet tooth even led her, in more recent years, to make hand-dipped chocolates and sell them at her family's store, Valley Fish and Cheese, in Prairie du Chien.

Then her dream came true: Crystal and her husband, Brian Priebe, opened their own candy shop, the Sweet Tooth, in Prairie du Chien in December 2019. A few months later, the pandemic hit, shuttering most retail establishments, including their store.

Soon after the shop reopened in May 2020, the Priebes had a chance to buy a much bigger building across the street. It would be a costly venture, especially at a time when businesses of nearly all types were struggling with pandemic-related sales declines. But with backing from a \$10,000 WEDC Main Street Bounceback Grant, the Priebes forged ahead with their expansion at the new location. The Sweet Tooth now features Crystal's hand-dipped chocolates, nut brittles and English toffee that Brian creates and a wide range of both modern and nostalgic candy and treats. The couple also provide interactive games and they plan to hold candy-making classes. In addition to the Main Street Bounceback Grant, they've received a \$2,500 Wisconsin Tomorrow Small Business Recovery Grant from WEDC and the Department of Revenue and they won a \$1,500 prize in WEDC's statewide Downtown Pitch Contest for unique business ideas.

Crystal hasn't wavered from her belief that the Sweet Tooth will make a go of it, even during the pandemic—and perhaps because of it, as people use simple pleasures like a sweet treat and a comforting memory from childhood as coping mechanisms in uncertain circumstances.



Success Story

MILWAUKEE STARTUP CREATES RAPID COVID-19 TEST

How do you keep company employees safe in the midst of a pandemic? When a Wisconsin-based, global manufacturer was hit by a COVID-19 outbreak, leaders of the business turned to Novir, a Milwaukee-based startup founded by former GE Healthcare executive Alexander Kempe. Novir had developed a rapid detection test for COVID-19 antibodies that could deliver results in minutes, rather than days.

Novir’s staff started testing the manufacturing company’s employees the next day to see if those who were exposed to infected coworkers had contracted COVID-19. With the quick results, the plant was able to reopen the following day, without requiring a lengthy shutdown—saving millions of dollars and potentially a lot of jobs. Novir has developed both an antibody-detecting blood test—to find out whether someone has been infected in the past—and a nasal swab test for antigens, or proteins that signal a current infection. Both tests are being manufactured by MPE-INC in Milwaukee. Novir, founded in 2020, has received the CE mark allowing the tests to be sold and used in Europe and clinical trials are underway to seek approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.



Early in the pandemic, Novir developed a test for COVID-19 antibodies that could deliver results in minutes, rather than days; the company was named the overall winner of WEDC’s We’re All Innovating Contest.

Novir was named overall winner of WEDC’s We’re All Innovating Contest in 2020. The company also received a \$2,500 Wisconsin Tomorrow Small Business Recovery Grant from WEDC and the Department of Revenue and won a \$1,500 prize from WEDC’s Downtown Pitch Contest for unique business ideas.

Kempe said Novir plans to develop more screening tests to detect other infectious diseases—hopefully, before they become pandemics. “It’s a preventive way of operating,” Kempe told WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes in a WEDC Focus Forward podcast episode. “That’s what screening does ... We can save lives.”



“That’s what screening does ... We can save lives.”

– Alexander Kempe, Founder, Novir



OVERCOMING WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



At the beginning of the pandemic, with companies struggling to stay open, 460,000 Wisconsin workers lost their jobs. By the end of 2020, about half of them were still unemployed. Many were people already facing workforce challenges: low-wage workers, people of color and women. Wisconsin's 11 tribal nations also faced uncertainties as casinos closed or scaled back.

As the economy recovered from the initial shock of the pandemic, Wisconsin's unemployment rate also bounced back, reaching an all-time low of 2.8% in December 2021 (reflecting 86,200 people unemployed). The state's labor market, already tight before the pandemic, has only grown tighter—meaning Wisconsin will have to get creative about solving these challenges to ensure our companies have the workers they need for their continued growth.

Over FY21, WEDC continued to focus resources on helping businesses weather the pandemic, but also began developing creative solutions for a workforce that is more highly qualified and aligned to the needs of Wisconsin companies—and a workforce in which more Wisconsinites are able to participate.

From training to transportation, collaborations across the state are working on solving these workforce challenges with WEDC support. In July, Governor Evers announced the Workforce Innovation Grant program, funded with \$100 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds. The grants provide up to \$10 million to regional organizations to develop programs aimed specifically at the needs of their communities, designed to encourage innovative businesses and provide them with the skilled workers who will help them grow on a long-term basis.

The grants encourage local government, business, education and nonprofit leaders to work together and find solutions to their communities' workforce needs. Three of the first-round projects focus on meeting local child care needs, while other projects are aimed at improving rural health care and education; providing training in advanced manufacturing, construction and agriculture; and allowing incarcerated people to earn degrees from the University of Wisconsin. A second round of grants will be awarded later in 2022. The Workforce Innovation Grant program is a collaboration between WEDC and the Department of Workforce Development.

NEARLY \$60 MILLION
in Workforce Innovation
Grants awarded so far

\$100 MILLION IN TOTAL
funding for the program
(includes multiple rounds)

**12 REGIONAL
COLLABORATIONS**

\$60 MILLION

\$100 MILLION

**12 REGIONAL
COLLABORATIONS**
working to solve
workforce challenges



Success Story

HELPING ADULTS EARN DIPLOMAS

Burlington resident Scott Fricke is excited to start a new phase of his life, with his newly earned high-school diploma in hand.

Fricke is not the typical high-school graduate—he is 56 years old and was a successful contractor until a back condition left him partially paralyzed in 2019. Fricke had quit high school after his junior year to launch his career, but to start over now, he would, at least, need a diploma. In December, he earned a high-school equivalency degree through a program of Gateway Technical College and the YWCA of Southeast Wisconsin. State government and education leaders say there are many other Wisconsin residents who could benefit from such a program, as well.

A state Workforce Innovation Grant worth up to \$5.6 million will allow Gateway Technical College, YWCA of Southeast Wisconsin, Southeast Wisconsin Workforce Development Board and the Racine County Higher Expectations workforce development organization to guide more students through the process of earning a high-school diploma.

“Wisconsin can’t afford to leave members of its workforce on the sidelines,” says Missy Hughes, WEDC secretary and CEO. “Education is key to building a skilled workforce but traditional high school programs don’t work for everyone.”

The program is aimed at people in Racine, Kenosha and Walworth counties who are unemployed, underemployed or incarcerated and nearing release. They will be able to take a four-week course to prepare for the 16-week Work Ready high school equivalency course.



WEDC Secretary Missy Hughes (second from left) visited the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee to announce that the organization will receive a Workforce Innovation Grant of up to \$3.3 million. Serving Milwaukee and Waukesha counties, the organization and its partner agencies and employers plan to use these funds for the Ready Center Collective to launch a new approach to teen workforce training, credentialing and employment engagement. The training building will include seven classroom training spaces and the programmatic approach is multi-tiered, providing teens the opportunity to sample career pathways, immerse themselves in occupational skills training experiences and engage in internships and apprenticeships.



“Wisconsin can’t afford to leave members of its workforce on the sidelines. Education is key to building a skilled workforce but traditional high school programs don’t work for everyone.”

– Missy Hughes, WEDC Secretary and CEO

Many working parents in Wisconsin cannot afford to enroll their youngsters in quality child care programs. Meanwhile, child care facilities face a serious staff shortage—partly because wages for workers in those programs are typically low.



Success Story

BETTER JOBS, MORE CHILD CARE

Crystal Ranson, preschool program director at the Red Caboose Child Care Center in Madison, knows that struggle. It took her eight years to earn her associate degree in early childhood education at Madison Area Technical College. Her staff at Red Caboose is stretched to the limit. “Child care providers need a break,” says Ranson.

A state grant aims to expand opportunities for both child care providers and working parents. Madison Area Technical College is receiving a Workforce Innovation Grant for up to \$2.9 million to train potential employees with skills that will land them higher-paying jobs and to assess the need for child care and place more workers in that field.

