

Gov. Evers: Announces \$23.3 million to support early childhood education, reduce barriers to workers entering the workforce

Posted on Wednesday, Jun 29, 2022

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MILWAUKEE — Gov. Tony Evers today announced up to \$23.3 million through the [Workforce Innovation Grant Program](#) will be awarded to MabiliSE, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, the Community Relations-Social Development Commission, and the Down Syndrome Association of Wisconsin Inc. for projects that address local needs for early childhood education (ECE) teachers and support career opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (PWIDD).

“I am proud to support these outstanding projects today because they accomplish exactly what we set out to achieve with these investments—finding regional and local solutions to our state’s workforce needs, reducing barriers to workers who want to join our workforce, and investing in building strong communities across our state,” said Gov. Evers. “These investments are critically important for our state’s long-term economic success and will positively impact folks and communities across Wisconsin.”

The first round of Workforce Innovation Grants were announced in [December 2021](#) when the governor announced 12 regional projects would receive up to \$59.5 million in grants. [Last summer](#), Gov. Evers announced a groundbreaking \$130 million investment in workforce solutions across the state. The second round of Workforce Innovation Grants brings that total investment to more than \$150 million, including:

- More than \$128 million for the 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 offers subsidized employment and skills training opportunities with local employers to unemployed individuals; and
- \$10 million for a [Worker Connection Program](#), which provides workforce career coaches who will connect with individuals attempting to reengage in the workforce post-pandemic.

While Wisconsin continues to see workforce shortages that existed long before the pandemic began, earlier this month, the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) [released](#) the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) preliminary employment data for the month of May, which not only showed Wisconsin's unemployment rate continues to remain below the national average at 2.9 percent but also a historic high of 3,059,300 Wisconsinites employed.

Last week, Gov. Evers announced the second round of the Workforce Innovation Grant Program and met with grant recipients throughout the state, including in [Stevens Point](#), [Fennimore](#), and [River Falls](#). Earlier today, the governor [announced](#) up to \$9.7 million in grants will be awarded to the Waupaca County Economic Development Association and Goodwill Industries of North Central Wisconsin for programs that support access to local options for employees and employers to arrange transportation for work, as well as programs that use a trauma-informed approach to workforce education and services to engage individuals from unserved and underserved populations in the local workforce. A full list of grant awardees is available [here](#).

The four additional projects the governor announced today will receive a total of up to \$23.3 million in grants through the second round of the Workforce Innovation Grant Program, and include:

MobiliSE | ~\$4.2 milion

Serving Milwaukee, Washington, Ozaukee, and Waukesha counties, MobiliSE plans to use these funds to support the expansion of the FlexRide program, which successfully launched in March 2022. Expansion of the program will include positioning childcare centers as “mobility hubs” to provide a safe, convenient, and welcoming pickup spot for working parents. This expansion will include more job centers throughout the region and high-quality childcare centers on key bus routes

in Milwaukee. Additionally, emergency rides home will be provided to participants, and community liaisons will be hired to assist working parents in navigating the childcare and employment market.

Local Initiatives Support Corporation | ~\$5 million

Serving Milwaukee County, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) plans to use these funds to address the need for ECE teachers in Milwaukee through their “Housing: An innovative Solution to Early Childhood Education Workforce Needs” program. The pilot project proposes to build 50 affordable homes for ECE teachers in the local area. When successful, the pilot will be replicated to develop up to 200 units per year. Housing will be developed by LISC Milwaukee Associates in Commercial Real Estate (ACRE) Program graduates, including developers from communities of color and other disadvantaged backgrounds. The ACRE Program works to expand representation and inclusion in real estate fields.

Community Relations-Social Development Commission | ~\$5 million

Serving Milwaukee County, the Community Relations-Social Development Commission plans to use these funds to support their Early Childhood Education Workforce Training project. This project proposes to develop an innovative ECE workforce training and pipeline program for 105 trainees over three years. This program and its partners will establish free workforce training for students to earn credentials which will lead to professional advancement and retention, provide wraparound and case management services to students to remove barriers that prevent the successful completion of coursework, help ECE businesses improve their YoungStar ratings to help increase revenues and their ability to offer more sustainable wages for staff, and provide graduates with opportunities to accept positions with partner ECE sites. This program will target predominately low-income ZIP codes in Milwaukee that have the most disparate gaps in ECE access.

Down Syndrome Association of Wisconsin. Inc. | ~\$9 million

Serving 53 counties across nine Workforce Development Areas, the Down Syndrome Association of Wisconsin plans to use these funds to support their “Thinkability Wisconsin” initiative, which takes a two-pronged approach to addressing the unique workforce challenges faced by PWIDD. First, the program will provide education and training for PWIDD and their families for careers in the manufacturing and hospitality industries, immediately increasing the number of trained workers available to fill jobs in these fields. Second, the program seeks to initiate long-term change by focusing on improving societal expectations, forming coalitions, and implementing public service campaigns to raise expectations and reduce barriers to employment for PWIDD.