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DWD Secretary Newson Announces Intent to Award Wisconsin Fast Forward Worker Grants Totaling \$2.6 Million for Demand-Driven Training

32 proposed awards would equip workers with manufacturing, customer service, construction skills

MADISON – Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Reggie Newson today announced the first round of Wisconsin Fast Forward worker training grants that would award more than \$2.6 million to 32 innovative projects. Many of these projects set a new standard for employer-driven training by promoting collaborative partnerships between employers, workforce boards, technical colleges, and labor organizations to design and deliver training that leads to employment or higher wages. The program targets labor market needs for high demand occupations and skill sets by equipping both incumbent workers and job seekers with in-demand skills and ensuring results with strong accountability measures.

"These first awards result from the Governor's focus on job creation and skill development in proposing Wisconsin Fast Forward a little over a year ago," Secretary Newson said. "The goal is innovative worker training, an employer-driven solution that will not only address the immediate problem, but serve as a model for building a skilled workforce for the future. This state-funded effort sets a new standard for collaborative training solutions. All who joined in its overwhelming bipartisan support a year ago can take pride in an initiative that will prove bold in its response and its results."

DWD has moved quickly to develop the infrastructure to implement the Wisconsin Fast Forward program, taking great care to develop an effective and accountable program that is nimble and responsive. This funding will allow innovative training projects to get underway to ensure employers can hire and train skilled workers, that unemployed and underemployed workers gain the skills needed for family-supporting jobs, and to keep Wisconsin's economy moving into the 21st century.

Signed into law by Governor Walker on March 13, 2013, Wisconsin Fast Forward authorized \$15 million for training grants and added four positions at DWD to administer the program through the newly-created Office of Skills Development. The initiative also included resources for an expanded Labor Market Information System (LMIS), which will provide real time data to connect employers, job seekers, and workforce partners in making hiring and staffing decisions.

The first round of grant program announcements targeted three broad categories:

- \$1.4 million to train manufacturing workers, including \$400,000 to companies with 50 or fewer full-time employees;
- \$1 million to train customer service workers; and
- \$300,000 to train construction workers.

Applicants had to match their funding requests with cash or in-kind matches, large employers dollar for dollar, and small employers, 50 cents on the dollar.

The applications received represented 35 Wisconsin counties and small and large businesses from around Wisconsin who joined with local and regional economic and workforce development organizations, as well as

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training providers, to confirm a current workforce need and to identify a solution that results in trained workers. The total employer request for funds in the first round of applications totaled approximately \$4 million, which exceeded the appropriated total of \$2.7 million. The applications set forth requests with the potential to train as many as 2,400 workers.

The applications were reviewed by a grant evaluation committee consisting of Office of Skills Development staff and representatives from the Wisconsin Technical College System, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, and local chambers of commerce. The evaluation committee approved over \$2.6 million of the \$4 million in grant requested funds. DWD has issued intent to award letters to successful applicants, each of whom will be required to commit to wage increases and/or new hires.

The Office of Skills Development will monitor grant awards and ensure that projects meet the intended job creation goal for unemployed and underemployed workers or wage increases for incumbent workers.

Below are some examples of projects that were approved for funding:

In collaboration with four regional training partners, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin is in line to receive awards totaling nearly \$400,000 in partnership with a number of large manufacturing employers throughout the state. The intended awards and areas are: \$109,285 in Milwaukee to train workers for careers with seven employers; \$100,000 in north central Wisconsin for jobs with 10 employers; \$96,463 in the Green Bay area for jobs with two employers, and \$88,558 in the Fox Valley for jobs with four area employers.

Laserwords, based in Madison, was approved for \$198,025 to train new call center employees at its inbound call center. Trainees will receive training in sales, customer issues, and technology. Graduates will become new employees at the call center.

Among the small manufacturing grant applications that were approved is Western Container Corporation of Beloit. DWD intends to award \$13,555 to train incumbent workers to operate new, high-tech cutting equipment that will increase the firm's production capabilities.

In the construction category, an intended award of \$30,000 will go to fund a project training unemployed or underemployed individuals in north central Wisconsin for jobs in crane operations. The North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters sought the grant to train the individuals as certified Rigging and Signalers. The council will use its pool of contractor members to hire the trainees.

List of all 32 awards: [Wisconsin Fast Forward First Round Awards](#).

For more about Wisconsin Fast Forward, visit WisconsinFastForward.com.

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