

# Greater Milwaukee Foundation: New research spotlights the promise of small-scale manufacturing in Milwaukee

Posted on Thursday, May 3, 2018

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

**Contact:** Johnny Magdaleno: UMA, [johnny@urbanmfg.org](mailto:johnny@urbanmfg.org), 503 858 7893  
Jeremy Podolski: Greater Milwaukee Foundation, [jpodolski@greatermilwaukeefoundation.org](mailto:jpodolski@greatermilwaukeefoundation.org), 414 336 7048

A new piece of research from the **Urban Manufacturing Alliance** (UMA) highlights the growth potential of manufacturing in the city of Milwaukee. The research, called the *State of Urban Manufacturing: Milwaukee Snapshot*, is the third of a six-city series produced by UMA that will provide first-of-its-kind data on city-based manufacturing across the country, with an emphasis on makers and small-scale manufacturers.

[Click here for more information on the \*\*May 7 release event.\*\*](#)

Milwaukee was built on manufacturing, and the sector still drives the local economy. Manufacturing was the second-largest employer in the city in 2015. Those jobs paid the highest share of total wages among all sectors, at \$7.42 billion.

But the *State of Urban Manufacturing: Milwaukee Snapshot* research, which is based on interviews and surveys of more than 100 local manufacturers, reveals

that **there's a new generation of small-scale manufacturers that are taking root alongside Milwaukee's legacy manufacturers.** Nearly 61 percent of firms surveyed for the *Milwaukee Snapshot* had fewer than 10 employees. About a third of all firms started in 2013, and 56 percent were founded since 2001.

These firms are eager to grow. Ninety-four percent of firms surveyed for the *Milwaukee Snapshot* said they expected to expand in two years. Fifty-eight percent said they expected to be “significantly larger” in that same time period. Impressively, about half of firms with fewer than 10 employees are already selling their products nationally or internationally.

More partnerships are needed between government and economic development practitioners in Milwaukee to help newer manufacturers grow. Milwaukee firms surveyed for the *State of Urban Manufacturing: Milwaukee Snapshot* said their **top three biggest barriers to growth were reaching new customers, finding qualified employees, and access to capital.** For example, nearly 91 percent of firms that were founded after 2007 said they relied on their own money to start their businesses. Just 11 percent were able to access bank loans when they got started.

“Across the country, the Urban Manufacturing Alliance is connecting with manufacturers of all sizes to learn about these vital businesses and their impact on cities,” said **Katy Stanton, program director at the Urban Manufacturing Alliance.** “Smaller firms and bigger, legacy manufacturers alike are what fortify Milwaukee's economy, and we hope this report helps policymakers and other local stakeholders plot out new programs to help these businesses prosper.”

“Manufacturers of all sizes are critical to the ongoing growth of our economy at the neighborhood, city and regional level,” said **Daniel J. Bader, president/CEO at Bader Philanthropies.** “The *State of Urban Manufacturing: Milwaukee Snapshot* offers another point of view to spark cross-sector partnerships that will help facilitate how growing manufacturers can thrive, while enabling residents to learn valuable job skills, raise families and contribute to the greater Milwaukee community.”

“The Urban Manufacturing Alliance’s research presents our legacy manufacturing city with a unique opportunity to better appreciate the shape and scope of making and manufacturing today,” said **Marcus White, vice president for civic engagement at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation**. “As the Foundation continues its work to improve access to employment opportunities and advance economic inclusion, the knowledge from this report will offer insight into a portion of the local economy that is full of potential but not fully understood.”

The *State of Urban Manufacturing: Milwaukee Snapshot* outlines specific recommendations city officials and local stakeholders can heed to help manufacturers overcome these challenges going forward. With more small-scale manufacturers working to bring innovation and local production processes to the city of Milwaukee, this new report captures what these entrepreneurs need today to grow alongside the city economy.

Snapshots of the remaining three cities will be released in June 2018. They will culminate in a national piece of research, titled *The State of Urban Manufacturing*, that will look at the industry’s promise in post-recession, urban America.

The report will be [released in partnership with the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and Bader Philanthropies](#) at 4 p.m. Monday, May 7, at Gathering Place Brewing Company, [811 E. Vienna Ave.](#)