



WISCONSIN

DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



ANNUAL REPORT 2020



STATE OF WISCONSIN
 **DWD**
Department of Workforce Development



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Secretary's Office Overview
- 2 Division of Employment and Training (DET)
- 9 Equal Rights Division (ERD)
- 12 Division of Operations (DO)
- 15 Unemployment Insurance Division (UI)
- 19 Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)
- 22 Worker's Compensation Division (WC)

December 30, 2020

The Honorable Tony Evers
Office of the Governor
115 East, State Capitol Building
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Tony Evers:

The following report provides an overview of the many strategies the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) has employed over the last year to continue delivering quality workforce services despite the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In adapting to new workforce realities brought on by the crisis, DWD staff have implemented creative solutions to continue safely and effectively serving the people of Wisconsin.

Specific highlights in this report include:

Youth Apprenticeship to Registered Apprenticeship Bridge: Part of the career pathways within the apprenticeship program is the bridge between Youth Apprenticeship (YA) and Registered Apprenticeship (RA). The YA to RA Bridge encourages employers to offer a registered apprenticeship to qualifying youth apprentices as the student graduates from high school by applying some hours of related instruction gained under the youth apprenticeship toward the registered apprenticeship. Successfully adjusting the model to COVID-19, the number of youth apprentices who bridged to RA during the 2019-2020 school year increased over the previous year, with 112 students transitioning into related registered apprenticeships.

Career Training Expansion in Correctional Facilities: DWD and the Department of Corrections (DOC) continued their shared commitment to workforce collaboration this year, opening two additional correctional job centers in 2020. With the new job centers at Milwaukee Women's Correctional Center (MWCC) and Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center (REECC), in addition to the job center opened in 2019 at Taycheedah Correctional Institution (TCI) in Fond du Lac, job centers are now operated at all women's correctional facilities statewide. The two new facilities offer the same programming and services as other Wisconsin correctional job centers, including career readiness programs, job search assistance, resume development, services for veterans, registered apprenticeships, and assistance for individuals with disabilities.

Project SEARCH: Since the inception of Project SEARCH in Wisconsin, the program has grown from a single site during the 2008-2009 school year to 27 business sites in 2019, enrolling 254 interns for the 2019-2020 school year. Adjusting to the impacts of COVID-19, DVR worked closely with active Project SEARCH sites to transition the final rotation of the 2019-2020 school year to off-site learning, leading to 241 interns completing the program. In February 2020, three additional Wisconsin Project SEARCH sites were awarded in the communities of Kimberly, Green Bay, and Superior, bringing the total number of licensed Wisconsin Project SEARCH sites to 30 for the 2020-2021 school year.

Virtual eWorkBoard and 60-Second Video Series: To ensure continued, quality customer service throughout the pandemic, DWD's Equal Rights Division (ERD) implemented two new service delivery tools to continue to connect workers with valuable information on worker rights and protections. In July 2020, ERD published the DWD eWorkBoard, a virtual collection of workplace posters allowing virtual access to worker rights and safety information, and a 60-second video series addressing commonly asked employment rights questions related to COVID-19.

Work-Share Program: Throughout the pandemic, DWD's Unemployment Insurance Division (UI) has continued to successfully administer Work-Share, a program that allows participating employers to avoid layoffs during times of reduced business activity by offering employees unemployment benefits pro-rated to partial work reductions. In the four years between 2016 and March 15, 2020, Wisconsin had only 20 total Work-Share plans involving 899 participants. Between March 15 and December 15, 2020, DWD approved nearly 1,000 Work-Share plans covering more than 34,000 participants.

Worker's Compensation Virtual Workshops: In response to COVID-19, DWD's Worker's Compensation Division (WC) successfully transitioned two WC trainings to virtual workshops, including one in November 2020 that drew more than 180 participants from 14 states. The first-ever virtual WC workshop was delivered in spring 2020, transformed from in-person to 100 percent online within a matter of days, garnering a record attendance of over 100 participants.

As we look to 2021 and continued economic recovery in the wake of COVID-19, DWD looks forward to delivering comprehensive, state-of-the-art programming to meet Wisconsin's diverse and evolving workforce needs. DWD will continue to advocate for the protection and economic advancement of all Wisconsin workers, employers, and job seekers in service of your mission to build an economy that works for everyone.

Sincerely,



Secretary-designee, Amy Pechacek
Department of Workforce Development

Secretary's Office Overview

The Office of the Secretary oversees the Department of Workforce Development (DWD), which efficiently delivers innovative, impactful, and inclusive programming to meet Wisconsin's diverse workforce needs, and advocates for the protection and economic advancement of all Wisconsin workers, employers, and job seekers. DWD is responsible for the state's employment and training services, including job centers; job training and placement services provided in cooperation with private sector employers; apprenticeship programs; and employment-related services for people with disabilities. The Department oversees several other programs, including Unemployment Insurance and Worker's Compensation programs, and is responsible for adjudicating cases involving employment discrimination, housing discrimination, and labor law. The Department also analyzes and distributes labor market information.

Legislative Liaison

The Office of Legislative Affairs is the agency's primary contact for the state's 132 legislators, as well as Wisconsin's Congressional delegation. He responds to legislative inquiries made on behalf of citizens from Wisconsin. He tracks legislation that has the potential to impact the agency and he meets with lawmakers and other stakeholders to educate them on DWD's mission and core services.

Office of Communications

The Office of Communications shares Department information and ensures the Department responds to requests for information from the news media in an accurate, timely, and comprehensive fashion. The office also works with each of the divisions to build awareness of the many programs, innovations, achievements, and issues related to DWD.

Office of Chief Legal Counsel

The Office of Legal Counsel provides legal advice to the Office of the Secretary and the Department's program managers, acts as the legal custodian for public records purposes, oversees rulemaking for the Department, supervises attorneys in the Office of Chief Legal Counsel and the director of Office of Integrity and Accountability, represents the Department before administrative tribunals, and acts as Department's litigation contact with the Department of Justice.

Office of Program Integrity and Accountability

The Office of Integrity and Accountability is responsible for evaluating the agency's resources to ensure they are being used efficiently, effectively, and appropriately for the advancement of the agency's mission and objectives. OIA conducts internal and external review activities and furnishes DWD with high quality analyses, appraisals, and recommendations.

MISSION

DWD efficiently delivers effective and inclusive services to meet Wisconsin's diverse workforce needs, and advocates for the protection and economic advancement of all Wisconsin workers, employers, and job seekers.

VISION

DWD envisions a thriving Wisconsin economy in which:

- ▶ All workers are treated fairly, with dignity and respect;
- ▶ Employers, government, educational institutions, and workers collaborate to ensure workforce programs meet current and future needs; and
- ▶ Every job provides the wages and benefits necessary to support workers' basic needs, invest in their future, and actively engage with their families and communities.



Department of Workforce Development

Employment and Training

MISSION:

Provide a seamless continuum of services accessed by employers and members of the workforce and their families with the following results:

- ▶ Employers have the talent they need
- ▶ Individuals and families achieve economic independence by accessing job search, training, and related services, making sound employment decisions, and maximizing their workforce potential

OVERVIEW:

The Division of Employment and Training (DET) oversees the majority of workforce services administered by DWD, including the state labor exchange system and Job Center of Wisconsin, analyzes and distributes labor market information, monitors migrant worker services, manages the Wisconsin Fast Forward grant program and operates the state apprenticeship programs.



VETS READY INITIATIVE



Last year, the Division of Employment and Training's Office of Veteran Employment Services established the Vets Ready Initiative, an employer recognition program. Vets Ready recognizes employers who go above and beyond for the veterans in their community, especially in their workforce. Businesses deemed "Vets Ready" provide an exemplary support system for Wisconsin's veterans and have demonstrated a strong commitment to building an engaged veteran network, both inside and outside their workplace. Employers recognized each year will be identified as Vet Ready within Job Center of Wisconsin. In 2020, recognitions were awarded to 4imprint, Associated Bank, Rockwell Automation, TDS Telecom, WEC Energy Group, and Xcel Energy.

Strategic Goal: Career Pathways

YOUTH AND REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS CONTINUE TO GROW

The Division of Employment and Training's Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards (BAS) continues to provide a successful and sustainable training model for employers to gain skilled talent and for individuals to find a career pathway into high-demand occupations with family supporting wages.

