

# Dept. of Workforce Development: Fast Forward funding supports a sustainable future

Posted on Friday, Apr 22, 2022

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CUSTER – It takes a well-trained workforce to keep communities green and growing.

Midwest Renewable Energy Association is taking the lead with a solar workforce training grant funded by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Fast Forward program.

"A skilled workforce is key to community sustainability and on this Earth Day, we salute Midwest Renewable Energy Association and the dozens of future solar industry leaders who are receiving training there," said DWD Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek. "This training, supported by Wisconsin Fast Forward funds, will help these workers make a difference for the environment and their families."

Nick Hylla, executive director of MREA, said improved solar panels and energy storage technology combined with growing concerns about sustainability and energy security are driving demand for solar installations. In Wisconsin, the projects include large-scale commercial and residential installations.

Through the Wisconsin Fast Forward grant, awarded in 2021, MREA is providing hands-on training to 79 unemployed trainees and 15 incumbent workers. The training provides basic and advanced solar skills, improves job safety and puts participants on a path to earn advanced industry certifications. The Fast Forward grant totaled \$73,810.

"The training is already paying off for many of the 36 participants who have completed the courses so far," Hylla said. "The trainees are receiving pay raises

averaging \$3 or more per hour, increasing their pay on average to just under \$30 per hour.”

To stay on top of evolving solar photovoltaic systems and employers’ changing workforce needs, Hylla said MREA has formed a consortium of nine Wisconsin solar companies. In addition to classroom space, a training lab and solar installations at its headquarters near Stevens Point in Custer, MREA also has an Energy Storage System Tech Center with residential battery storage systems from Tesla, Panasonic Generac, Blue Planet, Span and more. MREA generates 100% of its electricity from renewable energy systems.

“Tapping the sun for energy makes so much sense and with highly skilled workers, new solar fields can be installed more efficiently than ever,” Pechacek said. “Earth Day encourages us to reflect on ways to increase sustainability, and through Wisconsin Fast Forward, we’re proud to play a part in a greener future.”

Learn more about: [Wisconsin Fast Forward](#).