

Dept. of Workforce Development: Partners with IKEA US Community Foundation to fund workforce equity grant program

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MADISON – The Department of Workforce Development (DWD) announced today that IKEA US Community Foundation donated \$947,000 to address workforce needs in southeastern Wisconsin with a focus on improving racial equality in employment.

The Foundation's donation reflects the amount IKEA employees collected in Wisconsin unemployment insurance benefits when the company closed stores and furloughed employees during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. IKEA directed the state to use the funds toward the state's economic recovery efforts in response to COVID-19 that reflects the needs of the community. The pandemic has underscored racial disparities and has had disproportionate effects on communities of color. The grant's focus takes a strategic approach that complements Governor Tony Evers's statewide economic recovery plan by targeting the long-standing systemic inequities and the disparate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in certain communities.

"We are so grateful for IKEA's support for our state, and the generosity of businesses like IKEA that work with and take care of their communities as they face unprecedented challenges," said Governor Evers. "The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated some of the inequities our state was already facing, including economic disparity. We are looking forward to using this donation for innovative training programs that will support our state's economic recovery."

Southeastern Wisconsin makes up more than 35% of Wisconsin's total population. This seven-county region is a key economic driver for the state. Its residents have relatively high per capita income when compared to the state as a whole. Prosperity, however, has proven to be uneven, with major disparities in unemployment and poverty occurring along racial lines. For example, according to the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2014-2018, the percentage of the population below poverty level has been highest amongst African Americans at 32.9%, Hispanic/Latinos at 22.8%, and Native Americans at 25.9%, with the unemployment rate at 7.6%, 4.9%, and 5.5%, respectively.

“A recent report ranked Wisconsin's state economy as having the least racial equality in the nation in terms of employment and wealth,” DWD Deputy Secretary Rob Cherry said. “DWD's Workforce Equity grant program will fund education, skills training, and placement in high-demand occupations to under-represented populations in southeastern Wisconsin to reduce racial disparities and to narrow the education gap in Wisconsin's workforce.”

Up to \$947,000 is available in the 2021 fiscal year to train new and current employees and to place successful trainees in well-paying, family-supporting jobs. This grant will reimburse southeastern Wisconsin employers or consortiums comprised of employers and eligible workforce solutions providers for the expenses to design and implement training programs and post-training support to under-served populations.

Applications for the Workforce Equity Grant Program are due by **3 p.m. CST on January 18, 2021**. Applications must be submitted by email to WorkforceEquityGrant@dwd.wisconsin.gov. For more information visit: <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/det/>.