Youth Apprenticeship Enrolled Record Number of Students

BAS's Youth Apprenticeship (YA) Program prepares students for an array of options after high school, including transitioning directly into the workforce, pursuing higher educational training at a technical college, or both as demonstrated in the YA-to-RA Bridge opportunity. The YA Program continued its growth in the 2019-2020 school year, with enrollment reaching more than 6,000 students, an all-time high. Participants in YA this year represented 326 school districts and worked for 4,275 unique businesses throughout the state.

YA is a highly successful talent acquisition strategy in which employers hire high school juniors or seniors for a one- or two-year apprenticeship. During the apprenticeship, the student continues on their path to high school graduation and takes courses related to the profession as a way of enhancing what is being learned on the job. The YA Program is coordinated locally by regional consortia and overseen by the BAS.

Wisconsin Youth Apprenticeship Enrollment, 2015-2020

School Year	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Student Enrollment	3,042	3,561	4,362	5,078	6,064

Bridging Youth and Registered Apprenticeship

Part of the career pathways within the apprenticeship program is the bridge between Youth and Registered Apprenticeship (RA). The YA-to-RA Bridge program gives Youth Apprentices who complete a program in certain areas the opportunity to enter directly into RA with advanced standing. The program encourages employers to apply some hours of related instruction, on-the-job training, or both gained by the Youth Apprentice under YA toward their registered apprenticeship. Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the YA-to-RA Bridge program saw an increase in participation over the 2018-2019 school year, with 112 Youth Apprentices bridging into registered apprenticeships this year.

Number of Students Who Bridged from YA to RA:

2019-2020: **112 students**
2018-2019: **109 students**
2017-2018: **85 students**
2016-2017: **42 students**
2015-2016: **39 students**

Frito-Lay began its first year of hiring Youth Apprentices in 2020, with their Beloit, Wisconsin location being the company's first of its over 30 manufacturing facilities across the U.S. and Canada to have a Youth Apprenticeship (YA) Program. The Manufacturing YA Program Frito-Lay developed will promote the bridge from YA to their Registered Apprenticeship (RA) positions, offering the company a talent pipeline from YA to RA that will help them recruit local talent.



Strategic Goal: Career Pathways (con't)

YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP CONTINUES MODERNIZATION EFFORTS

To ensure the YA Program continues to meet the needs of Wisconsin youth and employers, BAS continued its comprehensive review, revision, and update of all YA Program occupational areas.

When complete, this modernization project will increase the rigor and relevance of the eleven career clusters and associated pathways. Specific objectives include seamless alignment for Bridging with the RA Program, expanding into new emerging technologies, maximizing dual enrollment credits, and increasing the number of certificates a student may earn.

In 2019-2020, BAS completed five of the 11 YA clusters representing 23 individual pathways, and launched the review of the modernization project's second tier. The third and final tier is scheduled for review in 2021-2022.

WISCONSIN FAST FORWARD GRANT INITIATIVES EXCEED CERTIFICATION GOALS

In 2020, under the expanded Wisconsin Fast Forward program, grants to technical colleges were completed, certifying high school students in industry-recognized, high-demand fields. The program, overseen by the Division of Employment and Training's Office of Skills Development, saw grant recipients exceed contract deliverables at three Wisconsin technical colleges.

1. *Gateway Technical College* exceeded its contract deliverables, training 38 of 34 contract students with 28 obtaining certificates or credentials. Wisconsin employers benefitted from this success, with two students enrolling directly in a youth apprenticeship program during the project timeframe. Additionally, 11 juniors and 17 seniors earned their Welding/Maintenance & Fabrication Technical Diploma (16 credits) in the tri-county area before graduating from high school, or simultaneously graduated from high school and college, and are now eligible for employment, entering the workforce an entire year earlier than expected.
2. *Northcentral Technical College* exceeded its contract deliverables by training 50 of 44 contracted students, with 45 obtaining certificates or credentials. Of those students, 39 earned the Gas Metal Arc Welding (GMAW) Technical Diploma and six earned the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) Technical Diploma.
3. *Northeast Wisconsin Technical College* exceeded its contract deliverables training 52 of 38 contracted students. Of those 52 students who enrolled in the technical diploma course, 49 completed the training. By late September 2020, 30 students had earned their certification.



Strategic Goal: Unlocking Workforce Opportunities

SUPPORT TO COMMUNITIES GRANT AWARDED TO DIVISION OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

The Division of Employment and Training (DET) was awarded \$5 million under the Support to Communities: Fostering Opioid Recovery through Workforce Development grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. This grant funding will be used to support individuals impacted by the opioid crisis and substance misuse through workforce services and training. DET has sub-granted with five local workforce development boards throughout Wisconsin to implement the grant, which will run for four years.

BUREAU OF WORKFORCE TRAINING RECEIVES NATIONAL DISLOCATED WORKER GRANTS

The Division of Employment and Training's Bureau of Workforce Training applied and received two National Dislocated Worker Grants to assist with the COVID-19 national health crisis.

Wisconsin's COVID-19 Disaster Recovery Dislocated Worker Grant

In May 2020, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded Wisconsin a \$999,000 COVID-19 Disaster Recovery Dislocated Worker Grant to help respond to the public health emergency and economic impacts stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. This grant funds temporary disaster-relief jobs that expand the capacity of either non-profit charitable organizations providing humanitarian assistance in response to the pandemic, or local public health departments engaged in efforts to address the pandemic. Three Workforce Development Boards have received funding under this grant: Southeastern, Milwaukee, and South Central. As of mid-November, 15 individuals are employed in disaster-relief employment, with positions ranging from food bank kitchen workers to county health department contact tracers. The goal is to employ 70 individuals in disaster-relief employment during the two-year grant period.

Wisconsin's Statewide Employment Recovery Dislocated Worker Grant

In September 2020, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded Wisconsin a \$4,995,000 Employment Recovery Dislocated Worker Grant to help respond to the economic impacts stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. This grant will supplement the state's Title I Dislocated Worker formula funds, expanding local Workforce Development Board's capacity to offer Dislocated Worker Program services to eligible individuals. By mid-November, two WDBs have received funding under this grant: Southwest and Bay Area. The goal is to serve 999 individuals during the two-year grant period.

DET EXPANDS CAREER READINESS AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

DWD and the Department of Corrections (DOC) continued their shared commitment to workforce collaboration this year, opening two additional correctional job centers in 2020. With the new job centers at Milwaukee Women's Correctional Center (MWCC) and Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center (REECC), job centers are now operated at all women's correctional facilities statewide.

The two new facilities provide the same services and programming offered at other Wisconsin correctional job centers, including career readiness programs, job search assistance, resume development, services for veterans, registered apprenticeships, and assistance for individuals with disabilities. DWD continues to collaborate with DOC to open additional correctional job centers, with an additional six locations slated to open in 2021. The additional locations planned for 2021 are Chippewa Valley Correctional Treatment Facility, Prairie du Chien Correctional Institution, Racine Correctional Institution, Racine Youthful Offender Correctional Facility, Jackson Correctional Institution, and Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution.

DWD also continues its partnership with DOC by offering opportunities for training and skill development in correctional facilities through training service providers and the technical college system. Computer Numerical Control (CNC), Welding, Electro-Mechanical, and Industrial Maintenance training programs are maintained at several institutions where individuals are provided training in these specific occupations and receive certifications and college credit for in-demand careers.

Strategic Goal: Unlocking Workforce Opportunities (con't)

As of December 2020, the CNC Mobile Training Lab is located at Racine Correctional Institution. In partnership with the Wisconsin Technical College System, Gateway Technical College offers individuals the instruction and training needed to obtain a certificate following a 10 to 12-week bootcamp course held in the CNC Mobile Training Lab. Similarly, Moraine Park Technical College serves as training provider at the Welding Training Lab at Taycheedah and Kettle Moraine Correctional Institutions, while Western Technical College provides the training at Jackson and New Lisbon Correctional Institutions for the Electro-Mechanical Mobile Training Lab.

In the upcoming year, DWD and DOC plan to introduce one additional mobile training lab with a specific occupation yet to be determined. Connecting the workforce with vital post-release resources like career readiness training, housing, healthcare, and childcare provides individuals the tools they need to be successful upon re-entry into the community.