The college is recruiting unemployed or underemployed people for a short training program that will help them qualify for a manufacturing job. At the same time, the school will determine what child care options are available in the region and what’s lacking.

“How do we raise the profile of child care providers so they’re recognized as professionals?” asks Jessica Cioci, dean of Madison Area Technical College’s School of Human and Protective Services. “High-quality child care is also related to better outcomes for children. This is a workforce issue, but it’s also best for children.”

WORKFORCE INNOVATION GRANTS UP TO \$10M.

DREAM IT. DO IT.



The Workforce Innovation Grant Program provides up to \$10 million grants to regional organizations to design and implement innovative plans that help solve the workforce challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has caused. This program encourages the development of leading-edge, long-term solutions that enable businesses to more easily find workers and empower those workers to more successfully prepare for and connect to the family-supporting careers in their regions. Three of the first-round projects focus on meeting local child care needs, while other projects are aimed at improving rural health care and education; providing training in advanced manufacturing, construction and agriculture; and allowing incarcerated people to earn degrees from the University of Wisconsin.



“How do we raise the profile of child care providers so they’re recognized as professionals? High-quality child care is also related to better outcomes for children. This is a workforce issue, but it’s also best for children.”

– Jessica Cioci, Dean of Madison Area Technical College’s School of Human and Protective Services



WEDC Deputy Secretary Sam Ridders announced that the Sauk Prairie School District will receive a Workforce Innovation Grant of up to \$2.4 million to provide an innovative solution to address the workforce needs of the region's advanced manufacturers, agricultural science employers and health care providers. Currently, needs are not being met due to outdated training spaces and equipment, creating a skills gap in the area. This project will lead to sustainable training for apprentices, current students and current employees by bringing employers into the school building and students into the region's employers.

WEDC AWARDED A

\$150,000 

GRANT THAT AIMS TO BRING COMPUTER SCIENCE INTO EVERY WISCONSIN CLASSROOM FROM KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 12



Success Story

WEDC GRANT BRINGS STEAM TO CLASSROOMS

At Forest Glen Elementary School in Suamico, children as young as kindergarten age are learning the principles of computer science as they play an educational program called Scratch Jr. that shows them how to plant a seed—virtually—and make it grow taller. Educators and state officials are hoping pilot projects such as this will help plant a seed in the minds of Wisconsin students and encourage them to pursue technology-based careers.

With a median salary of more than \$71,000 a year, tech sector jobs can bring financial stability to Wisconsin families. A \$150,000 grant from WEDC aims to provide teacher training and curriculum development that will bring computer science into every Wisconsin classroom, from kindergarten through grade 12. "Technology is the pathway to innovation in everything from health care and education to manufacturing and commerce. It is the future of our state and our economy," Governor Evers said in announcing the grant. The Targeted Industry Projects Grant will support the Computer Science Talent Ecosystem Youth project led by Cooperative Education Service Agency 7 in partnership with Microsoft, Brown County schools and others.

Becky Stapel, a technology integration specialist who works with the young students at Forest Glen Elementary, says some teachers may feel intimidated by computer science, but those principles already are part of the core curriculum. "The beauty of computer science is that the kids are so engaged in it and motivated by it that problems don't intimidate them when they arise," says Stapel. "They embrace the challenge and explore solutions."

RURAL PROSPERITY

CONNECTING RURAL RESIDENTS TO RESOURCES

Wisconsin's rural areas show off the state's natural beauty, and their residents are creative, innovative and resilient. But rural communities may not have access to all of the resources that might help ensure long-term sustainability—particularly, tools such as broadband access and adequate child care.



Newly created in 2020, the Office of Rural Prosperity added staff during FY21 to enable it to work on initiatives including expanding broadband access, supporting cooperatives and enhancing Wisconsin's forestry industry.

Created in 2020 by Governor Tony Evers, the Office of Rural Prosperity has been working on expanding broadband access, supporting cooperatives and enhancing Wisconsin's forestry industry. After a series of virtual listening sessions offered in collaboration with partners around Wisconsin, WEDC issued the Voices for Rural Prosperity Report in December 2020. In the Broadband Connectors Pilot, WEDC partnered with the Wisconsin Public Service Commission to provide six communities across the state with technical assistance to apply for public or private-sector funding for broadband expansion. The Office of Rural Prosperity is also working with other state agencies to develop a Wisconsin Environmental Equity Tool to map out areas with socioeconomic and environmental health needs so more attention can be directed toward those needs.



350+ PEOPLE

registered for listening sessions on rural prosperity issues and priorities in summer 2020



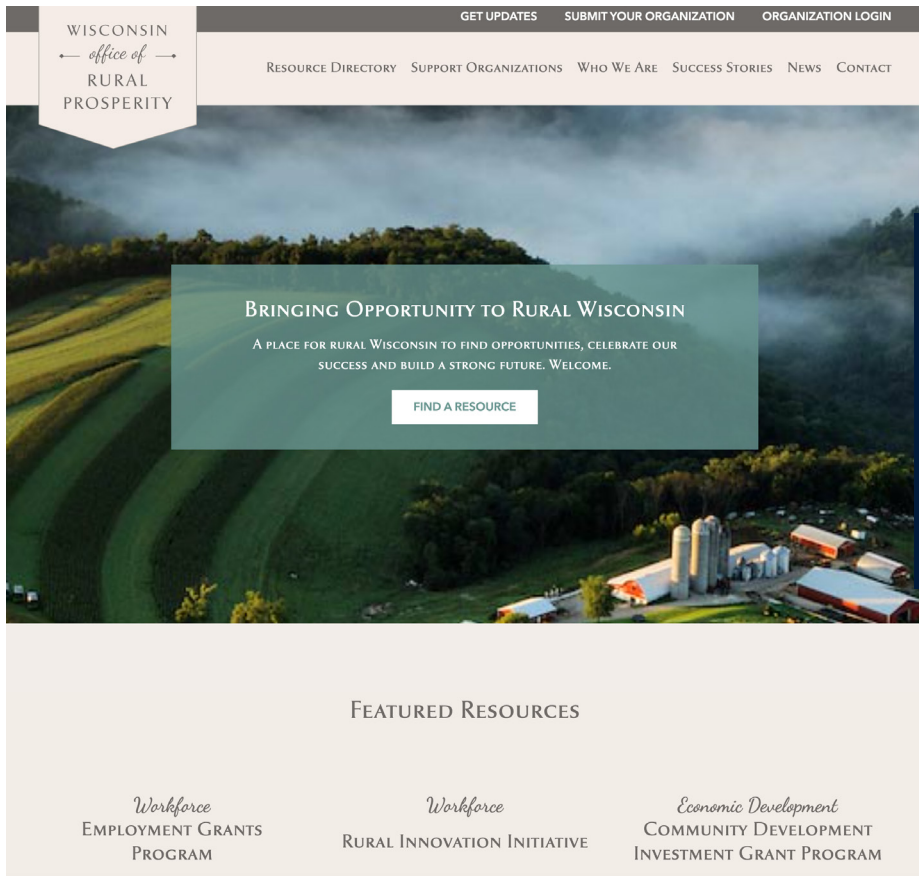
NEARLY 300 PEOPLE

registered for listening sessions on the future of Wisconsin's forest products industry in spring 2021



350+ PEOPLE

registered for listening sessions on environmental equity in fall 2021



The new ruralwi.com website provides lists of government contacts and nonprofit providers, as well as a range of success stories illustrating the resilience and creativity of rural residents and communities.



“Rural communities are used to coming up with creative solutions. Harnessing those good ideas and sharing solutions and resources to make these ideas come to life can help all of Wisconsin’s communities find the projects and solutions that work best for them.”

– Marcy West, Director, Office of Rural Prosperity



Success Story

SHOWCASING RURAL WISCONSIN'S FRONT PORCH

Rural Wisconsin offers breathtaking beauty, with forested peaks and verdant valleys, trails to explore and rivers to navigate. Rural communities brim with residents who have innovative business concepts and ideas for connecting with their neighbors. But sometimes, it’s hard to know where to find the resources that could help them.

