

Gov. Evers: Announces workforce, economic development plans to maintain economy's momentum

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers tonight, during his 2023 State of the State address, announced more than \$190 million in investments that will be included in his 2023-25 executive budget proposal to bolster Wisconsin's workforce, including the healthcare, education, and clean energy sectors, as well as his plan to continue investing in small business development across the state through the successful Main Street Bounceback Grant Program.

In his 2023 State of the State address delivered tonight, Gov. Evers highlighted the importance of investing in small businesses and local workforce solutions to maintain the state's economic momentum, including bolstering healthcare and education workforces:

"...We need to bolster the middle class; we need to maintain our economy's momentum; and we need to reduce barriers to work and recruit and retain talent to address our state's workforce challenges.

"I have a plan to responsibly address all three priorities, and we'll begin here tonight.

"A key priority in our strategy for investing federal pandemic aid was supporting Wisconsin's small businesses, our workforce, and long-term economic development. And we were successful. A new 2023 report shows that, as a share of aid we received under the American Rescue Plan Act, Wisconsin ranks number one in the country for both aid we directed to support businesses and aid we directed toward economic development.

“We invested more than \$800 million to provide grants to tens of thousands of businesses to respond to and get through the pandemic—to make health and safety improvements, purchase inventory, afford payroll and rent, and keep the lights on.

“Through our successful Main Street Bounceback grant program, I’m proud to announce tonight that we’ve helped more than 8,500 Wisconsin small businesses expand and move into vacant storefronts in communities across all 72 counties. If you travel around the state like I do, you can literally see the transformative impacts these investments have had in corridors and communities across Wisconsin.

“When we began our work together, Wisconsin was among the worst states in the country for start-up creation. But, much like downtown Fondy, Wisconsin’s changed a lot since then. Since 2019, we’ve seen significant increases in business start-ups. New business formations increased to more than 71,000—that’s a 42-percent increase between 2019 and 2021.

“And that was no accident, folks; our economic recovery plan worked by design. We knew that small businesses make up more than 99 percent of Wisconsin businesses. We knew that small businesses employ nearly half of Wisconsin workers. We knew that small businesses are more likely to hire locally, buy supplies locally, and reinvest locally back into our communities. We fueled our economic recovery by harnessing the ingenuity and homegrown talent we already have right here in Wisconsin. And it’s why our focus must continue to be building our economy from the ground up—starting with our small businesses, our Main Streets, and the hearts of our communities.

“Tonight, I’m excited to announce we’re going to continue our Main Street Bounceback program in my biennial budget with a \$50 million investment to provide as many as 5,000 eligible businesses with grants up to \$10,000 to help afford building repairs and improvements, lease and mortgage payments, and defray other expenses that can be a barrier to someone’s dream becoming a successful business.

“We’re also going to ensure our more than 8,500 small businesses who’ve

already received Main Street Bounceback grants continue to thrive by investing up to \$5 million into providing technical assistance, mentorship, and educational training to these small business owners to ensure they have the support they need to continue their success.

“Our homegrown innovators and entrepreneurs also need homegrown talent to support our local businesses and our local economies—and that’s been a top priority for us these past four years.

“We had record-high job numbers in 2022 in key sectors like construction, wholesale trade, professional, scientific, and technical services, and transportation and utilities. Our Registered Apprenticeship program last year had the highest number of participants ever in state history. And last year, we added 14 new career pathways to our Youth Apprenticeship program in construction, agriculture, health sciences, and science and engineering.

“We made a groundbreaking investment into three programs designed to address our state’s post-pandemic workforce needs, including our Worker Advancement Initiative and our Worker Connection Program, which helped provide more skills training and career coaching, and connected unemployed workers with available jobs.

“We also recognized that we cannot solve our workforce challenges with a one-size-fits-all approach—what Superior needs to support its local workforce and economy might be different from the needs in Platteville and Milwaukee or in La Crosse and Marinette. So, we created the Workforce Innovation Grant program and invested in 27 local projects across our state to help develop long-term, locally-based solutions that meet the unique needs of our local communities and regions. One of those projects at the Wisconsin Forestry Center at UW-Stevens Point is focused on developing the next generation of forestry professionals with skills curriculum in K-12 schools to get more young people into this critical profession. Another project with the Waupaca County Economic Development Corporation is expanding transportation services to make sure workers can get to work around the clock, even third shift.

“Tonight, I’m announcing we’re going to continue harnessing our local

ingenuity through the Workforce Innovation Grant program with a \$100 million investment in my budget to keep developing new, innovative ideas and locally-based projects that will support our workforce and economic development based on what those communities and regions need.

“We’re also going to invest \$10 million in an initiative led by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to collaborate with industries in every sector of our state’s economy to develop and implement initiatives to retain and attract talented workers.

“But we’ll also need investments in targeted industries that we know have been hit hard by the pandemic, including in our healthcare industry. I’ll propose a historic, \$50 million investment to bolster Wisconsin’s healthcare workforce—to expand our long-term care providers, increase the number of mental health providers and psychiatrists, and expand the Wisconsin Nurse Educator program to provide high-quality education for our future nurses.