Strategic Goal: Workforce Services Delivery

DET ADAPTS SERVICES TO MEET CHANGING WORKFORCE NEEDS DUE TO COVID-19

This spring, programs across the Division of Employment and Training (DET) successfully transitioned to virtual service delivery models to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Since then, DET staff have continued to provide services to help Wisconsinites get back to work quickly by connecting them to open positions, community services, and other workforce training programs.

BWITS Delivers Workforce Data and Analytics in Statewide COVID-19 Response

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, specialists from the Division of Employment and Training's Bureau of Workforce Information and Technical Services (BWITS) continued to meet regularly with over 430 primary customers throughout the state's Workforce Development Areas, including businesses, economic and workforce development organizations, plus K-12 and postsecondary education, government, and non-profit agencies, to guide the region's response through data-driven decision making.

BWITS staff assisted government agencies and non-profits throughout the state in creating their own data analytical and predictive dashboards for various purposes, including business attraction, economic health, talent attraction, decision making, and COVID-19 response. BWITS also provided vital research into incarceration rates compared to other cities throughout the Midwest, including unemployment rates of formerly incarcerated individuals, as part of DWD's initiatives to support successful transition back into the labor force.

OVES Responds to Veteran Needs During Pandemic

Throughout the majority of 2020, Wisconsin Job Centers were closed to the public due to COVID-19. Despite this challenge, the Division of Employment and Training's Office of Veteran Employment Services (OVES) found innovative methods to respond to the needs of veterans and their families using laptop computers, cell phones, and internet-based technologies. As of September 30, 2020, OVES effectively served 1,211 veterans with significant barriers to employment and 772 veterans entered the workforce.

Job Service Successfully Transitions Re-Employment Services to Tele-sessions

In response to rising numbers of COVID-19 cases and subsequent emergency orders, Wisconsin Job Centers closed their physical locations to customers in late March 2020. To minimize the impact on customers who were required to attend a Re-employment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) session to maintain Unemployment Insurance eligibility, the program quickly moved from in-person appointments to tele-sessions.

Over just a few days, IT programming was implemented to transition customer self-scheduling from a group session at a physical location to an individual telephone appointment. RESEA presenters were quickly trained on delivering the presentation one-on-one with a customer and were provided statewide resources for referrals, as RESEA participants may be speaking with an RESEA presenter in a different part of the state. The level of service was maintained, if not enhanced, with one-on-one attention focused to the individual's needs.

Between March 23 and November 20, 2020, Job Service served 19,338 RESEA participants in one-on-one telephone sessions.

Strategic Goal: Unlocking Workforce Opportunities (con't)



Drive-Thru Job Fairs Safely Connect Job Seekers and Employers

By the time the first COVID-19 public health orders began in March 2020, the Division of Employment and Training's Bureau of Job Service and workforce partners had already hosted several in-person job fairs in 2020, with statewide events connecting more than 700 job seekers with roughly 275 employers. With traditional job fairs no longer an option due to the pandemic, Job Service recognized the continued need for employers and job seekers to connect and began to work with partners to explore alternatives. By mid-July, the drive-thru job fair model had been introduced statewide, with the Wisconsin Workforce Development Association leading the effort.

On September 17, 2020, a statewide drive-thru job fair was held as part of the Wisconsin's Workforce Development Month efforts, with more than 20 locations participating across the state. Between July and November, drive-thru job fairs reached more than 1,000 job seekers, connecting them with information on local job openings through roughly 650 participating Wisconsin employers. This model has proven successful and is planned to continue through 2021 and beyond.

DIVISION OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ENHANCES STATEWIDE LIBRARY OUTREACH

The Division of Employment and Training (DET) received a grant through the Institute of Museum and Library Services in partnership with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Wisconsin Workforce Development Association in 2018. The Libraries Activating Workforce Development Skills Project (LAWDS) grant aims to improve community connections with workforce development programs by providing workforce information and resources to library staff and expanding workforce service delivery to library locations.

While COVID-19 significantly impacted implementation of the LAWDS project, DET continued to partner with libraries statewide in 2020 to:

1. Build the capacity of librarians and other staff to assist consumers with workforce needs; and
2. Allow Job Service staff to use the locations as remote workstations to assist consumers.

This year, Job Service staff provided trainings about Unemployment Insurance and JobCenterOfWisconsin.com for all librarians statewide. Additionally, collaborative efforts with Milwaukee Public Libraries and the Milwaukee County Federation Library System led to onsite services and outreach to library patrons.



Strategic Goal: Customer Service

BUREAU OF WORKFORCE TRAINING COMPLETES WIOA TITLE I PARTICIPANT SURVEY

In program year 2019, the Division of Employment and Training (DET) implemented a WIOA Title I participant satisfaction survey as a component of annual monitoring of the local workforce development boards. DET sent surveys via Survey Monkey to all Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth participants who were active at some point during the previous 12 months.

DET sent reminders to participants to complete the survey to improve the response rate, and in some cases, emails were sent to the local workforce development boards requesting they communicate with their participants and encourage responses. The survey was emailed to 6,746 participants statewide and 999 participants responded, for an average statewide response rate of 14.8 percent. The response rate within each of the 11 local workforce development areas ranged from 10.2 to 26.5 percent.

The results of each area's participant survey, including both statistical and qualitative feedback and comments, were shared and discussed with each local workforce development board during on-site monitoring. These discussions created the opportunity for highlighting local strengths and areas of improvement.

The DET-coordinated monitoring team decided to retain the participant satisfaction survey as a component of program year 2020 annual monitoring to allow year-over-year results to be compared and to collect information to inform future continuous improvement efforts.

In addition to WIOA Title I participant surveys, DET's one-stop system certification materials require local workforce development areas to have systems in place for collecting and analyzing customer feedback, both from job seekers and businesses, and to use the information to improve service delivery. These certification materials were distributed and utilized by the local areas at the end of program year 2018 for the purposes of certification for the next three-year certification cycle.





Department of Workforce Development

Equal Rights

MISSION:

To protect the rights of all people in Wisconsin under the civil rights and labor standards laws we administer, to achieve compliance through education, outreach, and enforcement by empowered and committed employees, and to perform our responsibilities with reasonableness, efficiency, and fairness.

OVERVIEW:

The Equal Rights Division (ERD) administers laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations, and the state's family and medical leave law. ERD also enforces laws pertaining to minimum wage, overtime pay, timely payment of wages, employment of minors, and notification of business closings or mass layoffs.



DID YOU KNOW . . .

Given the health emergency, online hearings are critical for making sure the people of Wisconsin can exercise their rights and seek remedy in a timely manner," says Division Administrator Jesús Villa. "I'm proud of our staff for adapting to these challenging times.

ANOTHER FACT . . .

Employee engagement is critical to employee recruitment, retention, job performance, and innovation. As many ERD employees made the transition to work remotely due to COVID-19, answering the question of how to keep teams engaged became a priority for ERD's Administrator.

In the months leading up to the COVID-19 health crisis, ERD had already made significant improvements to employee engagement, expanding its footprint into Milwaukee to better accommodate workplace needs. Additional staff was hired to ease workload burdens and reduce burnout, and the Advanced Equal Rights Officer (ERO) position was reinstated to assist with development. Although adding staff was a step in the right direction, keeping staff was just as important. Stay interviews were conducted to identify which aspects of employee engagement the division excelled in and in which areas ERD could improve.