A new, online directory of resources is available at ruralwi.com, with lists of government contacts and nonprofit providers, as well as a range of success stories illustrating the resilience and creativity of rural residents and communities. Ruralwi.com is a project of WEDC’s Office of Rural Prosperity. “Rural communities are used to coming up with creative solutions,” says Marcy West, director of the Office of Rural Prosperity. “Harnessing those good ideas and sharing solutions and resources to make these ideas come to life can help all of Wisconsin’s communities find the projects and solutions that work best for them.”

The success stories include examples of residents or workers coming together to develop solutions and enhance rural life, such as the employees who formed a co-op to save their company from closing, residents who established a charter school that uses nature to teach and women farmers who forged a close-knit community that has generated new businesses and garnered political power.

“We like to say that this site is rural Wisconsin’s front porch,” West says. “It’s a place to come to learn the news, share good ideas, build relationships and get help. We’re hoping everyone will stop over and check it out.”



Success Story

LOCALLY SOURCED MEALS, CSA STYLE

Providing healthy meals using fresh, locally produced food, keeping small south-central Wisconsin farmers profitable and providing employees with fair wages—those are the goals of a group that came together in 2020 to form the Community Kitchen Co-op steering committee. Working with the South Central Chapter of the Wisconsin Farmers Union and area organizations, the committee decided to launch a meal service for the region using a community-supported agriculture (CSA) model.

With the support of a \$48,900 Capacity Building Grant from WEDC, Community Kitchen Co-op opened its doors in October 2021. For a \$165 monthly payment, subscribers receive one vegetarian dinner and one lunch per week—each containing two servings—along with vegetables and crackers, rolls or muffins. They can add shares of meat, cheese, bread, eggs, coffee or dessert. The food comes from local farmers and producers and is packaged in reusable, recyclable or compostable containers. The meals are prepared in the co-op's kitchen in Monticello and can be picked up or delivered to an area within about 20 miles.

"People are thinking more about where their food comes from," says Dela Ends, president of the co-op's board. "There are really a lot of people who don't like to cook but they want to have healthy and local food." Ends and her husband, Tony, have operated a CSA through their Brodhead farm for many years. She says the meal co-op idea is a way for rural communities to have some control over their food supply and their economies.

"Watching our neighbors go out of business is terrible," she says. "When farmers go out of business, other businesses go out because they don't have the customers."



Sourcing from local farmers and producers, the Community Kitchen Co-op delivers meals anywhere within 20 miles of its Monticello location.



"People are thinking more about where their food comes from. There are really a lot of people who don't like to cook but they want to have healthy and local food."

— Dela Ends, Board President, Community Kitchen Co-op



“Access to high-speed internet is a necessity and critical to how we live, learn and work.”

– Tony Evers, Governor



Success Story

BROADBAND ACCESS VIA DRONE POWER

High-speed internet is still unavailable in parts of Wisconsin, hampering education, business and communications. About 10% of the students in the Northland Pines School District, in Eagle River, have not been able to access broadband. But drone-based technology—originally designed to spot poachers in South Africa’s game reserves—could provide a new way to solve the problem.

Tethered drone platforms fitted with cell phone towers were installed in the broadband “deserts” of the Eagle River area in a pilot project between the Northland Pines School District and Wisconsin TeleLift. The test program was funded in part by a \$100,000 WEDC Capacity Building Grant to the Forest County Economic Development Partnership. Wisconsin TeleLift founders Scott and Greta Williams have used the technology in Kenya, to provide cell phone service at refugee camps and in California, to help firefighters stay in touch as they battle wildfires.

Wisconsin TeleLift CEO Scott Williams says the system can be moved around to find the best locations and installed in minutes. “The whole concept is we can now do dynamic networks as needed,” says Williams.



The same drone-based internet technology now being used in Wisconsin has been used to provide cell phone service at refugee camps in Kenya and to help firefighters stay in touch as they battle wildfires in California.

“We don’t replace infrastructure. We’re replacing the mindset that you have to have permanent infrastructure. We think it’s a truly disruptive technology.” Developer Carl Ruedebusch, who serves on WEDC’s Entrepreneurship and Innovation Committee, also contributed \$100,000 to the pilot through his Eye on Entrepreneurs Network.

This initiative fits well with the governor’s 2021-23 budget, which allocates nearly \$200 million for broadband expansion. “Access to high-speed internet is a necessity and critical to how we live, learn and work,” says Governor Evers. “It’s the key that opens the door to new opportunities for our students, our communities and our state and will be vital to our state’s economic bounce back.”



THE TEST PROGRAM WAS FUNDED IN PART BY A

\$100,000

WEDC CAPACITY BUILDING GRANT TO THE FOREST COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

TARGETING EQUITY IN BUSINESS SUPPORT



\$550,000  PROVIDED TO

 **8 organizations** 

THAT SUPPORT MINORITY AND UNDERSERVED
BUSINESS COMMUNITIES



Wisconsin's economic viability and ability to thrive over the long term are predicated on the goal that every resident has the opportunity to succeed.

Wisconsin's economic viability and ability to thrive over the long term are predicated on the goal that every resident has the opportunity to succeed. This must include those who have faced barriers to employment, housing or education on a personal level, as well as those who have faced systemic factors that affect entrepreneurs of color, women and other members of groups that traditionally have had less access to capital and guidance to start or expand businesses.

One of WEDC's longstanding programs, MARKETPLACE, the Governor's Conference on Diverse Business Development, held its 40th annual gathering in December 2021, attracting nearly 800 registrants for its mix of live and virtual events. MARKETPLACE offers opportunities for diverse business leaders to network and to make connections that might result in future business deals. Conference sessions focused on incorporating companies with diverse ownership into corporate supply chains, selling to government agencies and getting involved in exporting.

Financially, WEDC is supporting meaningful projects aimed at improving equity. That includes a \$400,000 grant to the Urban League of Greater Madison for its planned Black Business Hub, whose accelerator fund will provide a boost of capital to entrepreneurs of color. WEDC also will move its offices into the Black Business Hub in 2023 once it is completed. And WEDC is providing a \$250,000 Community Development Investment Grant to Milwaukee County and up to \$12.4 million in Historic Preservation Tax Credits for the Community within the Corridor project (featured on page 35). The two-block-long development will remodel part of the former Briggs & Stratton factory complex into 197 affordable housing units, with meeting space, recreational facilities and a day care center.



49 LOANS
TOTALING
NEARLY

\$1.6 million

PROVIDED TO WISCONSIN COMPANIES BY
THE STATE'S DIVERSE CHAMBERS IN FY21



Success Story

WEDC GRANT HELPS URBAN LEAGUE FUND STARTUPS

Entrepreneurs and business owners of color traditionally have a harder time getting access to capital to start or grow their operations. A targeted fund to help startups by people of color and to give them a place to locate could provide a boost.

That's what the Black Business Hub in Madison plans to do. The hub will be a four-story building being constructed on South Park Street, where businesspeople of color can share space and receive support services. Underpinning the project is the Black Business Hub Accelerator Fund which will offer loans, grants and culturally competent technical assistance to at least 40 startups and existing companies owned by people of color, with preference given to companies planning to relocate to the hub.

Tanisha Harbert is one of those entrepreneurs. Harbert founded Madison's first Black-owned beauty school, Chanell Ardor Schools of Beauty and Culture. The building that houses the school was recently purchased and Harbert will lose her lease after 2022. Harbert says she looks forward to the mentorship and support that the Black Business Hub will provide. "It's the perfect place for my business and the services we offer," says Harbert. "Sometimes we may have these big ideas and know where we want to go, but we need help with strategic planning and finding the growth drivers to get us there."

WEDC has awarded a \$400,000 Capital Catalyst Grant to the Urban League of Greater Madison to help launch the accelerator fund. "Careers in high-tech industries like biosciences and entrepreneurship are key to closing the dramatic racial disparities in wealth," says Ruben Anthony, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Madison.

"Sometimes we may have these big ideas and know where we want to go, but we need help with strategic planning and finding the growth drivers to get us there."

