
With Wisconsin Working Again, Governor Walker Builds on Success with *Blueprint for Prosperity*, More Worker Training, Job Opportunities

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Wisconsin is working once again. One has only to look at the latest reports to see the remarkable turnaround. Unemployment is 6.1 percent. Four years ago, it topped out at 9.2 percent. After losing more than 133,000 jobs and 27,000 businesses during the four years before Governor Scott Walker took office, Wisconsin added more than 63,600 private sector jobs in 2011-12, and our state added some 13,000 businesses over the past three years.

More people are employed. More employers are hiring. With personal income up 4.4 percent, people once again optimistic about the future.

All of this is welcome news, but our work is by no means finished. Governor Walker's efforts to encourage economic growth, provide employment opportunities and move Wisconsin forward are ongoing. The current budget provides investments of \$100 million in workforce development and training. To accelerate the pace, he offered his *Blueprint for Prosperity*, adding \$35 million more in workforce investments.

Let's look at the \$100 million currently being invested to keep the economy and employment numbers on the right direction. These investments help our technical colleges and universities expand training and degree options. The funding includes greater financial aid for those seeking degrees at technical colleges and more resources for technical education courses in our high schools. There is also funding for schools to start Career and Academic Plans as early as 6th grade to help students make early career choices.

As vital as these investments are, the more exciting development for all of us in the Department of Workforce Development and our partners is Governor Walker's *Wisconsin Fast Forward* initiative. With \$15 million spread over two years, we are funding customized, employer-driven training in demand occupations, jobs with good pay and benefits so workers can provide for their families and support their communities.

We recently awarded \$2.6 million in worker training grants, benefiting job seekers, working families and businesses in communities across the state. We currently are accepting applications for second round with up to \$7.5 million available. These are matching grants, supporting collaborative training projects with strong accountability measures to get results.

With *Wisconsin Fast Forward* and other investments at work, Governor Walker earlier this year offered his *Blueprint for Prosperity*, a comprehensive package that includes relief for hard-working taxpayers as well as more funds for worker training and employment opportunities. An overwhelming number of Republicans and Democrats alike approved it, and the Governor signed the legislation into law on Monday, March 17.

His *Blueprint for Prosperity* provides \$35 million more for *Wisconsin Fast Forward*, a timely and strategic investment to benefit many more people who are unemployed or underemployed, hard-working employees who seek a better job to support their families, and employers who want to expand operations but need skilled workers to succeed. The additional funding targets needs in three areas:

- Support for school district and technical college dual enrollment programs that target high demand jobs;
- Investment in our technical colleges to eliminate waiting lists in growth sectors, such as manufacturing, agriculture, and Information Technology; and
- Support for programs helping people with disabilities enter the workforce.

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Helping people with disabilities enter the workforce holds special significance for Governor Walker this year. Building a workforce to move Wisconsin forward must be inclusive to be successful. In proclaiming this the *Year of A Better Bottom Line*, he plans to highlight employers who hire people with disabilities, not out of charity, but because these are individuals with abilities and skills who add value.

Governor Walker's *Blueprint for Prosperity* is a plan for job seekers and workers in need of new skills; for people with disabilities who want to work, become independent, and add value to an employer's workforce with their abilities; and for employers who want to expand, create jobs and be part of Wisconsin's growing economy. This is how we and our partners are building a workforce to move Wisconsin forward.

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