

Gov. Walker: Urges schools to apply for Fab Lab grants

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MADISON – Governor Scott Walker today announced the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) is now accepting applications for the third year of its Fabrication Laboratories (Fab Labs) Grant Program, which provides funding to help public schools build or expand fab labs.

“Fab labs are a key part of our goal to make sure that every student in Wisconsin has the tools needed to succeed in school and beyond. That’s why our budget included \$1 million in funding to continue to this vital program over the next two years,” said Governor Scott Walker. “As a result of our commitment, Wisconsin now has provided funding to 34 fab labs statewide and is a national leader in this initiative. I strongly encourage districts throughout the state to consider applying for a fab lab grant.”

The fab lab 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.

WEDC’s investment in the program puts fab labs within reach for schools that might otherwise not have the financial means to install such facilities.

WEDC will provide grants of up to \$25,000 to public school districts or up to \$50,000 to consortiums of two or more districts, for the creation and/or expansion of fab

labs. The funds may be used to purchase equipment used for instructional and educational purposes by elementary, middle, junior high, or high school students. Applicants must match the amount of funding provided by WEDC.

In April, grants totaling nearly \$500,000 were awarded to 21 school districts in the second year of the program. WEDC is allocating another \$500,000 in this fiscal year and anticipates awarding 20 grants this time around. Grant recipients will be announced next spring.

Fab Labs Grants will be awarded through a competitive process, with applications evaluated based on readiness and long-range planning, curriculum, business and community partnerships, financial need and previous awards.

More information on the program and requests for applications can be found at InWisconsin.com/fablabs. The application deadline is Dec. 14.

“For the state’s economy to continue to grow, it is imperative that Wisconsin companies have the skilled workers they need to fill the jobs of 21st century,” said Mark R. Hogan, secretary and CEO of WEDC, the state’s lead economic development organization. “Fab labs can play a key role in meeting that challenge by providing students with hands-on experience in areas such as design, engineering and complex problem-solving.”

In addition to the grant program, WEDC also is supporting the state’s fab labs by working with the University of Wisconsin-Stout to develop an online tool to increase collaboration and the sharing of resources among school districts with fab labs.

The web portal, which was developed by the UW-Stout Discovery Center with guidance from teachers statewide, allows teachers and others at fab lab schools to communicate with one another on topics such as curriculum development and implementation, equipment usage and troubleshooting, training and professional development.

Governor Walker’s fab labs announcement comes as more than a dozen state agencies and organizations are marking Manufacturing Month with events throughout October. While students in fab labs will develop the types of skills applicable to any industry, those skills are increasingly important in the evolution of next generation manufacturing.

“With 9,500 manufacturers in Wisconsin, there is, and will continue to be, a need for highly skilled workers in the industry, and we need to ensure a robust talent pipeline in the years to come,” Governor Walker said. “The Fab Labs Grant Program is just one of the many ways the state is working to address that challenge.”