*- Tanisha Harbert, Founder,
Chanell Ardor Schools of Beauty and Culture*



As part of the state's ongoing efforts to directly support diversity, equity and inclusion in Wisconsin's economy, WEDC will locate its Madison offices in the Urban League of Greater Madison's Black Business Hub when construction is complete in 2023. The Black Business Hub is set to become the Madison region's premier Black-led enterprise center devoted to assisting underserved entrepreneurs. Its location in South Madison, the city's oldest African American enclave, constitutes a significant investment in the neighborhood.

WEDC AWARDED A

\$400,000 

**CAPITAL CATALYST GRANT TO THE
URBAN LEAGUE OF GREATER MADISON
TO HELP LAUNCH THE ACCELERATOR FUND** 

A&A Transportation in Milwaukee got its start in 2020 as an attempt by Pastor W. Aaron Robbins Sr. and his wife, Laci Coppins Robbins, to launch a trucking company that would have staying power and sustain their family for generations. With help from Milwaukee's Northwest Side Community Development Corporation (CDC), the couple developed a business plan and negotiated for months to win a contract with FedEx, but A&A was not chosen.



"It's about creating a legacy for our children and jobs for our community. Everything's a ministry for us."

– Laci Robbins, Co-owner, A&A Transportation



Success Story

MILWAUKEE FIRM BREAKS DOWN BARRIERS IN THE TRUCKING INDUSTRY

Then, with the COVID-19 pandemic canceling family get-togethers for Christmas, the delivery business was swamped with what the U.S. Postal Service called "a historic record of mail and package volume." FedEx gave A&A a second chance, offering the company a West Allis route. To be awarded the route, A&A would need to have three Sprinter vans. But to get financing from the Northwest Side CDC to buy the vans, the young company would need to have a contract in effect. So, the Robbins family took \$10,000 in savings to lease the vans and get the contract and the Northwest Side CDC came through with a \$56,000 loan.

WEDC had provided the Northwest Side CDC with a \$500,000 Capital Catalyst Grant in 2019 to help build its revolving loan fund and added a \$60,000 Entrepreneurship Support Grant in 2021.

A&A is now a subcontractor for FedEx, with its three Sprinter vans operating on three West Allis routes and two semi-trucks hauling packages between the Milwaukee area and Illinois. Aaron and Laci Robbins want to train and hire more people of color to spread generational wealth throughout Milwaukee's Black community.

"It's about creating a legacy for our children and jobs for our community," says Laci Robbins. "Everything's a ministry for us."



A&A Transportation owners Laci and Aaron Robbins (left and center, pictured with employee Ralpheal Gordon) are proud to be driving change in an industry that is just 6.9% female and 15% Black, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2017 American Community Survey.

WEDC PROVIDED THE NORTHWEST SIDE CDC WITH A
\$500,000
CAPACITY BUILDING GRANT IN 2019 TO HELP
BUILD ITS REVOLVING LOAN FUND



Jean Marie Thiel (second from left) accepts her award from US Bank Vice President and Community Affairs Manager Suzanne Zwaska, Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes and WEDC Deputy Secretary Sam Rikers at MARKETPLACE 2021. The Governor's Conference on Diverse Business Development went virtual in 2020, then returned to an in-person conference (with some virtual options) at the Wisconsin Center in Milwaukee to celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2021. Nearly 800 people registered to attend the 2021 conference; there were 79 exhibitors and 416 one-on-one meetings facilitated as part of the event.

In 1981, state officials decided to shine a light on minority-owned businesses by bringing them together with state agency purchasing agents to forge potential partnerships. About 20 minority business leaders from around Wisconsin showed up for the one-on-one meetings in hotel rooms, snacking on coffee and doughnuts. It was the beginning of what became the annual MARKETPLACE conference.

Forty years later, in December 2021, 800 people registered to attend MARKETPLACE 2021. The three-day conference, presented by WEDC, featured a series of in-person meetings and banquets held at the Wisconsin Center in Milwaukee and workshops staged virtually to accommodate concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 400 one-on-one meetings were facilitated.



"When you start your business, you don't know what to do... At MARKETPLACE, you go and talk to people and learn from their experience."

– Mino Seifoddini, President/Owner, Custom Service Plastics



Success Story

MARKETPLACE CELEBRATES 40 YEARS

Jean Marie Thiel, president and CEO of West Bend-based Belonger Corp., the only woman- and American Indian-owned mechanical contracting firm in Wisconsin, has attended MARKETPLACE for more than 20 years. "It's where I challenge myself to be a better entrepreneur and a better leader," she says.

Mino Seifoddini, president and owner of Custom Service Plastics, a plastics injection molding company in Lake Geneva, started coming to the conference at the same time. "When you start your business, you don't know what to do ... At MARKETPLACE, you go and talk to people and learn from their experience," she says.

While the state offered few incentives aimed at minority business people 40 years ago, today WEDC provides loans, tax credits and workforce training grants to expand access to people of color, women, people with disabilities, military veterans, LGBTQ business owners and others with diverse backgrounds.

"We need to make sure we're thinking about ... how can we make all of our businesses in Wisconsin as successful as possible?" Missy Hughes, WEDC secretary and CEO, said at the 2021 conference.



HELPING ENTREPRENEURS BRING DREAMS TO LIFE



In addition to the entrepreneurship and innovation initiatives described in the Pandemic Recovery and Workforce Innovation sections, WEDC's core efforts to support entrepreneurship and innovation in Wisconsin continued in FY21.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORT GRANTS WERE AWARDED TO

13 ORGANIZATIONS

THAT WILL SUPPORT ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THEIR COMMUNITIES,
WITH A FOCUS ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



WEDC'S SEED ACCELERATOR PROGRAM PROVIDED

\$1.1 MILLION

IN SUPPORT TO WISCONSIN ORGANIZATIONS THAT
HELP YOUNG COMPANIES GROW AND SCALE



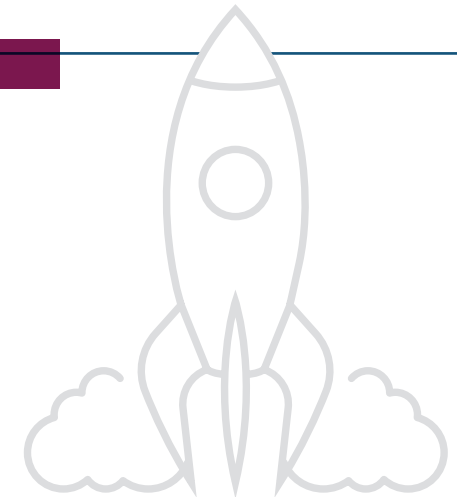
THE TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT LOAN PROGRAM PROVIDED

\$3.4 MILLION

IN LOANS TO 13 COMPANIES TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT AND
COMMERCIALIZATION OF INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Entrepreneurship Support Grants were awarded to 13 organizations that help small businesses with training, legal services, pandemic impacts and more, with emphasis this year on bringing entrepreneurship resources into communities of color and into rural areas where services are harder to access.

The Capital Catalyst and Seed Accelerator programs continued to support organizations that, in turn, assist startups and emerging growth companies and provided \$2.8 million to 16 organizations. Administered by WEDC's partners, the Entrepreneurial Micro-grant and SBIR/STTR Matching Grant programs reached 118 businesses. The Qualified New Business Venture Program, which helps young companies attract investment by offering tax credits to investors, certified 46 new companies. The Technology Development Loan Program issued 13 loans for a total of \$3.4 million.





“Whatever benefits do come out of the tech industry, here in Wisconsin and nationally, need to come to all of us.”

– Nadiyah Johnson, Founder, Milky Way Tech Hub



Success Story

PROMOTING DIVERSITY IN THE TECH WORLD

Milwaukee computer scientist Nadiyah Johnson has a mission: to make careers in technology welcoming to women and people of color. Only 3% of Wisconsin’s tech employees are Black and 3% are Latinx, while each group makes up 6% of the state’s total workforce, according to the Computer Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) Cyberstates 2021 report. Meanwhile, median pay for tech workers in Wisconsin tops \$71,000, which is 63% higher than the median wage in the state, the Comp TIA report says.