Strategic Goal: Customer Service

EQUAL RIGHTS DIVISION RESPONDS TO COVID-19 IMPACTS

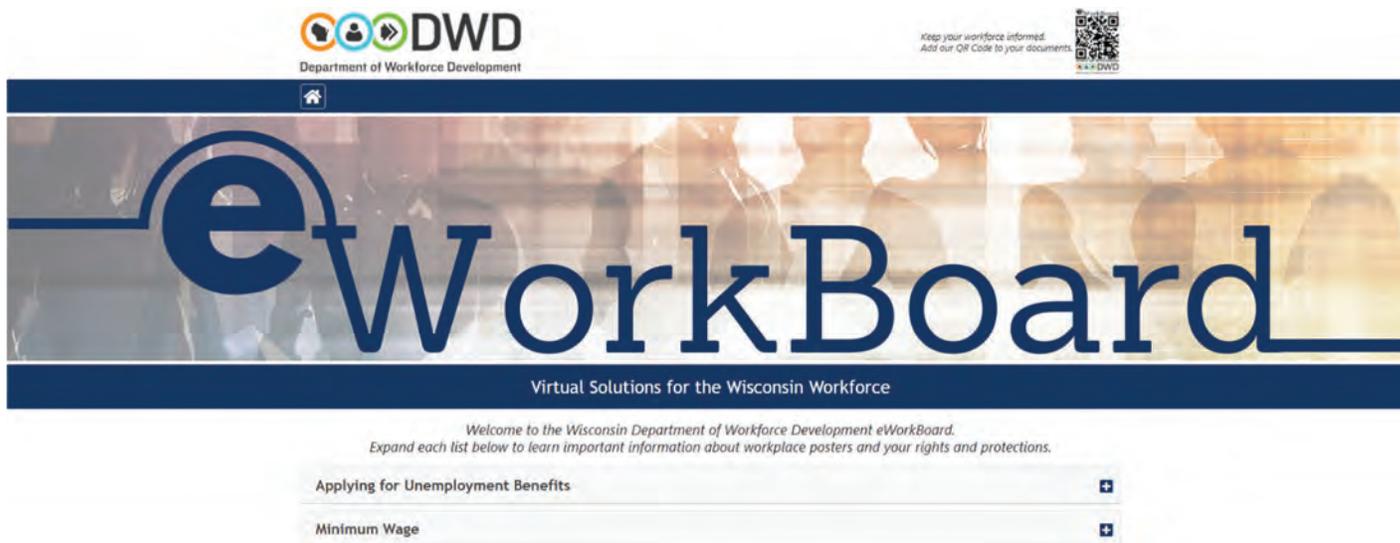
The COVID-19 health crisis changed the way Wisconsin does business, and therefore changed the way the Equal Rights Division (ERD) serves Wisconsin. In a matter of weeks, ERD made significant organizational changes to its workforce and operations.

ERD's immediate goal was to continue serving Wisconsin's workforce without interruption while transitioning most of its team to work safely from home. By the end of March, most ERD employees had transitioned to work from home. This challenge was met by a dedicated ERD team whose commitment to serving the people of Wisconsin remained a priority even during the state's Safer at Home order. Pivoting to online work presented obvious challenges, most of which related to the technical aspects of working remotely, such as functions typically performed in office transitioning to Skype and VoIP.

ERD Debuts DWD eWorkBoard

To ensure continued, quality customer service throughout the pandemic, ERD had to consider new and unique ways to administer, deliver, and enforce worker rights and protections, adapted to new workforce realities. One such method was the development of an online platform to serve as a virtual bulletin board for the thousands of employees no longer reporting to a brick and mortar office.

In July 2020, ERD published the DWD eWorkBoard, a virtual collection of workplace posters and the first DWD application to use a QR Code to improve access. The DWD eWorkBoard and QR Code make it possible for all employees, no matter where they are, to access a collection of workplace posters through their personal devices. Additionally, employers can share the QR Code with their remote workforce by placing it on any document.

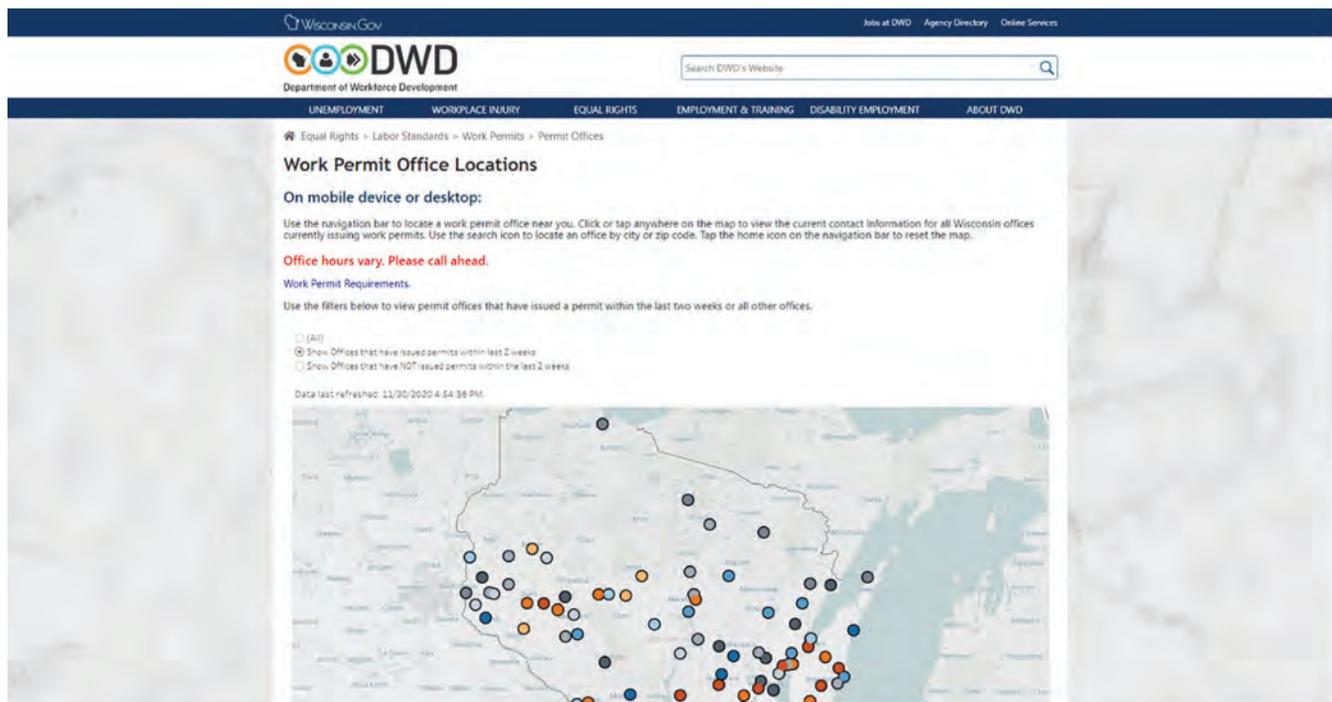


60-Second Video Series Addresses COVID-19 Workplace Questions

To connect Wisconsin workers with important information related to COVID-19 as quickly as possible, ERD created a quick hit platform called "60-Second Videos." The videos, displayed as tiles on the ERD homepage, flip when clicked to reveal an ERD staff member addressing commonly asked questions in 60 seconds or less. At the close of the video, users can click on a "Learn More Now" button if they wish to be redirected to an expanded resource on one of the DWD webpages. The videos offer quick answers to common questions, freeing up valuable ERD staff time that would otherwise be used to answer calls and direct people to the appropriate online resource.

ERD Develops Interactive Work Permit Office Map

To address the need for essential workers and minor employment during the COVID-19 pandemic, DWD put a temporary hold on the work permit requirement for minor workers. While this "enforcement holiday" helped get minor workers into the workforce, it created some very significant challenges for ERD. One such challenge was how to best communicate to the public which work permit offices were open once the enforcement holiday was over. To address this issue, ERD created an interactive map showing which work permit offices were open and the date they last issued a permit. The interactive work permit office map helped hundreds of working minors find the open work permit office nearest them.



Strategic Goal: Workforce Services Delivery

EQUAL RIGHTS DIVISION ADAPTS SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL TO MEET COVID-19 NEEDS

By late March 2020, over 90 percent of Equal Rights Division (ERD) employees transitioned to remote work. A limited number of staff remained in the office to continue providing services that could not be delivered remotely. ERD committed to keeping both staff and the public safe and healthy while continuing to serve the people of Wisconsin without disruption and as effectively and efficiently as possible.

In person services were replaced by virtual services. Some services, like constituent inquiries and case intake, took little effort to transition to virtual platforms. Others, like issuing child labor work permits or conducting hearings, were more challenging. Systems and hardware were upgraded as needed, and staff was trained to support these efforts.

Additionally, ERD increased communication between supervisors and staff to make sure operations were continuing efficiently and that employees were adequately supported. As the health emergency continued and ERD had to respond to more changes – such as by reassigning staff to assist UI with case adjudications, email inquiries, and staff hires – ERD was in a position to respond. Virtual employee engagement continued to improve through virtual features like SharePoint online discussion boards that allowed staff to share personal news celebrating individual staff members each week. Likewise, remote staff regularly showed appreciation to in-office staff with delivery of lunches and treats.

