

# Gov. Evers: Celebrates four consecutive years of record-high enrollment in state's registered apprenticeship program, announces new training pathways and opportunities for growth in high-demand fields

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*Governor announces two new apprenticeship pathways in healthcare and education careers, workforce training grants for advanced manufacturing and AI sectors, and efforts to advance startup companies with high-growth potential*

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers, during his 2026 State of the State address, celebrated that for the fourth year in a row, Wisconsin's Registered Apprenticeship program set a new record high of 18,524 apprentices enrolled and more than 3,095 employers participating in the program in 2025. This marks the fourth year in a row that the Registered Apprenticeship program has reached an all-time record in its 115-year history, following record years under Gov. Evers' administration in [2022](#), [2023](#), and [2024](#).

Additionally, during his address, Gov. Evers also highlighted new efforts by the Evers Administration to address the state's generational workforce challenges and build a workforce prepared to meet the needs of a 21st-century economy. This includes launching:

- Two new registered apprenticeship pathways for high-demand fields, including the state's healthcare and education workforces;
- The new Wisconsin Training for Resilient Advanced Industry Needs (WisTRAIN) employer grant program to deliver employer-driven, occupational skills training focused on advanced manufacturing and artificial intelligence (AI); and
- The first round of funding through the newly-created Ignite Wisconsin program, which aims to make strategic investments that will advance startup companies in targeted sectors with high growth potential.

**Relevant excerpts from Gov. Evers' 2026 State of the State address are available below:**

*"...Another important priority for us over the last seven years has been addressing the workforce challenges that have plagued our state for generations. We've been working to build the 21st-century workforce Wisconsin needs to compete in a 21st-century economy.*

*"We've reduced barriers to joining our workforce by investing in child care slots for working parents and making sure they can get to and from work. We've helped over 127,000 Wisconsin workers get career and skills training thanks to investments I directed. Wisconsin's seen record-high employment and record-low unemployment, and we've had the highest ever enrollment in our youth and registered apprenticeship programs ever in state history for several years in a row. And by cracking down on worker misclassification, we've made sure over 134,000 workers got the wages and benefits they were owed. ...*

*"The Wisconsin Idea has always been about harnessing the extraordinary research and innovation that's happening on UW campuses and using it to improve public policy in Wisconsin and beyond. It's why I'm also excited we're continuing that tradition to support small businesses across our state. Our newly created Ignite Wisconsin program is going to make strategic investments to advance startups in our state in targeted sectors to boost our homegrown innovation. This includes connecting the dots to invest in the Wisconsin Fusion Energy Coalition, anchored by UW-Madison's fusion research, so Wisconsin becomes a national hub for commercializing fusion energy.*

*"A key part of our work to build a more sustainable future is building a 21st-century workforce to meet 21st-century needs. If Wisconsin wants to continue to compete and be a leader in new and innovative industries, we must invest in workforce*

*training to prepare our workforce for the future. It's why my administration worked to secure over \$7 million to launch new workforce training programs focused on developing our advanced manufacturing and AI workforce in Wisconsin.*

*"Folks, AI is here to stay. So, making sure Wisconsin is prepared to create jobs for the future and meet the rapidly evolving needs of a 21st-century economy must be a top priority. At the same time, we also have to make sure we don't jeopardize the work we have done—and are doing—to build a more sustainable future for our state. ..."*

## **NEW REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PATHWAYS TO SUPPORT HIGH-DEMAND CAREERS IN HEALTHCARE AND EDUCATION**

**WORKFORCES** Wisconsin's [Registered Apprenticeship](#) program, administered by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD), pairs structured, on-the-job training with classroom instruction, allowing apprentices to be paid to earn as they learn. Wisconsin has been a national leader in apprenticeship since 1911, when it became the first state in the nation with a registered apprenticeship program, and is unique among the 50 states in requiring employers to pay their apprentices for both time worked and time spent in required classroom instruction, recognizing the importance of a dual training system that combines skills obtained on the job site with technical knowledge in the classroom.