Johnson, founder of the software development company Jet Constellations, started an organization with a wider goal: the Milky Way Tech Hub. The tech hub is working to bring science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) education to more students, to provide a sense of community among Milwaukee tech employees and to encourage entrepreneurship by people of color. Run in partnership with the Consumer and Merchant Awareness Foundation, the organization hosts monthly events for tech workers and the community, and with the help of an \$82,850 Seed Accelerator Grant from WEDC, Milky Way held its first two-week bootcamp in July 2021 to help tech entrepreneurs of color take their concepts to the next level.

Johnson says the Milky Way Tech Hub aims to bring economic inclusion to people of color in the Milwaukee area by making them part of the growing tech ecosystem.

“The reality is that most of the technological solutions today have been primarily developed by white males. We have to ask ourselves: Who is behind these data models? Who codes, matters,” says Johnson. “Whatever benefits do come out of the tech industry, here in Wisconsin and nationally, need to come to all of us.”



Nadiyah Johnson founded the Milky Way Tech Hub to bring STEAM education to more students, to provide a sense of community among Milwaukee tech employees and to encourage entrepreneurship by people of color.

MEDIAN PAY FOR TECH WORKERS IN WISCONSIN TOPS



WHICH IS 63% HIGHER THAN THE MEDIAN WAGE IN THE STATE



Madison-based Clandestine Materials Detection's technology allows for scouring a wide area to detect land mines, nuclear weapons, chemical weapons and dirty bombs—all while keeping investigators at a safe distance.



Success Story

SCOURING THE WORLD FOR HIDDEN EXPLOSIVES

Land mines—many of them long forgotten—have killed 130,000 people in the last 15 years, including at least 30,000 children. More than 110 million of the explosives still are buried underground and Madison startup Clandestine Materials Detection Inc. (CMD) is determined to find them. “I’m in it for the humanitarian side and to help save those children,” cofounder and chief engineer Gerald Kulcinski says.

CMD became certified for WEDC’s Qualified New Business Venture Program in 2021, making investors in the company eligible for a 25% state tax credit on their investments. CMD hopes to raise \$5 million to create a prototype; investors in CMD are authorized to receive a total of up to \$1.25 million in state tax credits.

CMD’s Red Rover System uses a drone-based neutron generator, which sends neutrons below the surface of the earth or underwater. If explosive materials are present, they produce gamma rays which are detected by additional drones, identifying their location. The drones can scour a wide area, keeping investigators at a safe distance and they can detect land mines, nuclear weapons, chemical weapons and dirty bombs.

Kulcinski, an emeritus professor of nuclear engineering and director of the Fusion Technology Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and John Santarius, CMD’s cofounder and chief scientific officer and an emeritus research professor of engineering physics, developed the patented technology. Kulcinski says the system eventually could be used not only to find hidden explosives but also to find airplanes that have crashed into the sea, to identify mineral deposits or to help organizations assess resources in space.





Success Story

FORK FARMS CREATES URBAN FARMERS

Wisconsin native Alex Tyink was an opera singer in New York City when a simple bag of homegrown lettuce, given to him for volunteering at a rooftop garden, made him think about the health and psychological benefits of growing one's own food. Tyink founded Fork Farms in 2010 as an independent contractor providing rooftop and indoor gardens for schools and food programs in New York. Then he started to dream even bigger.

Tyink moved back to Wisconsin in 2014 and began building vertical hydroponic systems for growing salad greens and herbs. The Flex Farm system takes up less than 10 square feet and plugs into a standard electrical outlet. The company says a Flex Farm can produce up to 394 pounds of fresh produce a year, indoors.

Fork Farms moved to the TitledownTech complex in Green Bay, where the partnership between the Green Bay Packers and Microsoft helps build early-stage companies. WEDC approved Fork Farms for the Qualified New Business Venture (QNBV) Program in 2021, allowing investors to receive up to a 25% state tax credit on their investments in the company. Within months, Fork Farms closed on a \$2 million series A funding round. The company, which has more than 600 installations around the U.S. and in several other countries, plans to develop more products and expand to new markets.

Tyink says WEDC's QNBV designation gave Fork Farms a significant boost. "Overall, we believe their support of the local startup community is critical to building a vibrant Wisconsin state economy," he says.



Based at the TitledownTech complex in Green Bay, Fork Farms has more than 600 installations around the U.S. and in several other countries.

THE COMPANY SAYS A FLEX FARM CAN PRODUCE UP TO

394 lbs 

OF FRESH PRODUCE A YEAR, INDOORS



"Overall, we believe their support of the local startup community is critical to building a vibrant Wisconsin state economy,"

– Alex Tyink, Founder, Fork Farms

GLOBAL TRADE AND INVESTMENT



BOOSTING EXPORTS AND ATTRACTING INVESTMENT FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH



31 COMPANIES

WEDC led virtual global trade ventures to 5 international markets in FY21, serving 31 Wisconsin companies.



\$20.5 BILLION

Wisconsin companies exported products worth \$20.5 billion to markets around the world.



56 COMPANIES

WEDC assisted 56 Wisconsin companies in growing their export sales through the ExporTech™ and Global Business Development Grant programs.



*In Wisconsin, one of our best qualities is how we pull together in the face of a big challenge. When hard times knock us down, we find ways to come back even stronger. **And we always succeed—together.***

Although the pandemic delivered worldwide shocks to travel and trade, the flow of goods and services across international borders continued and exporting has been as crucial as ever for Wisconsin companies. WEDC's efforts to support export growth during FY21 included ExporTech™ and Global Business Development Grants, as well as Global Trade Ventures in a virtual format. WEDC's global network of authorized trade representatives continued to help Wisconsin companies connect with partners and distributors in 82 markets around the world.

Efforts to attract foreign direct investment to Wisconsin also moved into virtual formats in FY21, using technology to make the best of challenging circumstances. Events were held showcasing opportunities in Wisconsin for potential partners in Luxembourg, Spain, Japan, the UK and South Korea. In some cases, these online sessions brought Wisconsin to the attention of companies that may not have been able to make an in-person visit to the state and drew participation by Wisconsin business leaders who may not have been able to travel overseas—starting conversations that could result in future business endeavors.



Efforts to attract foreign direct investment to Wisconsin also moved into virtual formats in FY21.



Success Story

VIRTUAL TRADE VENTURES GET CREATIVE

A WEDC trade venture to Germany in 2020 was canceled when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down foreign travel. But that didn't stop Wisconsin companies from wooing potential customers. The program, held several months later than initially planned, went virtual instead.

WEDC presented its first-ever virtual Global Trade Venture, with 13 companies participating and dozens of meetings with German counterparts, held over a two-week period. Wisconsin businesses got creative with their presentations. Graftobian Professional Makeup, in Madison, added a second camera to give product demonstrations. June Taylor, a Richfield-based maker of sewing and quilting tools, hung an overhead webcam to better display its products.

"Although our European competitors have a strong foothold in the German market, the quality of our products is actually superior and we are able to easily demonstrate this using the dual camera setup," says Graftobian President Eric G. Coffman. "With the assistance of the translator provided by WEDC, we were able to keep the discussion going and do demonstrations seamlessly."

In addition to the cultural briefing that is part of all WEDC Global Trade Ventures, the in-market trade office coordinated workshops on pricing for the German market, customs regulations and taking advantage of services offered by VDMA, Germany's mechanical engineering industry association. For Wisconsin participants, the cost of the virtual trade venture was much less expensive than traveling in person and WEDC's staff still conducted market research to find the best-matched German companies for meetings. The model was successful enough that WEDC conducted multiple virtual trade ventures thereafter, completing five during FY21; the model has continued in FY22 as WEDC contemplates a return to an in-person format while continuing to take public health concerns into consideration.



June Taylor, a maker of sewing and quilting tools based in Richfield, used an overhead webcam to demonstrate products during WEDC's virtual trade venture to Germany, while a separate camera focused on the face of the meeting participant. Innovations like this were key to making the online trade venture successful.

"WEDC was completely organized and walked us through every step of the process. We achieved a successful outcome with minimal investment," says Jill Repp, vice president of sales and marketing for June Taylor. "We would highly recommend a virtual trade venture to anyone looking to grow their business overseas."