Strategic Goal: Worker Protections and Rights

EQUAL RIGHTS HEARINGS CONTINUE DURING THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY

In early March, as COVID-19 began to spread, ERD leadership discussed the question of whether ERD hearings could be conducted online. While the Division was initially concerned about technical capabilities, privacy, and potential due process issues, it quickly became apparent that in-person hearings would no longer be possible for the foreseeable future, and ERD began developing an online hearings process.

Every year, over 850 ERD cases are certified to hearing – either on appeal or on a finding of probable cause. Most of those cases settle either privately or with ERD mediation, but over 200 of them typically go on to a hearing. ERD hearings often require multiple days of testimony by multiple witnesses. Cases can involve hundreds of pages of exhibits, with nearly every case involving issues of credibility. In short, ERD hearings are more like complex judicial trials than typical administrative hearings.

Effectively conducting hearings online required a platform that would allow live video from multiple participants, the ability to share exhibits, and the ability to record proceedings. Moreover, the platform needed to be broadly accessible to parties and witnesses of widely varying technological sophistication. Hearing and pre-hearing procedures would need to be modified to meet online needs. ERD's Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) also needed training to be able to conduct hearings with confidence.

ERD quickly settled on WebEx as the most secure and widely accessible platform available. ALJs were trained on how to host WebEx hearings, including how to admit participants into the hearing from the virtual lobby, how to share exhibits on screen, and how to record proceedings. Pre-hearing procedures were expanded to accommodate the planning and organization needed for online hearings, and instructional guides were developed for hearing participants.

In August 2020, select ALJs conducted ERD's first online hearings. Due to the success of those pilot hearings, by October all ALJs were given the go-ahead to begin conducting hearings online. By November, ERD had successfully conducted 21 online hearings, including those with unrepresented parties. By January 2021, ERD expects to be back to conducting hearings at its pre-COVID-19 pace.





Department of Workforce Development

Operations

MISSION:

Provide strategic vision, leadership, and solutions with our business partners to empower clients and customers.

OVERVIEW:

The Division of Operations (DO) provides management and program support to DWD's divisions, including budget, facilities, finance, information technology, purchasing and procurement, lean government, project management services and solutions, and incident management and continuity of operations. In addition, DO provides IT support to the Labor & Industry Review Commission, batch monitoring support to the State of Wisconsin Investment Board, and certain statewide programs administered by the Department of Health Services and the Department of Children and Families. Additionally, DO works closely with the Department of Administration (DOA) and the Division of Personnel Management (DPM) in the delivery of human resource services to the department.

DO consists of five bureaus and one office:

- ◆ Enterprise Solutions
- ◆ Finance
- ◆ General Services
- ◆ Information Technology
- ◆ Procurement and Information Management
- ◆ Office of Policy and Budget



DO's Linda Preysz Awarded 2020 Virginia Hart Award

Linda Preysz, business consultant in DO's Bureau of Enterprise Solutions was awarded the 37th Annual Virginia Hart Special Recognition Award for 2020. The award recognizes women in state service who embody characteristics that include a commitment to service above and beyond their expected duties, overcoming obstacles and hardships, and demonstrating personal growth.

Linda has served as a state of Wisconsin employee for over 25 years, holding previous positions in DWD as a business analyst and policy advisor to DWD's Secretary's Office and Division of Employment and Training. In her current role, Linda supports DWD's mission by providing expertise in project management, facilitation, change management, strategic planning, Lean/Continuous Improvement, business analysis, and much more in support of DWD's critical programs and services.

Leaders and peers across DWD request Linda's assistance regularly in running high level projects, facilitating strategic planning, and assisting with continuous improvement projects. Her ability to examine business needs and process to develop a forward-thinking approach and solution is unmatched. She enables her "customers" to own the projects and take them forward to ensure continued success.

Strategic Goal: Customer Service

DIVISION OF OPERATIONS LEADS DWD CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS EFFORTS

Due to COVID-19, in mid-March 2020 the Division of Operations (DO) transitioned DWD to a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). DO successfully implemented the Incident Command Structure with the DWD Secretary's Office and Division leadership to rapidly transition as many staff as operationally possible to work at home. This transition involved implementing a variety of solutions while ensuring safe and sustainable operations.

DO staff facilitated distributing portable devices and cell phones to staff throughout the state, enabling remote connectivity. Staff also made configurations to laptops, workstations, and other staff computing devices to enable agency personnel to telework. Two-factor authentication protocol for access to the DWD network was implemented agency-wide to ensure security of information and data. DO implemented these measures quickly to ensure staff safety while continuing agency operations without disruptions.

DO Implements Peer Support Pilot Program

Responding to the needs of DWD's workforce during COVID-19, DO launched a peer support pilot program in September 2020 to provide meaningful support to staff who experience work-related trauma. When serving the people of Wisconsin, DWD staff members often hear desperate, distressing stories. The ongoing stress of hearing these stories, coupled with threats agency personnel have received since the beginning of the pandemic, can cause serious deterioration of employee mental health. The vicarious trauma that can happen to staff exposed to ongoing negativity and high workloads is real and can affect productivity and the quality of customer service.

Peer support programs are commonly used by first response, medical, and mental health agencies. Locally, the Dane County Sheriff's Department and NAMI of Dane County both have successful peer support programs. The Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) has had a peer support program in place for over 10 years, which has resulted in a significantly positive effect on staff, with the program receiving wide support by DOC leadership. DWD's program adopts many of DOC's best practices, adjusted to meet DWD's unique circumstances.

By providing a peer support program for employees, DWD offers a trauma-informed approach to supporting employee mental wellbeing. This not only helps the agency by reducing sick leave use, workplace conflict, and staff turnover, but is simply the right thing to do. The purpose of the DWD peer support program is for peer supporters to provide timely, comprehensive, and confidential assistance to DWD employees following an identified critical or personal incident that may have happened on or off the job.

Strategic Goal: Workforce Services Delivery

DO AIDS IN DWD IMPLEMENTATION OF COVID-19 RELIEF PROGRAMS

In March and April of 2020, DO, in close collaboration with Unemployment Insurance (UI), analyzed federal legislation to address the immediate and extremely disruptive impact of COVID-19. Federal COVID-19 legislation included the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), enacted on March 18, 2020, and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, enacted on March 27, 2020. Many states also enacted legislation to address the pandemic, with Wisconsin enacting 2019 Act 185 on April 15, 2020. In addition to state-specific legislative changes to address the pandemic, Act 185 also adjusted state law to ensure that Wisconsin could fully capture federal funding available to states and their residents under FFCRA and CARES.

DO tracked agency expenses related to COVID-19 and submitted them to the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) for reimbursement from the state's CARES funds. DWD's reimbursement for expenses from March to June 2020 was approximately \$4.5 million, about \$4.2 million of which was UI-related expenses. DWD's September to October 2020 reimbursement is expected to total approximately \$9.7 million.

DO's UI Applications Development team worked on several projects that implemented CARES Act UI benefit programs including Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC). The team also worked on implementation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Lost Wages Assistance (LWA) program, as well as several changes enacted by the Wisconsin State Legislature.

DO SUPPORTS RESPONSE TO COVID-19 SURGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE CLAIMS

DO played a key role in supporting DWD's response to the unprecedented number of unemployment insurance (UI) claims resulting from the pandemic. DO accomplishments included:

- ▶ Reassigning nearly 40 DO staff to UI, either full- or part-time, to assist with the UI workload.
- ▶ Providing project management services to support changes and enhancements to UI program operations, including IT and telecommunications projects.
- ▶ Drafting two general waivers and requests for bids to procure third-party vendors to provide additional resources to answer UI calls and process claims.
- ▶ Implementing Virtual Desktop Interface (VDI) and network connectivity to enable third-party vendors to connect to the state network and use DWD IT applications. DO completed network access provisioning for approximately 1,600 contract call center agents in just four weeks, and continues to provide ongoing technical support for third-party vendor day-to-day operations.
- ▶ Quickly working to increase the call capacity of the UI call center by 200% in 10 days.
- ▶ Implementing a frequently asked questions style of Chatbot to support access to UI resources.
- ▶ Requesting and receiving approval for more than 240 UI project positions.
- ▶ Participating in numerous recruitment activities to support the filling of permanent, project, and limited-term UI positions.