The two new Registered Apprenticeship programs introduced by Gov. Evers in his 2026 State of the State address include:

- A Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) Technologist program, which recently started at UW Health. This program is the ninth apprenticeship program offered to UW Health employees and is one of 13 healthcare-related Registered Apprenticeship programs across the state; and
- A two-year Educational Assistant program, which is slated to begin later this year. This program will lay the foundation for those seeking a teaching career and align with the Wisconsin Technical College System's Foundations of Teacher Education associate degree program, where participants earn a degree with 60 transferable credits. Once completed, participants can work as a paraprofessional or continue into a Teacher Registered Apprenticeship pathway.

This announcement comes as Gov. Evers championed the launch of five new apprenticeship programs in 2025 to train individuals for in-demand careers such as

bus/motor coach mechanics and operators, dental assistants, paramedics, and surgical technologists. Wisconsin has more than 200 apprenticeship occupations with over 3,000 employers, and while traditional construction trades apprenticeships continue to be strong, emerging employment sectors and occupations, including healthcare, are building the depth of offerings and growing apprenticeship opportunities in Wisconsin. Additionally, as more employers from a growing list of industry sectors are turning to apprenticeship, the program remains a successful way to recruit, train, and retain talented workers.

In addition to the Registered Apprenticeship program, last April, Gov. Evers and DWD [announced](#) that for the fourth year in a row, Wisconsin's successful [Youth Apprenticeship](#) program also set a new record high of 11,344 youth apprentices enrolled during the 2024-25 school year. The program partnered with a record 7,447 employers, and more than 99 percent of Wisconsin's 421 public school districts with a high school had students enrolled in Youth Apprenticeship for the 2024-25 school year.

To learn more about Wisconsin Apprenticeship, visit [WisconsinApprenticeship.com](https://WisconsinApprenticeship.com).

### **\$7.3 MILLION TO FUND NEW WORKFORCE TRAINING GRANTS FOR ADVANCED MANUFACTURING AND AI SECTORS**

Additionally, Gov. Evers announced tonight that the state of Wisconsin has secured \$7.3 million in federal funding to support workforce training programs focused on developing skills in advanced manufacturing and AI. Wisconsin is one of 14 states that received an [Industry-Driven Skills Training Fund grant](#) from the U.S. Department of Labor to prepare workers for jobs in high-demand and emerging industries. Utilizing these funds, Gov. Evers announced tonight that DWD will launch the WisTRAIN employer grant program to deliver employer-driven, occupational skills training focused on advanced manufacturing and AI.

WisTRAIN builds on the success of Gov. Evers' [Workforce Solutions Initiative](#), which, to date, has collectively served 127,775 Wisconsinites across the state by supporting local and regional workforce training programs. The development of the WisTRAIN employer grant program also aligns with recommendations by the [Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence](#), which was [created](#) by Gov. Evers in 2023 to study how AI will transform business, education, and other key sectors of the state economy.

WisTRAIN will fund worker training programs, including apprenticeship and pre-

apprenticeship programs, that equip Wisconsin's workforce with the skills necessary to meet rapidly evolving industry needs. WisTRAIN grant applications are anticipated to open in May 2026 for eligible employers that engage in advanced manufacturing and AI applications, such as data analytics, cybersecurity, predictive maintenance, and robotics.

## **BOLSTERING WISCONSIN'S FAST-GROWING STARTUP SECTORS, SUPPORTING INNOVATION, AND CREATING JOBS**

In addition to efforts to boost homegrown talent and strengthen opportunities for Wisconsin employers,

the Evers Administration has also been hard at work to promote and support Wisconsin ingenuity, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

As part of the governor's announcements tonight, Gov. Evers and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) are excited to launch the first round of funding through WEDC's newly created [Ignite Wisconsin program](#). Established in 2025, Ignite Wisconsin aims to make strategic investments that will advance startup companies in targeted sectors with high growth potential. Through the first round of grants, four Wisconsin consortiums are receiving funding to boost homegrown innovation, supporting over 200 startups and businesses and creating an estimated 120 new jobs.

Consortiums collectively receiving \$3.5 million from the Ignite Wisconsin program include:

### **Wisconsin Fusion Energy Coalition | \$778,000**

The Wisconsin Fusion Energy Coalition, led by the 5 Lakes Institute Inc., will establish Wisconsin as a national hub for fusion energy commercialization. The coalition, which is anchored by the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison's fusion research strength and commercialization capacity, will accelerate startup formation, supply chain development, and community outreach in a sector projected to exceed \$350 billion globally by 2050. The initiative's core components include business creation, business creation support, business attraction, outreach, and brand strategy.