"WEDC was completely organized and walked us through every step of the process. We achieved a successful outcome with minimal investment. We would highly recommend a virtual trade venture to anyone looking to grow their business overseas."

– Jill Repp, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, June Taylor



In September 2021, Bi-khim Hsiao (third from left), Taiwan's representative to the U.S., visited a ginseng farm in Wausau to meet with state and local officials to promote the expansion of trade between Wisconsin and Taiwan.



Success Story

WISCONSIN GINSENG HAS INTERNATIONAL APPEAL

Strains to international trade, caused by both political and public health factors, have led to declining trade volumes between the U.S. and some Asian countries, making the market more difficult for Wisconsin ginseng growers. But a recent visit to Wisconsin by a Taiwanese delegation is raising hopes for turning that around.

Ginseng has been an important part of Wisconsin's agricultural economy for years. Prized for centuries in Chinese traditional medicine and by some Native American tribes, ginseng has gained popularity worldwide as an ingredient in food and beverages and a dietary supplement with possible health benefits.

Wisconsin growers have cultivated ginseng since the 1800s. The state's climate, terrain, water and soil combine to yield a product that has earned a reputation as the gold standard in American ginseng. More than 90% of all ginseng produced in the U.S. is grown in Wisconsin and Marathon County produces about 95% of the state's crop. Wisconsin growers exported more than \$19 million of ginseng in 2020.

Bi-khim Hsiao, Taiwan's trade representative to the U.S., visited a ginseng farm in Wausau in September 2021 and met with state and local officials. Hsiao said, "Taiwanese consumers have a long tradition of appreciating ginseng products and Taiwan, being Wisconsin's third-largest ginseng market, looks forward to further expanding this trade."

Taiwan imported about \$1 million of ginseng from Wisconsin in 2020. Taiwan recently published its protocol for importing fresh ginseng from the U.S., so Wisconsin growers are hoping that may lead to more opportunities to export their ginseng.

"Wisconsin's leadership as the world's premier producer of high-quality ginseng is an important part of our state's export strategy," says WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes.



More than 90% of all ginseng produced in the U.S. is grown in Wisconsin.



"Wisconsin's leadership as the world's premier producer of high-quality ginseng is an important part of our state's export strategy."

– Missy Hughes, WEDC Secretary and CEO



Success Story

VIRTUAL VICTORIES A BRIGHT SPOT DURING PANDEMIC



The session on trade with Luxembourg drew more than 300 participants, while the Japan event had an attendance of 250. That's significantly higher than the number of businesspeople in those countries who would have been able to come to an in-person meeting in their own country, let alone come to Wisconsin to find out about business opportunities here.

When the COVID-19 pandemic put a halt to most travel and large gatherings, events were forced to go virtual. For WEDC, staging meetings online may not have been the ideal way to connect Wisconsin business leaders with their foreign counterparts, but in some ways, the virtual sessions produced unexpected positive results.

In 2021, WEDC organized or participated in events designed to attract foreign direct investment into Wisconsin from markets that included South Korea, Japan, the UK, Spain and Luxembourg—several of which already are leading sources of investment in the state.

One advantage to going virtual was that key Wisconsin corporate executives spoke at the sessions—leaders who ordinarily would not have time to travel overseas for personal meetings. Another plus was that many more people were able to attend the events. The session on trade with Luxembourg drew more than 300 participants, while the Japan event had an attendance of 250. That's significantly higher than the number of businesspeople in those countries who would have been able to come to an in-person meeting in their own country, let alone come to Wisconsin to find out about business opportunities here. One virtual event even sparked a partnership between Marquette University and the Luxembourg government on the issue of blockchain, notes Katy Sinnott, WEDC vice president of global trade and investment.

Sinnott says even when the pandemic recedes, WEDC may continue offering virtual meetings as part of its strategy. For example, before attending a trade venture to a given country, Wisconsin business leaders could meet virtually with potential export partners in that country. "The pre-meetings can help make the time in that country more productive and efficient and the meetings more meaningful," says Sinnott.



With international travel suspended, the pandemic forced WEDC to explore new formats and technologies for its events and programs promoting global trade and investment.



BOOSTING BUSINESSES THAT LOCATE, STAY AND GROW IN WISCONSIN

WEDC's business attraction, retention and growth programs combine a variety of economic development tools, including tax credits and loans as well as leveraging strong partnerships with economic development organizations and units of local government across the state to help businesses get what they need to support their continued expansion.



BOOSTING BUSINESS



\$10 MILLION

in Business Development Tax Credits

AWARDED TO

25 COMPANIES

in FY21 to support their continued growth



Business Development Tax Credits

HAVE A

**48:1 LEVERAGE
RATIO**

of outside investment to WEDC investment



*WEDC's Business and Community Development team **has worked with both large and small businesses to help them thrive and grow in Wisconsin.***

From luring a luxury boat manufacturer—Grand Craft Boats—to the shores of Lake Geneva to helping backup power manufacturer Generac expand and add hundreds of jobs in Waukesha County, WEDC's Business and Community Development team has worked with both large and small businesses to help them thrive and grow in Wisconsin.

In FY21, with WEDC support, the state welcomed its first new paper mill in more than 30 years with a celebration at Green Bay Packaging's new \$500 million facility. Across the state in La Crosse, the pandemic heightened demand for Kwik Trip's food products. WEDC was able to help the company expand its food production campus with an additional \$5 million in performance-based tax credits. Hewlett Packard Enterprise Co. will receive up to \$8 million in tax credits for a Global Center of Excellence for High Performance Computer Manufacturing in Chippewa Falls, a \$22 million project expected to create 30 new jobs. And Agropur Dairy Cooperative will receive up to \$4.5 million in tax credits for the state-of-the-art cheese factory it is building in Little Chute. These are just a handful of the projects that represent WEDC's FY21 business development successes.



Success Story

KWIK TRIP'S SUCCESS LEADS TO CONTINUED EXPANSION

The COVID-19 pandemic may have hurt parts of Wisconsin's economy, but for the Kwik Trip convenience store chain, it meant more business. As restaurants were forced to scale back and residents were stuck at home with their families, consumer demand soared for some of Kwik Trip's food offerings—enough that the La Crosse-based chain had to step up plans to add onto its facilities.

Family-owned Kwik Trip had started expanding its La Crosse production facilities in 2017. At the time, the company planned to hire at least 329 new employees and invest at least \$309 million. But reality exceeded expectations. By mid-2021, the company had created 527 jobs—60% more than anticipated—and now expects the expansion will result in a total of 662 new, full-time jobs and a total capital investment of more than \$378 million.

At the start of the expansion, WEDC created an Enterprise Zone and awarded Kwik Trip up to \$21 million in tax credits to help with the growth. Now that the company has not only met those goals but topped them, Kwik Trip has been authorized to receive up to \$5 million more, for a total of \$26 million in state tax credits, contingent on job creation and capital investment.

"Our work with WEDC has helped Kwik Trip's growth and ability to provide excellent job opportunities," says John McHugh, Kwik Trip's director of public relations. Kwik Trip operates more than 800 retail stores in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois and Iowa and employs more than 28,000 people. The company produces more than 80% of the products featured in its stores, supplied by its commissary, bakery, dairy and distribution center in La Crosse.



Kwik Trip produces more than 80% of the products featured in its stores. The company operates more than 700 retail stores in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois and Iowa and employs more than 28,000 people.

BY MID-2021, KWIK TRIP CREATED
527 JOBS
60% MORE THAN ANTICIPATED



Success Story

GREEN BAY PACKAGING OPENS NEW MILL

Green Bay Packaging built a \$500 million paper mill in Green Bay—the first new mill built in Wisconsin in more than three decades and one of the largest economic development projects in Wisconsin history. The state-of-the-art mill recycles used cardboard boxes into paper, more than doubling paper production capacity for the company. Replacing a facility built in 1947, the new mill is environmentally conscious, with boilers fueled by natural gas instead of coal and a system to recycle its wastewater. Ribbon-cutting ceremonies were held in June 2021.

