

UW-Madison: Wisconsin business leaders and UW-Madison push for new engineering building with latest campaign

Posted on Monday, Nov 6, 2023

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

MADISON — The University of Wisconsin–Madison, in partnership with business leaders and allies across the state, has launched a new campaign urging legislators to advance a new College of Engineering building. The new, state-of-the-art building promises to significantly boost engineering enrollment, which is essential for addressing Wisconsin’s critical workforce needs.

The campaign, which includes digital ads, social media, newspaper placements and a video spot, amplifies the messages of Wisconsin’s businesses about the need for more engineers and calls on policymakers to take action to move the project forward.

Many of Wisconsin’s top employers are calling for legislative action, including Johnson Controls, Kohler, Epic, American Family Insurance, Rockwell Automation and Plexus, as well as the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce — organizations dedicated to creating the best possible environment for economic growth and business success in Wisconsin.

“The response from the business community has been crystal clear: Wisconsin’s economic growth and innovation rely heavily on a skilled engineering workforce, and this project is crucial for the state’s continued prosperity,” says Charles Hoslet, vice chancellor of university relations at UW–Madison. “At the core of this campaign is the university’s dedication to strengthening our workforce and building Wisconsin’s talent pipeline. The need for a new College of Engineering building is

undeniable.”

On Sunday, a full-page letter of support for the project appeared in newspapers across the state. Signed by Wisconsin’s top business and economic development leaders, the letter calls on officials to pass legislation to advance the new education and research facility.

[Embed Newspaper Letter Ad Visual]

The letter’s 40-plus signees detail the urgent need to move the building project forward, highlighting the importance of engineers to the state’s economy and the opportunities to address unmet workforce needs. An updated facility would allow the university to admit hundreds more engineering students annually. Currently, the college can accept fewer than 20% of its applicants.

“These engineering graduates are vital to the state’s economic development needs, but we need more of them to meet the increasing demand from our companies,” notes the letter.

The statewide campaign, funded by the Wisconsin Alumni Association, highlights the importance of growing a strong labor and innovation pool to ensure Wisconsin’s future economic success. A website, engineeringthefuture.wisc.edu, which showcases the College of Engineering’s widespread impact on the state, includes testimonials from business leaders and offers opportunities for alumni, business leaders and others to take action.

In addition to campaign ads and the letter from executives, a coalition of business allies, economic development groups, industry associations and prominent alumni continue to advocate tirelessly for the project, working publicly and behind the scenes to advance the building.

- Editorials by technology leaders and news organizations have repeatedly advocated for the project and outlined the consequences of inaction.
- A group of 11 prominent organizations representing Wisconsin employers, contractors and economic development entities issued a letter asking legislators to advance the project.
- Another letter by the Wisconsin Technology Council, a 50-member organization that advises state government on matters related to science and technology, called

on legislators to authorize construction of the building.

- BioForward, the lead agency for Wisconsin's Regional Tech Hub designation that would bring substantial job growth and millions in investment to the state, called on its member companies to support the project.
- Prominent business leaders, donors, alumni and other project supporters have continued to work directly with legislators and university officials to advocate for the building.

The engineering facility was the top building priority for the UW Board of Regents and was included in a slate of projects proposed by Governor Tony Evers in the 2023-2025 state budget. Nearly half — \$150 million — of the project's budgeted \$347 million cost would be provided by private philanthropy, further leveraging the state's dollars. The decision by the Joint Finance Committee not to advance the building surprised many in the state's business, economic development and media communities, who saw the project as an obvious step to address critical workforce development issues facing Wisconsin.

Without urgent action, private donors may withdraw their support, project costs will continue to rise, and Wisconsin's economy, employers and students will suffer.

Over the next month, the campaign aims to reinvigorate support and demonstrate that the project's long-term economic benefits far outweigh the upfront costs. By providing the necessary space and resources to train a new generation of engineers, the university can help the state's businesses to expand, innovate, and drive Wisconsin's economic growth.

Find additional information about the project at engineeringthefuture.wisc.edu.