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Investments in 22 Counties builds on governor's initial nearly $60 million Workforce Innovation Grant money, projects announced prioritize forestry, manufacturing workforce development, and workforce housing.

STEVENS POINT — Gov. Tony Evers announced Tuesday up to $19.5 million in grants through the Workforce Innovation Grant Program will be awarded to Lakeshore Technical College, the Wisconsin Forestry Center at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and Northwood Technical College for projects that support long-term solutions to Wisconsin's workforce challenges and promote workforce development across 22 counties in Wisconsin's Northwestern, Northern, Northeastern, and Eastern regions. The projects are the first to be announced as a part of the second round of Workforce Innovation Grants.

"We're working to build the workforce of tomorrow and address our state's long-standing workforce challenges by investing in retaining and recruiting our talented workers, making sure our kids have skills and apprenticeship opportunities, and reducing barriers to Wisconsinites who want to join our workforce," said Gov. Evers. "Our Workforce Innovation Grant program

was designed to do just that, helping folks tackle the regional challenges that affect their communities, connecting workers with available jobs, and making sure we have an innovative, high-skilled workforce that is able to support the future of Wisconsin's critical industries."

The first round of Workforce Innovation Grants were announced in December 2021 when the governor announced 12 regional projects would receive up to $59.5 million in grants. Last summer, Gov. Evers announced a groundbreaking $130 million investment in workforce solutions across the state. Today's announcement brings that total investment to more than $158.5 million, including:

- More than $128 million for the Workforce Innovation Grant Program to encourage regions and communities to develop leading-edge, long-term solutions to the workforce challenges the state faces in the wake of COVID-19;
- $20 million toward the Worker Advancement Initiative, which offers subsidized employment and skills training opportunities with local employers to unemployed individuals; and
- $10 million for a Worker Connection Program, which provides workforce career coaches who will connect with individuals attempting to reengage in the workforce post-pandemic.

"The Workforce Innovation Grants we're announcing today will provide additional training resources to Wisconsin's manufacturing and forest product industries, both of which are so vital to a vibrant state economy," said Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes. "By targeting both workers who need help getting back into the job market or developing their skills and young people just starting their careers, we're building a workforce that will meet our immediate and long-term needs."

While Wisconsin continues to see workforce shortages that existed long before the pandemic began, last week, the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) released the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) preliminary employment data for the month of May, which not only showed Wisconsin's unemployment rate continues to remain below the national average at 2.9 percent but also a historic high of 3,059,300 Wisconsinites employed.

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