“Green Bay Packaging’s investment in Wisconsin is a testament to the strength of our state’s paper industry, which remains a major driver for our economy,” says WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes.

The project began in August 2018 and took nearly three years to complete. Green Bay Packaging has received \$41.9 million in performance-based state tax credits from WEDC in exchange for retaining 1,468 jobs and creating 177 new jobs. Up to \$60 million in state tax credits has been authorized for the project, subject to job creation/retention and capital investment targets being met.

Family-owned Green Bay Packaging was founded in 1933 and has operations in 14 states and in Mexico. The company encompasses paper mills, folding carton and corrugated packaging plants and coated paper products manufacturing.

The paper industry has been part of Wisconsin’s economic backbone for nearly 175 years and has had its ups and downs over the past few decades. But a surge in demand for packaging during the last few years prompted a longtime Wisconsin company to make a huge investment in the state by building a new paper mill.



**Family-owned
Green Bay Packaging
was founded in 1933.**

Green Bay Packaging’s state-of-the-art mill recycles used cardboard boxes into paper. Replacing a facility built in 1947, the new mill is environmentally conscious, with boilers fueled by natural gas instead of coal and a system to recycle its wastewater.



In FY21, with WEDC support, the state welcomed its first new paper mill in more than 30 years with a celebration at Green Bay Packaging’s new \$500 million facility.



Agropur, the largest dairy cooperative in North America and one of the top 20 dairy producers in the world, operates facilities in La Crosse, Appleton, Little Chute, Weyauwega and Luxemburg, employing about 850 people in Wisconsin.



*Wisconsin's dairy industry scored a big victory with the news in 2021 that the **Agropur Dairy Cooperative is building a \$168 million, state-of-the-art cheese factory in Little Chute.***



About 85% of the milk will come from dairy farms within 40 miles of the plant.



Success Story

SUPPORTING GROWTH IN WISCONSIN'S DAIRY INDUSTRY

Wisconsin has been known as the dairy state for generations. With about 6,700 dairy farms—more than any other state—the dairy industry contributes \$45.6 billion to the state's economy. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, prices paid to farmers for their milk production became volatile and unpredictable. But Wisconsin's dairy industry scored a big victory with the news in 2021 that the Agropur Dairy Cooperative is building a \$168 million, state-of-the-art cheese factory in Little Chute.

Agropur is the largest dairy cooperative in North America and one of the top 20 dairy producers in the world. In Wisconsin, Agropur operates facilities in La Crosse, Appleton, Little Chute, Weyauwega and Luxemburg, employing about 850 employees. With this project, the cooperative anticipates spending nearly \$60 million more a year on milk from Wisconsin farms and creating at least 54 new full-time jobs.

"This expansion is a promise to farmers that we're going to be here and you'll have a place for your milk to go," says Lorraine Steffens, who, with her sons, runs Steffens Dairy Farm, an Agropur supplier near Seymour. Agropur's 210,000-square-foot cheesemaking plant will update an older plant and will more than double its milk processing volume. About 85% of the milk will come from dairy farms within 40 miles of the plant.

Agropur will be eligible for up to \$4.5 million in business tax credits from WEDC over the next four years, based on meeting hiring and capital expenditure goals. Agropur U.S. President Doug Simon says the facility will help the cooperative meet growing demand for cheese and dairy products and offer a broader product line.



COMMUNITIES FORM THE FOUNDATION OF ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

34 MAIN STREET
COMMUNITIES



81 CONNECT
COMMUNITIES

41 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENT
GRANTS WORTH MORE THAN
\$8.5 MILLION AWARDED
IN FY21



Economic development isn't just about businesses and jobs. It's about building communities—places where people want to live and are able to thrive. WEDC's community development tools include:

- » **Community Development Investment Grants** to fund projects such as renovating and preserving historic buildings, creating significant community destinations, developments on underutilized land and mixed-use developments;
- » **Idle Sites Redevelopment Grants**, which provide incentives to help rejuvenate sites that have been idle, abandoned or underutilized for a period of at least five years;
- » **Brownfields Grants**, which provide funding to redevelop commercial and industrial sites impacted by environmental contamination;
- » **Site Assessment Grants**, which cover the cost of a site assessment to evaluate the impact of environmental contamination and initial demolition activities;
- » the **Certified Sites Program**, which helps business parks and other industrial sites market themselves as shovel-ready;
- » **Historic Preservation Tax Credits**, which provide incentives for reinvestment into Wisconsin's historic main streets, downtowns and commercial districts; and
- » the **Main Street** and **Connect Communities** programs which support communities working on downtown development with training, technical assistance, planning and other guidance.

In addition, WEDC's popular Main Street Makeover contest expanded in FY21 to include a new mini-makeover. Rather than a full-scale remodel, the mini-makeover is a merchandise rejuvenation, completed in a 24-hour period with help from WEDC's downtown development staff and designers from Milwaukee-based Retailworks. The first mini-makeover winner was The Sow's Ear, a yarn and coffee shop in Verona.



The Community within the Corridor project—which will provide 197 affordable housing apartments, a community center with child care, a food hall, a laundromat, resources for STEAM education and 25,000 square feet of recreation space—broke ground in June 2021.



Success Story

UNIQUE MILWAUKEE HOUSING PROJECT AIMS TO BUILD TRUE COMMUNITY

At a time when housing prices are on the rise and child care is hard to find, a new development in Milwaukee hopes to help with both of those problems.

The Community within the Corridor will provide 197 affordable housing apartments, a 35,000-square-foot community center with a child care center; resources for science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) education and adult development; a food hall; a laundromat; and 25,000 square feet of recreation space. The project, which broke ground in June 2021, will occupy part of the former Briggs and Stratton engine manufacturing complex and will span two city blocks on Milwaukee's northwest side. Launched by Scott Crawford Inc. and Roers Companies, it will be the largest privately owned affordable housing development in Wisconsin.

WEDC is supporting the \$66 million redevelopment with a \$250,000 Community Development Investment Grant to Milwaukee County and up to \$12.4 million in Historic Preservation Tax Credits to allow the redevelopment to proceed while maintaining the historic architecture and character of the early-20th-century industrial buildings.

The apartments will range in size from studios to four-bedroom units. The child care center will be able to accommodate up to 200 children, ages six weeks to 12 years old. Recreation space will include a fitness center, a playground and a basketball court.

"The Community within the Corridor development is very exciting because it takes this holistic approach to supporting families by offering not just affordable housing but child care, food resources, recreation spaces and more," says WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes. "We know that these are the types of resources that allow families to thrive and workers to succeed."



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– Missy Hughes, WEDC Secretary and CEO



The Wyoming Valley School Cultural Arts Center, originally a school designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, is undergoing a restoration and will one day be open for field trips, art exhibits, classes, concerts and weddings.



“I think the building had a profound effect on anyone who came there to learn.”

***– Peter Rött, Preservation Consultant,
Wyoming Valley School Cultural Arts Center***



WEDC IS PROVIDING A

\$90,000

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENT GRANT
TO HELP PAY FOR HISTORIC REHABILITATION**

Success Story

HISTORIC FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT SCHOOL TO GET NEW LIFE AS ARTS CENTER



Wyoming Valley School—the only elementary school designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright—needed repairs and updates so it might once again serve as a gathering place for children and adults in the Spring Green area.

WEDC is providing a \$90,200 Community Development Investment Grant to help pay for historic rehabilitation of the school’s sloped and flat roofs, rebuilding a chimney and cleaning up water damage inside the building. The school was built in 1957 in honor of Frank Lloyd Wright’s mother, a kindergarten teacher. The building was closed in 1990 but it was donated to a nonprofit organization in 2010 and now houses the Wyoming Valley School Cultural Arts Center. Volunteers have been working to preserve the building, relying on donations.

When the restoration is finished and the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, the building will be open for field trips, art exhibits, classes, concerts and weddings. The building is on State Highway 23 near Spring Green and near Taliesin, Wright’s famed home and studio, which has been designated as part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

“I think the building had a profound effect on anyone who came there to learn,” says architect Peter Rött, the project’s preservation consultant, who grew up nearby. The former school has two large classrooms, an auditorium, an office, a kitchen and restrooms. It is on the National Register of Historic Places as well as the state’s register.