BITS CONTINUES TO DEPLOY TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS FOR HIGH-VALUE PROJECTS

Despite being fully focused on supporting continued agency operations during the COVID-19 pandemic, DO's Bureau of Information Technology Services (BITS) continued to work on successfully completing planned projects in support of DWD Division and Agency initiatives to meet various goals and statutory requirements.

This year, BITS completed a pilot project to integrate SARA, a cloud-based virtual assistant service, with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) case management system. SARA is used by DVR to provide status updates and reminders to consumers of DVR's services. SARA also provides functionality that allows consumers to take pictures of key documents and submit via text messages which are then automatically inserted into the DVR case management system. Currently, the virtual assistant functionality is being piloted by two DVR Workforce Development Areas, with use in additional areas of the state expected to roll out in 2021.

BITS also completed several projects for the Division of Employment & Training (DET) this year. Key DET projects completed in 2020 included implementation of the document management system to digitize and store documents electronically in ASSET, DET's case management system, eliminating the need for paper-based files, and enhancements to the Wisconsin Fast Forward application allowing grantees to transmit required participant files electronically.



Department of Workforce Development

Unemployment Insurance

MISSION:

To facilitate financial stability and a prosperous Wisconsin economy by delivering high quality, innovative, customer-driven unemployment services.

OVERVIEW:

The UI program primary roles are to provide:

- ▶ **Temporary economic assistance** to individuals who find themselves unemployed through no fault of their own and who are actively seeking work.
- ▶ **Economic stability** in the community during periods of economic downturn.

The UI program is financed by federal and state taxes paid by employers who are subject to the federal/state UI laws. Wisconsin was the first state to enact a UI law in 1932 to help stabilize the effects of the Great Depression.

The UI Division areas of responsibility consist of:

UI Administration - Handles the development of strategic plans, operating budgets, system modernization, information technology coordination, communications, and legislative and customer relations. UI Administration is also responsible for Quality Control (QC), providing statistically valid estimates of the accuracy of both benefit payments and decisions and auditing UI Tax operations to ensure accuracy and timeliness.

Benefit Operations Bureau (BOB) - Processes claims, adjudicates disputes, and ensures proper payment of benefits.

Bureau of Tax and Accounting (BTA) – Collects, controls, and accounts for flow of funds into and out of the UI program; establishes tax liability; maintains employer accounts; audits employers to promote and verify employer compliance with state laws, regulations, and policies; and collects unpaid employer taxes and benefit overpayments.

Bureau of Legal Affairs (BOLA) - Provides legal advice and services for the division, handles internal security, processes UI benefit and tax appeals, represents DWD in court and administrative proceedings, conducts research and analysis on UI laws and policies, investigates and educates employers on worker misclassification, and provides support to the Unemployment Insurance Advisory Council (UIAC).

Bureau of Management and Information Services (BMIS) – Handles project management, imaging and document management, business analysis and automation, telecom and data services.



UI OVERSEES THRIVING WORK-SHARE PROGRAM AMID HISTORIC DEMAND

Throughout the pandemic, UI continued to successfully administer Work-Share, a program that allows participating employers to avoid layoffs during times of reduced business activity by offering employees unemployment benefits pro-rated to partial work reductions. Participation in the Work-Share program skyrocketed due to COVID-19 as employers began to consider alternatives to layoffs amid the crisis.

Participating in the Work-Share program benefits both employers and employees, allowing employers to retain their trained staff while employees maintain partial income and their full health benefits during times of reduced business activity. In the four years between 2016 and March 15, 2020, Wisconsin had only 20 total work-share plans involving 899 participants. Between March 15 and December 15, 2020, DWD approved nearly 1,000 Work-Share plans covering more than 34,000 participants.

Strategic Goal: Workforce Services Delivery

UI DIVISION ADAPTS TO CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Since March 15, 2020, Wisconsin has faced not only an historic public health crisis with the emergence of COVID-19, but a workforce and economic crisis as well. By December 26, 2020, the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Division had paid out over \$4.68 billion to approximately 590,095 claimants since the start of the pandemic.

At the beginning of the pandemic, while adjusting internal organizational plans to ensure staff safety through transitions to remote work or onsite social distancing arrangements, UI worked tirelessly to battle the avalanche of unemployment claims filed. In all of 2019, UI received 287,022 initial applications for unemployment benefits. When the pandemic hit, UI received roughly 240,000 initial applications within the two-week period from March 15 to March 31, 2020.

Between March 15, 2020, and December 26, 2020, DWD had received more than 9.02 million weekly claims – compared to 7.2 million claims handled by the agency in the four-year period from 2016 to 2019. Though UI received more than four years of work in nine months, by December 26, 2020, more than 96.89% of weekly claims filed were resolved.

UI Successfully Implements COVID-19 Emergency Rules and Relief Programs

On March 18, 2020, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) was enacted, followed by the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act on March 27, 2020. This federal legislation included a package of relief programs administered through the UI program. UI's outdated IT system only allowed the agency to program one CARES Act program at a time. Even with the constraints of this antiquated system, UI successfully analyzed, programmed, deployed, and paid benefits for the following CARES Act programs:

- ▶ Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), which provided \$600 in additional benefits per week to eligible individuals through July 25, 2020;
- ▶ Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), which pays up to 39 weeks of benefits to individuals who are not eligible for regular UI and meet one of several COVID-19 scenarios; and
- ▶ Pandemic Unemployment Emergency Compensation (PEUC), which provides up to 13 weeks of benefits to individuals who exhaust their regular UI benefits.

In addition to the CARES Act programs, UI has successfully implemented several emergency rules since the start of the pandemic. UI implemented law changes in Wisconsin Act 185 including a temporary waiver of the one-week waiting period for benefits and tax relief for employers.

UI also programmed and deployed the Lost Wages Assistance (LWA) program, a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) program providing \$300 in additional benefits per week to eligible individuals who filed during any week between the those ending August 1, 2020, and September 5, 2020.

After Wisconsin's 13-week insurance unemployment rate (IUR) exceeded 5 percent, UI programmed and deployed the Extended Benefits (EB) program. This program provides up to 13 weeks of benefits to individuals who exhaust their regular UI and PEUC benefits. The EB program does not apply to individuals collecting PUA.



UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ADVISORY COUNCIL BEGINS WORK ON AGREED BILL

The Unemployment Insurance Advisory Council (UIAC) advises DWD and the Legislature on policy matters concerning the development and administration of UI law. The Council allows labor and management representatives to work together to ensure stability in the UI system and collaborate on positive changes to enhance to program. The Council is recognized as essential and integral to the legislative process. As a result, controversial issues and the foremost policy concerns are addressed effectively. Council deliberations and negotiations resolve difficult issues while efficiently balancing the interests of employers and employees.

Every two years, the Council submits recommended changes to Wisconsin's UI law to the Wisconsin State Legislature as an "Agreed Bill" for the Legislature's consideration. In November 2020, UAIC began its agreed-bill process for the biennium by holding a public hearing via video conference. The Council also accepted written comments from the public submitted to the department by mail or through a dedicated email box.

Announcement of the public hearing resulted in UIAC receiving 62 email comments and one letter. During the two-day hearing, held the afternoons of November 9 and 10, 2020, 26 public comments were delivered. Following the public hearing, the UIAC agreed to support extensions to existing emergency rules and approved two emergency rules as the Council continues to work toward passing the biennium's Agreed Bill.

UIAC activities and related UI reports can be found on the Unemployment Insurance Advisory Council homepage at <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/uibola/uiac/>.

Strategic Goal: Customer Service

UI UPDATES UNEMPLOYMENT APPLICATION QUESTIONS

In December, DWD announced plans to make it easier for Wisconsinites to file for unemployment insurance benefits by updating the language for both its initial and weekly UI claim applications to use plain language. This effort was designed to make the applications more understandable to all individuals who may apply for UI benefits, regardless of their educational background or regional/cultural language differences.

The Department drafted updated language for the application questions and began seeking public input on the new draft questions in December 2020. The applications will be finalized in 2021.

UI QUADRUPLES STAFFING IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 CRISIS

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, DWD began investing significant time and resources to boosting the number of trained UI staff available to assist with the surge in unemployment claims. In March 2020, UI had just 508 employees. By August 2020, between temporary reassignments within DWD and from other agencies, internal hires, and outside vendors, the UI Division had over 1,900 employees.

