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Gov. Evers Announces Groundbreaking \$130 Million Investment in Workforce Solutions

New workforce programs build on successes and incentivize new solutions to workforce challenges

GREEN BAY — Gov. Tony Evers today announced he is investing \$130 million into solutions to help address the state's post-pandemic workforce needs. The announcement comes as Wisconsin continues to be a national leader in getting available shots in arms and has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, which has nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Under Gov. Evers' plans announced today, funds will be invested into Wisconsin's workforce across three programs. The resources will support both connecting unemployed or underemployed workers with new opportunities while also incentivizing innovative solutions to regional workforce challenges that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Programs announced today include:

- \$100 million Workforce Innovation grant program to encourage regions and communities to develop leading-edge, long-term solutions to the workforce challenges the state faces in the wake of COVID-19;
- \$20 million toward the Worker Advancement Initiative, which will offer subsidized employment and skills training opportunities with local employers to unemployed individuals; and
- \$10 million for a Worker Connection Program which will provide workforce career coaches who will connect with individuals attempting to reengage in the workforce post-pandemic.

"I'm proud of our work to ensure Wisconsin's economy can continue to recover, and that's why it's critically important that we invest in our workforce. We've heard from unemployed workers, business, and community leaders across the state about the workforce challenges they face, and recognize there's no one-size-fits-all solution to meeting these needs," Gov. Evers said. "These programs will allow us to invest in regional solutions, help businesses find workers, and provide support to our friends and neighbors who are getting back on their feet."

"These grants will support our communities in addressing the labor force challenges and workforce constraints exacerbated by the pandemic so that our entire state's economy can bounce back even better than before,"

Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek said. "Helping employers expand their candidate pools and tackling barriers to employment will make a significant and lasting impact on communities, which will offer Wisconsinites greater opportunities for generations to come."

Missy Hughes, Secretary and CEO of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), said the new grants will give communities and industries the flexibility to respond to their specific workforce challenges and find solutions.

"A region could address childcare or transit issues—whatever they know as their top priority to respond to the continuing workforce impacts of COVID-19," she said. "Another region might invest in and encourage apprenticeships, while another may develop strategies to attract or retain talent. The idea is to reward creativity, promote regional collaboration and foster local accountability and participation."

WEDC, DWD, and the Department of Administration will combine forces and expertise to administer the Workforce Innovation program, which will offer up to \$10 million in grants to at least 10 local and regional collaborations which develop proposals that represent innovative thinking, data-driven planning and leverage existing infrastructures to connect the dots for post-pandemic workforce solutions. The program will fund initiatives to help businesses find workers and workers connect to better, higher quality and more family-sustaining jobs. Grant funds could be used to meet local workforce needs resulting from or exacerbated by the pandemic, such as childcare, transit, worker attraction and retention, or housing, and may be used to support initiatives like training, planning, marketing, or developing pilot programs that can be applied in other communities.

Gov. Evers also announced \$20 million toward the Worker Advancement Initiative, which will offer subsidized employment and skills training opportunities with local employers to those whose previous employment has not come back post-pandemic, as well as those who were not attached to or were not successful in the labor market prior to the pandemic. The program builds on the success of current transitional jobs programs in the state by launching a new, statewide effort to provide subsidized work opportunities to around 2,000 individuals. DWD will administer the program through local workforce development boards in partnership with community-based organizations.

The governor will also invest \$10 million in a robust Worker Connection Program that will offer individuals who are attempting to reengage in the workforce career coaches who will connect them with the information and support necessary to overcome any barriers that may prevent their full participation in the labor force. The program will also offer individuals local training opportunities that are focused on in demand sector and employer needs. Employers will ensure that the training meets their workforce needs and provide job opportunities to participants. Two regions of the state will be selected for the program.

The grants will be funded with federal American Rescue Plan Act dollars, which are available to support investments to address the ongoing negative economic impacts of COVID-19.