“Opening the historic Wyoming Valley School for tours and events will draw even more visitors and allow new generations to experience the area’s rich cultural heritage,” says WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes.



“Small businesses are the heart and soul of our Wisconsin communities.”

– Tony Evers, Governor



Success Story

WASHBURN'S DOWNTOWN BOUNCES BACK

The small city of Washburn, in Bayfield County, is in the heart of a popular tourist region along Lake Superior's Chequamegon Bay. But its downtown had fallen on hard times and many storefronts on Main Street sat empty.

The Wisconsin Tomorrow Main Street Bounceback Grant Program has helped give the area new life. The Washburn Area Chamber of Commerce helped businesses obtain more than 10 of the grants, each of which provides up to \$10,000 for a business or nonprofit that moves into a vacant commercial space.

Artists John Hopkins and Susan Lince received one of the grants to open an art gallery that celebrates the work of artists living near the Wisconsin Lake Superior National Scenic Byway. “That is an engine of growth in a community that was essentially a drive-through community. We have something wonderful here ... Washburn is more than anyone ever thought of us,” says Hopkins.

Artist and photographer Jamey Penney-Ritter moved her travel poster business from the basement of her home to a building that once housed Bayfield County's first bank. She says the grant she received helped her buy equipment and prepay her rent.



Governor Tony Evers visited Washburn in December 2021 to learn about the businesses that had received Wisconsin Tomorrow Main Street Bounceback Grants to move into vacant spaces and help revitalize the downtown.

Other businesses assisted by the grants include a martini bar, a physical therapy center and a children's boutique. Washburn Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Melissa Martinez says the new businesses have revitalized the city for visitors and for local residents alike.

“Small businesses are the heart and soul of our Wisconsin communities,” says Governor Evers, who has allocated a total of \$50 million in funding for the program. “These businesses not only provide jobs and build wealth; they bring vitality and life to our downtowns. The creativity and spirit these business owners bring is part of what makes Wisconsin a wonderful place to live.”



FAB LABS

SPARKING TECHNOLOGY CREATIONS WITH FAB LABS


When it comes to getting creative with technology, Wisconsin students with grand ideas can turn them into reality, with help from the Fabrication Laboratories (Fab Labs) Grant Program.

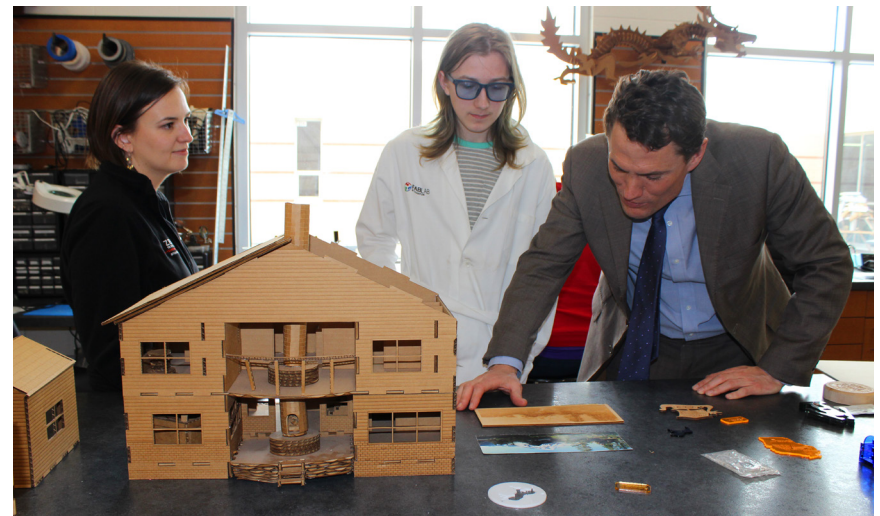


The grant program supports hands-on science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) education by assisting public school districts with equipment purchases for instructional and educational purposes in fab labs. Fab labs are high-tech workshops with the latest equipment, including computer-controlled manufacturing components such as 3D printers, laser engravers and computer numerical control routers.

Since the program's inception, WEDC has awarded more than \$3.4 million in grants to 95 school districts. In April 2021, grants totaling more than \$635,000 were awarded to 28 districts.

 **\$3.4 MILLION**
HAS BEEN AWARDED TO
95 SCHOOL DISTRICTS
SINCE 2017

\$635,000
WAS AWARDED TO
 **28 SCHOOL DISTRICTS**
IN FY21



Above and upper left: WEDC Deputy Secretary Sam Rikers (at right in the photo above) visited the Stoughton Area School District fab lab in early 2020, just before the pandemic began.



Success Story

FIRING UP SOUTHERN DOOR COUNTY STUDENTS WITH STEAM

About five years ago, educators in southern Door County started a move to get their students prepared for potential careers in STEAM fields, working to equip them with knowledge and skills that are in high demand in the global economy. A \$25,000 grant from the WEDC's Fab Labs Grant Program helped get the program off the ground.

Today, all students from kindergarten through 12th grade in the Southern Door County School District have access to fab labs, with equipment that includes 3D printers, robotic gear, laser cutters and computer-aided design software.

Jessica Meacham, career technical education coordinator for the district, says the fab labs have sparked interest in STEAM courses because students can take concepts and turn them into reality in the labs. "Kids always enjoy working hands-on in passion projects," says Meacham, who is also a 4K-fifth grade STEAM teacher.

Fifth-graders design and 3D print boats, middle-school students make 3D printed doorstops and high-school students have made trail markers for Potawatomi State Park. The district even holds special workshops for area adults.

The school district has now received a total of \$100,000 in grants through WEDC's Fab Labs Grant Program as well as funds from local, state and national foundations. Former district superintendent Patti Vickman says the project has built collaborations with local businesses and the community. "The greatest thing that students have learned is to be out-of-the-box thinkers," she says. "The enthusiasm around the labs is sparking creative energy in both our students and our staff."



The Southern Door County School District has received four grants totaling \$100,000 through the Fab Labs Grant Program.



Fifth-graders design and 3D print boats, middle-school students make 3D printed doorstops and high-school students have made trail markers for Potawatomi State Park.



"The greatest thing that students have learned is to be out-of-the-box thinkers. The enthusiasm around the labs is sparking creative energy in both our students and our staff."

***– Patti Vickman, Former Superintendent,
Southern Door County School District***



WEDC Deputy Secretary Sam Ridders (left) spoke with students and teachers during a visit to Belleville High School, where the FY21 Fab Labs Grant recipients were announced. Belleville was one of 28 districts that received a grant in FY21.



“The skills learned in Wisconsin’s fab labs can help prepare our kids for their future, including high-paying jobs in technology and manufacturing, which are critically important for our state’s future and our economy.”

– Tony Evers, Governor



Success Story

BUILDING THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

School districts around the state are getting serious about educating their students in STEAM fields and in the process, seeking to incorporate fab labs into the curriculum.

A total of 28 school districts throughout Wisconsin were awarded a total of \$635,000 in 2021 through WEDC’s Fab Labs Grant Program to establish or expand fab labs. The high-tech equipment includes computer-controlled laser engravers and 3D printers for use by students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

Governor Tony Evers says fab labs give students the opportunity to design and create things, from robots to 3D models. “The skills learned in Wisconsin’s fab labs can help prepare our kids for their future, including high-paying jobs in technology and manufacturing, which are critically important for our state’s future and our economy,” he says.

Over the past six years, WEDC has invested more than \$3.4 million to help 95 school districts with fab lab projects. “Fab labs not only benefit the students themselves with important technology and career skills, but they also benefit Wisconsin employers, who will be able to find workers with the right skills to allow their companies to grow and thrive,” says WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes.

In addition to the grants, WEDC has developed a fab lab resource webpage, wedc.org/fablabs, that provides districts with information on how to set up and equip a fab lab and how to implement best practices for the program. Content for the page was provided by the UW-Stout and Fox Valley Technical College.



WEDC.ORG