In May, UI's contract for a 500-person call center was implemented, resulting in a significant increase in successful customer contacts. In June, UI's call center for PUA applicants was officially launched, while UI also expanded help center hours. From May 20 through December 5, 2020, UI help center staff and vendors have made over 1.7 million customer contacts. UI also contracted with a vendor to supply 200 adjudicators and 100 claims processors in 2020.

As more calls have been answered thanks to increased capacity, the number of calls into UI call centers has decreased significantly, more issues have been resolved, and claimants have received their UI benefits. In April, incoming calls to the UI help center peaked at over 5 million, and many claimants were left unable to reach the center. Since August, UI has been able to answer almost every call to Wisconsin UI call centers within seconds.



DWD TEAMS WITH GOOGLE CLOUD TO ADDRESS UI CASELOAD

In mid-October 2020, DWD announced a new partnership with Google Cloud to assist in Unemployment Insurance (UI) claims processing. DWD partnered with Google Cloud to expedite review of UI claims and assist in processing claim payment determinations. Using predictive analytics, Google Cloud's service shortens adjudication decision-making time, allowing DWD to release payments to eligible claimants faster.

Google Cloud has also assisted DWD in identifying unemployment claims that have the risk of improper payment. Google's fraud detection and identification service scans and identifies potentially fraudulent claims based on key indicators, allowing DWD to more strategically work through eligible claims.

In addition to these benefits, DWD is also working with Google to allow claimants and employers to be contacted electronically and provide the functionality for UI to receive documents submitted online instead of by only mail and fax. These efforts aim to reduce the need for scheduled phone calls and streamline data extraction and integration from documentation to provide further efficiencies in the claim processing workflow.

DWD's data and business teams continue to work, in conjunction with Google, to review data analysis and assess the unemployment caseload. UI plans to continue developing additional reporting and metrics on the Google Cloud collaboration through 2021.





Department of Workforce Development

Vocational Rehabilitation

MISSION:

The mission of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is to assist individuals with disabilities in obtaining, maintaining, and improving employment by working with consumers, employers, and other partners. DVR primarily serves individuals with disabilities, working with them to maximize their employment opportunities by helping them develop the skills that today's businesses are seeking in the workforce. DVR also serves employers, connecting them to qualified job seekers with disabilities.

OVERVIEW:

DVR's primary services for job seekers with disabilities include:

- ◆ Career guidance and counseling
- ◆ Disability and employment assessment
- ◆ Job search and placement assistance
- ◆ Information and referral services
- ◆ Transition to work services for students with disabilities
- ◆ Employment service support for persons with significant disabilities, including:
 - ◆ Time-limited, on-the-job supports
 - ◆ Vocational and other training
 - ◆ Rehabilitation technology
 - ◆ Occupational licenses, tools, and other equipment
 - ◆ Assistance in small-business plan development

DVR's primary services for businesses include:

- ◆ Informing business about the DVR talent pool and the full spectrum of DVR programs and services
- ◆ Sharing information with employers about incentives and opportunities to provide work-based learning and career exploration options to students and youth through internships and work experiences
- ◆ Connecting employers to resources to help them recruit, job match, hire, train, and retain qualified job candidates from the DVR talent pool
- ◆ Providing consultation, technical assistance, and support to employers on workplace accommodations, assistive technology, and accessibility
- ◆ Offering information and consultation on disability employment topics, including the benefits and return on investment of enhancing diversity in the workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act



Program Accomplishments 2019-2020

In state fiscal year (SFY) 2020, 3,451 individuals with disabilities successfully reached their employment goals and entered the workforce. The combined earning potential of these DVR consumers is estimated at nearly \$64 million annually, more than double the public investment made during the entire time they received DVR services.

DVR Outcome Data

In State Fiscal Year 2020, DVR helped over 3,400 individuals with disabilities achieve their employment goal. Those workers had an average hourly wage over \$14.00 per hour, and are projected to earn over \$64 million annually.

Strategic Goal: Workforce Services Delivery

DVR SUCCESSFULLY ADAPTS SERVICE DELIVERY TO MEET COVID-19 CHALLENGES

COVID-19 had a significant impact on service delivery for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) in 2020. Beginning in mid-March, DVR switched to virtual consumer services and encouraged DVR service providers to do the same. DWD and DVR leadership worked quickly to ensure that all staff had laptops and cell phones to efficiently and effectively work from home. DVR employed accountability measures to ensure staff productivity and created support mechanisms to ensure staff had access to tools and resources for support.

Since the virtual service delivery model was implemented, DVR counselors have worked closely with consumers to determine their comfort and interest in searching for work. Depending on individual consumer needs, some continued with job search efforts while others either requested a temporary pause or focused their efforts on developing job readiness skills to be better prepared for work following the pandemic. Despite the obstacles presented by COVID-19, hundreds of DVR consumers successfully achieved their employment goals during this period.

DVR Offers COVID-19 Subsidies to Service Providers

Early in the pandemic, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) recognized that its valued network of service provider partners would be in a better position to retain staff if DVR provided short-term subsidies to assist with expensive technology upgrades necessary to efficiently transition to remote consumer services. On March 30, COVID-19 supplemental fees were made available to DVR service providers for the delivery of several key services. These extra payments were offered until previously planned permanent fee increases and contract efficiencies were implemented for all service providers on July 1, 2020.

Strategic Goal: Career Pathways

WISCONSIN CONTINUES SUCCESS IN IMPLEMENTING PROJECT SEARCH PROGRAM

Administered by DVR, Wisconsin continued its successful participation in Project SEARCH, a national program for youth and adults with disabilities that provides internships and education leading to competitive integrated employment. Each Project SEARCH program runs concurrent with the K-12 school year and is offered statewide in partnership with Wisconsin businesses, schools, disability services agencies, and managed care organizations.

Since the inception of Project SEARCH in Wisconsin, the program has grown from a single site during the 2008-2009 school year to 27 business sites in 2019, enrolling 254 interns for the 2019-2020 school year.

Adjusting to the impacts of COVID-19, throughout the spring months DVR worked closely with active Project SEARCH sites to transition the final rotation of the school year to off-site learning, leading to 241 interns completing the program for the 2019-2020 school year. In February 2020, three additional Wisconsin Project SEARCH sites were awarded in the communities of Kimberly, Green Bay, and Superior, bringing the total number of Wisconsin Project SEARCH sites to 30 for the 2020-2021 school year.

Throughout the pandemic, Project SEARCH sites and teams have worked hard to ensure the ability of their sites to provide services virtually, onsite, or as a hybrid model. While not all Project SEARCH sites were able to operate for the 2020-2021 school year, as of November 2020, Wisconsin Project SEARCH has 20 active sites serving 176 interns. The table below shows the most recent data available demonstrating Wisconsin Project SEARCH's success in connecting interns with employment upon completion of the program.

It is unclear how the high unemployment rate experienced during 2020 due to COVID-19 may impact the employment rates for 2019-2020 school year graduates. DVR anticipates a lower percentage than previous years as many Project SEARCH participants were affected by the pandemic due to losing jobs, being laid off, or being unable to work due to health concerns related to COVID-19.

Wisconsin Project SEARCH Statistics	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
# Enrolled	194	237	254
# Graduated	186	223	241
# Employed-Total	164	174	--
# Employed-PS National Criteria	135	140	--
% Employed-Total	85%	73%	--

Strategic Goal: Unlocking Workforce Opportunities

DVR REPORTS PROGRESS ON COMMUNITY INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT (CIE) DELIVERABLES

2017 Wisconsin Act 178 requires the DWD Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the Department of Health Services (DHS), and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to work together to increase competitive integrated employment (CIE) outcomes for working age people with disabilities who receive public services outside their home.

Since its enactment, the CIE Workgroup has published a second annual report for 2020 highlighting the progress made in plan implementation through interagency collaboration, most recent CIE data available, and barriers the agencies have encountered.

The CIE Report categorizes the progress under three cross-agency objectives:

1. Increase awareness that work is possible for people with disabilities by promoting CIE opportunities using targeted outreach and education.

DVR has produced three videos highlighting CIE for people with disabilities in Wisconsin. The videos were created for specific audiences: DVR 101 for individuals considering applying for DVR and their families, Transition Services for students with disabilities and their families, and Finding Career Success for individuals with the most significant disabilities seeking CIE. Links to these videos can be found on the CIE website.

