

WEDC: Wisconsin school districts encouraged to apply for Fab Labs Grants

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WEDC expects to award grants to 20 districts; deadline is Dec. 13

MADISON, WI. Oct. 8, 2018 – The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) is now accepting applications for the fourth year of its Fabrication Laboratories (Fab Labs) Grant Program, which provides funding to help public schools build or expand fab labs.

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.

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 fabrication laboratories. 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.

Since the program's inception, WEDC has awarded nearly \$1.6 million in grants to 43 districts. In April, grants totaling more than \$500,000 were awarded to 22

districts. WEDC is allocating another \$500,000 in this fiscal year and anticipates awarding 20 grants this time around. Recipients will be announced next spring.

“Over the last three years, we have seen WEDC’s Fab Labs Grants make a real difference in every region of the state in providing students with hands-on experience in areas such as design, engineering and complex problem-solving,” said Mark R. Hogan, secretary and CEO of WEDC, the state’s lead economic development organization. “We are pleased to invest again in this vital program and I encourage school districts statewide to consider applying for a grant.”

Fab Labs Grants will be awarded through a competitive process, with applications evaluated based on the applicant’s readiness and long-range planning, curriculum, business and community partnerships, financial need and previous awards. This year’s round of Fab Labs Grants includes a moratorium on applicants who have already received three grants, excluding Milwaukee Public Schools.

More information on the program, including applications details, can be found at wedc.org/fablabs. The deadline is Dec. 13.

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.

The fab labs announcement comes as the state celebrates Wisconsin Manufacturing Month with events throughout October. While fab labs help students develop skills applicable to any industry, those skills are increasingly important in the evolution of next-generation manufacturing.

“With more than 9,000 manufacturers in Wisconsin, there is a real need for skilled workers to fill the jobs of today and tomorrow,” Secretary Hogan said. “The Fab Labs Grant Program is one of the ways in which the state is helping to fill that need as we continue to grow Wisconsin’s economy.”