The consortium expects to provide financial support to five startup teams and technical assistance to over 80 companies in 18 months, resulting in 24 new jobs,

three new product lines, and two company relocations or retentions.

### **Cheese Wedge Consortium | \$1 million**

Cheese Wedge Consortium, led by New North Inc., is a coordinated, regionally based approach that builds on existing partners and infrastructure. The consortium will draw on New North Inc.'s longstanding role in Northeast Wisconsin and the Phoenix Innovation Park's integration with UW-Green Bay to connect universities, corporations, investors, and service providers into a single, cohesive platform for entrepreneurship. The consortium will deliver accelerator programming, pre-seed bootcamps, and corporate engagement. Core components include equity investments, legal and housing stipends for relocating founders, co-working space, and community outreach to raise Wisconsin's entrepreneurial brand.

The consortium expects to support 21 startups and 42 participants in one year, provide direct funding to 18 businesses, create 46 new jobs, and generate \$3.4 million in revenue.

### **Wisconsin Frontier Technology Consortium | \$950,000**

The Wisconsin Frontier Technology Consortium, led by the Wisconsin Technology Council, aims to accelerate commercialization of frontier technologies, such as artificial intelligence, robotics, advanced materials, and quantum computing. The initiative will establish the Wisconsin Frontier Technology Lab to connect researchers and industry for collaborative technology development, launch the Wisconsin Frontier Technology Accelerator to support early-stage high-growth startups with mentorship and investor access, and convene the Wisconsin Frontier Technology Roundtable to strengthen partnerships and address challenges.

The consortium expects to support 24 early-stage startups in two years, host four Frontier Technology Labs and four statewide roundtables, engage researchers, industry leaders, and investors, provide grants for technology development, generate early-stage investments, create more than 50 jobs, and raise Wisconsin's profile as a technology leader.

### **The Foundry Factory | \$772,000**

The Center for Technology Commercialization's Foundry Factory is a founder-centric pipeline designed to increase the number and quality of high-growth startups in Southeastern Wisconsin. The initiative addresses gaps in the region's startup

community through a structured, milestone-driven model. Components include an innovation bootcamp, accelerators, pitch events, matchmaking, networking, and more.

The consortium expects to provide funding for 15 businesses over two years, provide technical assistance to 60 businesses, and provide pre-accelerator programming for 15 teams advancing toward investment readiness.

For more information about Ignite Wisconsin, visit [wedc.org/programs/ignite-wisconsin/](https://wedc.org/programs/ignite-wisconsin/)

### **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND ON THE EVERS ADMINISTRATION'S EFFORTS TO BUILD A 21ST-CENTURY WORKFORCE TO SUPPORT A 21ST-CENTURY ECONOMY**

Gov. Evers [declared](#) 2024 the Year of the Worker in Wisconsin to highlight the need to address the state's generational workforce challenges and promote new efforts by the Evers Administration to build a workforce prepared to meet the needs of a 21st-century economy. This included launching the state's first teacher apprenticeship pilot program, creating the Governor's Task Force on the Healthcare Workforce and the Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence, establishing the Office of Employee Engagement and Retention for the state of Wisconsin workforce, and more.

The Evers Administration's efforts to bolster the state's workforce and ensure it can meet the needs of a 21st-century economy are also evident through the workforce accomplishments the state has celebrated in recent years, including capping off 2024 with nine counties showing the lowest rates of unemployment on record, as well as the state seeing seven consecutive months of record-high employment—a record that was only later to be beaten again in January 2025.

But Gov. Evers' efforts to bolster Wisconsin's workforce have extended well beyond 2024 the Year of the Worker. In 2021, Gov. Evers launched the state's Workforce Solutions Initiative, which works to connect unemployed or underemployed workers with new opportunities while also incentivizing innovative solutions to regional workforce challenges. Included in Gov. Evers' Workforce Solutions Initiative were three innovative programs: the Workforce Innovation Grant Program, the Workforce Advancement Initiative, and the Worker Connection Program. To date, programs

included in the governor's Workforce Solutions Initiative have collectively served 127,775 Wisconsinites across the state.