The video series, which also includes an instructional video related to DVR Eligibility, is shared with potential DVR consumers at orientation as well as in outreach efforts. They are distributed to a broad statewide audience by each agency via conference presentations, training events, and Department-specific listservs.

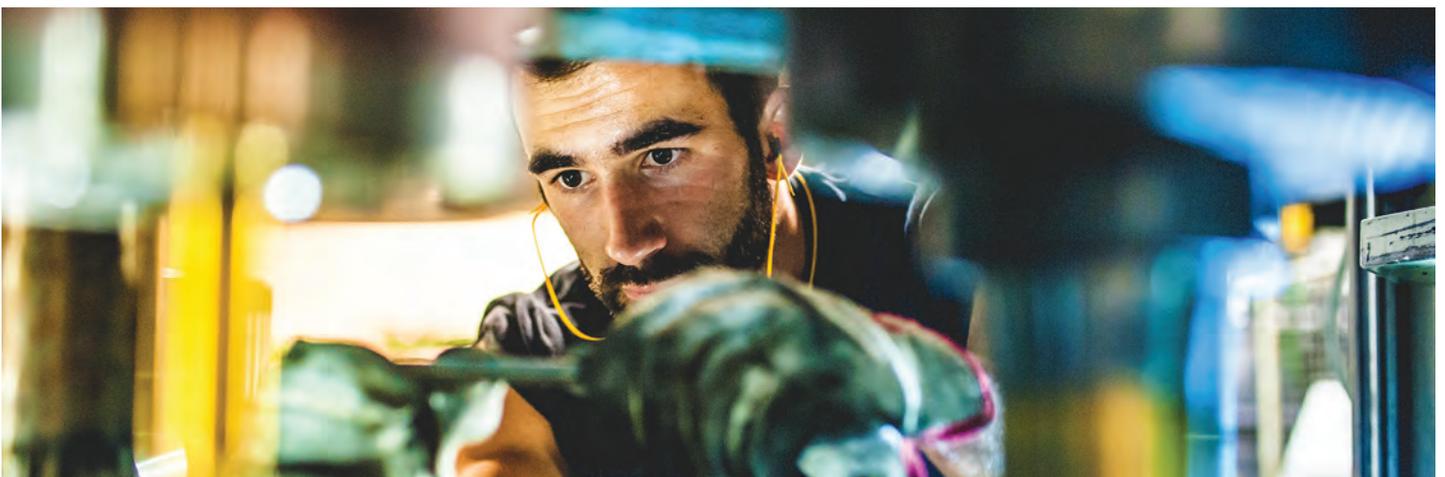
2. Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination to increase CIE opportunities for people with disabilities.

CIE Data Workgroup meetings began in February 2019. The IBM Identity Insight matching tool was selected to build a joint data sharing system, and the required data agreements were signed by the three agencies in the summer of 2020. DHS and DVR will continue to build the data system through next year, with the first cross agency reports expected by June 2021.

3. Prepare students for CIE through their educational experience, connecting individuals to vital services both during and after high school.

The Service Provider Capacity and Quality Workgroup continues to address issues including service provider capacity and best practices in providing employment services to individuals with disabilities. The workgroup includes representatives from each Department and service providers.

The report was posted on the DVR-hosted CIE website on June 30, 2020. CIE workgroups continue to meet monthly to implement the plan by reviewing workplans, data integration elements, and data system requirements, as well as getting updates on service provider capacity activities.





Department of Workforce Development

Worker's Compensation

MISSION:

The mission of the Division of Worker's Compensation (WC) is to promote healthy, safe work environments by maintaining a balanced system of services to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Wisconsin Worker's Compensation Act. The Division's work to ensure compliance with the Worker's Compensation Act includes, among other efforts, advancing worker protections and providing exceptional customer service – both of which are areas of focus in DWD's current long-term strategic planning efforts.

OVERVIEW:

WC administers programs designed to advance worker protections by ensuring that injured workers receive prompt payment of required benefits from private insurance companies or self-insured employers. WC also encourages rehabilitation and reemployment for injured workers and promotes the reduction of work-related injuries, illness, and deaths. The Division ensures compliance with the provisions of the Wisconsin Worker's Compensation Act.

Highlights of key functions include:

- ▶ Division staff manage the Wisconsin worker's compensation claims program, provide claimant assistance, set permanent disability ratings for claimants, and monitor accuracy and promptness of payments, health cost disputes, and return-to-work programs.
- ▶ Division attorneys resolve disputes related to health care service fees, necessity of treatment, and pharmacy fee schedules.
- ▶ WC oversees the insurance functions of the worker's compensation program by managing the self-insurers program, the Uninsured Employers Fund, and the wrap-up insurance program.
- ▶ WC also serves as liaison to the Wisconsin Compensation Rating Bureau and the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance.

In fulfilling these responsibilities, WCD maintains a commitment to the delivery of exceptional customer service through streamlining services, empowering staff, and robust outreach and education.



WISCONSIN WORKER'S COMPENSATION SAFETY PROGRAM

A safe workplace is good for everyone. For employers, it means lower worker's compensation premiums, better productivity by experienced and loyal workers, and higher profitability. For workers, a safe workplace means fewer injuries, greater confidence, higher morale and steady pay to support themselves and their families.

Putting Together a Safe Workplace provides an overview on the basics for an effective safety program that virtually any Wisconsin employer can implement. This publication highlights key considerations, reviews core safety program elements, and includes a comprehensive list of safety resources and organization

Strategic Goal: Workforce Services Delivery

WC TRANSFORMS SERVICE DELIVERY, EXTERNAL TRAINING

In March 2020, all WC staff members rose to meet the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19. In just five business days, WC transformed itself from a division with only one member working from home on a part-time basis to a division with all but eight members, whose core job functions cannot be performed outside of GEF-1, working remotely full-time.

From the procurement of laptops, tablets, and VPN connection capabilities, to the reorganization of work processes throughout the entire division, every member of WC approached this shift with patience and a desire to work together. To ensure as minimal an interruption to services to WC stakeholders as possible, staff showed their commitment to problem solving by taking on additional job duties to ease the burden for those still working in GEF-1.

As an example of this ability to adjust, the WC Division successfully conducted two virtual WC training workshops, including one in November 2020 that drew more than 180 participants from 14 states. The first-ever virtual WC workshop was delivered in spring 2020 through WebEx, garnering a record attendance with over 100 participants, including insurance adjusters, WC specialists, and others from across the country. Before 2020, the WC workshop was presented in person at GEF-1 and had attendance limits. WC staff transformed the training to 100 percent online within a matter of days, and almost all presenters did so from remote locations. The virtual training saved customers travel and lodging costs, including flight costs for those traveling from outside Wisconsin.



The Worker's Compensation Division (WC) conducted two virtual workshops in 2020, including one in November 2020 that drew more than 180 remote attendees from 14 states. Conducted via WebEx, WC Dispute Resolution Specialist Frank Salvi (above) moderated several of the workshop sessions.

Strategic Goal: Customer Service

WC IMPROVES HEARING APPLICATION PROCESS

Through a combination of process efficiencies, staffing changes, and other improvements, the number of WC hearing applications waiting 30 days or less to be served reached nearly 100 percent in spring 2020, with all but extreme exceptions outside of WC's control served in well under 30 days.

In addition to process efficiencies and staffing increases, WC Administrative Law Judges worked on weekends to help expedite related workflows, all for the benefit of customers awaiting service. Collectively, the improvements resulted in an efficient and effective system that has remained despite the pandemic and the need for most WC staff to work remotely for an extended period.

Selected Uninsured Employer Fund Metrics	CY2020
Uninsured Employer Fund (UEF) 10/31/2020 balance	\$30,009,744
Completed employer investigations by UEF staff - 1/1/2020 to 10/31/2020	18,967
UEF payments to, or on behalf of, workers injured while working for illegally uninsured employers - 1/1/2020 to 10/31/2020	\$1,690,685

Selected Legal Services Metrics	CY2020
Number of processed and closed disputes involving reasonableness of fees, necessity of treatment, or pharmacy fee schedule - 1/1/2020 to 10/31/2020	2,770
Number of received hearing applications - 1/1/2020 to 10/31/2020	3,044



STATE OF WISCONSIN



Department of Workforce Development

201 E. Washington Ave.

Madison, WI 53703

608-266-3131 | dwd.wisconsin.gov