“Finally, our state’s Clean Energy Plan provides a blueprint for skills training, apprenticeships, and creating good-paying, family-supporting jobs by investing in new, innovative industries and technologies. So, we’re also going to invest nearly \$10 million into expanding clean energy job training and reemployment and reducing barriers for folks joining our clean energy workforce.”

As the governor announced this evening, his 2023-25 executive budget will include a \$50 million investment to continue the successful Main Street Bounceback Grant Program, which will provide as many as 5,000 eligible businesses with grants up to \$10,000 to help afford building repairs and improvements, lease and mortgage payments, and defray other expenses that can be a barrier to becoming a successful business. To date, the Main Street Bounceback Grant Program has helped more than 8,500 Wisconsin small businesses expand and move into vacant storefronts in communities across all 72 counties.

The governor also announced an additional \$5 million investment, funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), to provide technical assistance, mentorship, and educational training for Main Street Bounceback grant recipients to ensure they

have the support they need to continue their success.

In addition to his investments in small business development, Gov. Evers is also proposing \$100 million to continue the Workforce Innovation Grant Program that has supported 27 projects across the state in developing and implementing plans to address local and regional workforce challenges. This continued investment will focus on grants that address long-term solutions for businesses to find workers and help workers obtain family-supporting jobs.

The first round of Workforce Innovation Grants recipients were announced in [December 2021](#), and in [July 2021](#), Gov. Evers announced a groundbreaking \$130 million investment in workforce solutions across the state. The second round of Workforce Innovation Grants brought the governor's total investment of ARPA funds to more than \$150 million, including:

- More than \$128 million for the Workforce Innovation Grant Program;
- \$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.

The governor's 2023-25 executive budget proposal will also include \$12 million for the Worker Advancement Initiative for job training initiatives.

Gov. Evers also emphasized the need for targeted workforce investments for sectors of the workforce that have been particularly challenged over the past few years, including Wisconsin's healthcare, education, and clean energy workforces. As announced, the governor is proposing a historic, more than \$50 million investment in Wisconsin's healthcare workforce, as well as nearly \$10 million to invest in expanding clean energy job training and reemployment and reducing barriers to joining the clean energy workforce.

During the address, the governor also highlighted his proposals to reinforce the education workforce and keep class sizes small, including his plan to create a pathway to get experienced educators back into the workforce by making it easier for school districts to hire retired teachers and staff. Additionally, the

governor announced he will be proposing more than \$20 million for recruiting, developing, and retaining teachers and student teachers.

A list of the governor's proposed investments in bolstering the state's workforce and investing in small businesses is available below:

- \$100 million to continue the Workforce Innovation Grant Program to provide long-term solutions for businesses to find workers and individuals to obtain family-supporting jobs;
- \$12 million for job training initiatives through the Worker Advancement Initiative;
- More than \$50 million to increase our healthcare workforce through innovative and multifaceted strategies, including:
 - \$22.5 million to establish an ongoing Innovation Grant program for healthcare employers to engage in improved recruitment and retention of long-term care providers;
 - \$8 million in support to the WisCaregivers Careers program to expand the long-term care workforce;
 - \$4.7 million to bolster the Qualified Treatment Trainee grant program, increasing licensed and certified psychologists, counselors, social workers, nurses, and marriage and family therapists in Wisconsin;
 - \$7 million to establish a new Medical College of Wisconsin Psychiatry Residency Program;
 - \$1.26 million for the Graduate Medical Education program to increase residency programs in rural Wisconsin hospitals. This budget also expands the grant term to five years and doubles support per resident position;
 - \$1 million to Covering Wisconsin to increase awareness of available tax credits and subsidies and connect care providers to health insurance;
 - \$10 million for the Wisconsin Nurse Educator program, ensuring the robust teaching workforce necessary to provide high quality education to our future nurses; and
 - \$5 million over the biennium through the Worker Advancement Initiative for health care workforce programs.
- More than \$20 million to bolster the teacher pipeline, including:
 - \$5 million per year for "grow your own initiatives" to promote local teacher recruitment, development, and retention;

- \$9.4 million for stipends to student teachers or interns;
- \$2 million to provide stipends to teachers who train/oversee student teachers or interns; and
- \$50,000 for stipends to school library interns.

- \$10 million to invest in Wisconsin's future workforce and future clean energy economy by providing clean energy job training and reemployment programs;
- \$50 million to continue the successful Main Street Bounceback Grant Program to provide as many as 5,000 eligible businesses; and
- \$5 million, funded by ARPA, for technical assistance, mentorship, and educational training for Main Street Bounceback grant recipients.

The governor's full 2023-25 executive budget proposal will be announced following his 2023-25 Biennial Budget Message to the Legislature on Wed., Feb. 15, 2023, at 7 p.m.

An online version of this release is available [here](#).