Of the 127,775 Wisconsinites served, 118,000 of those workers were helped through the Workforce Innovation Grant Program. Grants were awarded to support projects across the state that seek to address key regional workforce challenges across the state, including barriers to entry, career training, child care, skills training, entrepreneurship, health services, housing, transportation, and more. Through the program, 195 childcare slots were created, 165 housing units were constructed, over 2,550 businesses were served, and 185,000 workers received rides to get to and from work.

Similarly, participants served through the Workforce Advancement Initiative benefit from a continuum of services, including paid work experience opportunities to develop and/or enhance job skills; training so participants can acquire occupational skills connected to in-demand jobs along with critical work-based skills needed to succeed; on-the-job training opportunities that will lead to economic self-sufficiency; and supportive services to address related barriers to employment, which may include assistance for child care, housing, transportation, and worker stipends. Through these efforts, 5,579 individuals have been helped.

Additionally, Gov. Evers has emphasized that Wisconsin is uniquely positioned to tap into the potential of AI and advanced manufacturing sectors, both of which offer opportunities to advance job equity and economic opportunity in communities across the state. That's why, in 2023, Gov. Evers [signed Executive Order #211](#), creating the [Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence](#), which he tasked with studying how AI will transform business, education, and other key sectors of the state economy. Over the course of a year, the task force worked to devise an [action plan](#), which offers guiding principles to promote ethical decision-making related to AI and the workforce, advance equitable access to AI technology and training, and ensure that workers are represented in AI investments to strengthen the state's economy. With a focus on policies related to education, government, workforce development, and economic development, the policy proposals reflect the need to:

- Expand digital literacy;
- Develop more flexible training and credentialing;
- Continue efforts to remove employment barriers and connect underutilized

- talent pools with AI skills;
- Improve government service delivery through strategic deployment of AI tools; and
- Incent industry adoption of AI tools to enhance competitiveness and create high-quality jobs.

Further, in 2023, Gov. Evers [celebrated](#) Wisconsin's secured status as a designated [U.S. Regional Tech Hub](#), which unlocked \$49 million in federal funding to advance research and innovation in Wisconsin, grow the state's economy, and boost American competitiveness in a cutting-edge industry. Over the first 10 years, the Tech Hub designation is projected to create more than 30,000 jobs in the personalized medicine sector and over 111,000 indirect jobs attributable to the Tech Hub in Wisconsin. Additionally, the Tech Hub is projected to create \$9 billion worth of economic development in Wisconsin within the first decade. Gov. Evers, together with U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisconsin), worked together to secure Wisconsin's designation as a Tech Hub, and a comprehensive list of efforts to secure the state's official designation as a Tech Hub is available [here](#).

Additionally, Gov. Evers has advocated for and welcomed investments from several global companies looking to advance innovative infrastructure across the state and set Wisconsin apart as a global leader in AI and advanced manufacturing. Namely, in 2024, Gov. Evers [celebrated](#) Microsoft's investment of \$3.3 billion to expand its national cloud and AI infrastructure capacity through the development of a state-of-the-art datacenter campus in Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin, which is expected to provide long-term employment opportunities over the next several years. Microsoft is also pairing its datacenter investment with a broad investment package designed to strengthen the role of Southeast Wisconsin as a hub for AI-powered economic activity, innovation, and job creation. These investments include the creation of an AI co-innovation lab and an AI skilling initiative to equip more than 100,000 of the state's residents with essential AI skills. Then, in 2025, Gov. Evers joined Microsoft officials and local leaders to [announce](#) that Microsoft would be investing an additional \$4 billion to further expand its planned datacenter campus in Mount Pleasant, raising Microsoft's total investment in Wisconsin to more than \$7 billion.

Gov. Evers has made supporting Wisconsin's current and future workforce a centerpiece of every budget he has introduced as governor, including his most recent 2025-27 Executive Budget. While the final 2025-27 Biennial Budget was a far

cry from the budget the governor proposed, in July, the governor signed a budget that made important investments to support Wisconsin's current and future workforce. This included critical investments in the University of Wisconsin and Technical College systems, as well as over \$6 million to support the Youth Apprenticeship Program. More information on those investments is available [here](#).