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JULY 2014

**WORKER TRAINING GRANTS
for
WISCONSIN CUSTOMER SERVICE
OCCUPATIONS**

Award Amount: \$5,000 to \$400,000

Applications must be submitted no later than:
October 14, 2014

Grant Program Announcement
GPA #FF143BL1



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Department of Workforce Development → Office of Skills Development

WISCONSIN FAST FORWARD PROGRAM

Governor Scott Walker signed 2013 Act 9, also known as Wisconsin Fast Forward, into law in March 2013 with strong bipartisan support from both houses of the Wisconsin legislature. The Wisconsin Fast Forward program provides funding to develop a cutting-edge labor market information system, includes \$15 million to provide employer-focused worker training grants, and enabled the creation of the Office of Skills Development (OSD) at DWD to administer the grant program.

The Office of Skills Development is the point of contact for employers seeking Wisconsin Fast Forward training grants, which are customized to the skill needs of each employer. OSD administers and oversees the grant program through a transparent and accountable process. Additionally, OSD will work to encourage the development of innovative solutions at the local and regional level that bring together employers, educators, workforce development entities, and economic development organizations to meet area workforce demands.

To maintain a strong environment for private-sector job creation, Wisconsin must train workers to fill the employment demands of growing and expanding businesses.

The Wisconsin Fast Forward Program will act as a catalyst, encouraging increased collaboration between Wisconsin's workforce trainers and employers to develop and execute business-led training programs. These training programs are designed to provide sustainable short and medium-term training and placement of workers in positions which offer trainees long-term professional growth and economic opportunity.

The long-term goal of Wisconsin Fast Forward training programs is to encourage partnership between businesses and local or regional economic development organizations, workforce development boards, post-secondary institutions, and private training providers. It is anticipated that the relationships developed through Wisconsin Fast Forward funded training programs will continue to flourish after the Wisconsin Fast Forward grant has ended.

Department of Workforce Development → Office of Skills Development

GRANT PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT (GPA) FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE OCCUPATIONS

The Office of Skills Development (OSD) is seeking applications from Wisconsin businesses that are looking to train customer service representatives, either incumbent workers or unemployed and underemployed individuals, with new or expanded skills in basic sales, computer literacy, conflict resolution, and other related proficiencies.

Customer service representatives are an integral component of the Wisconsin workforce and can be found in almost every sector with varying responsibilities and tasks. They may interact with customers, listen to the customer’s needs and concerns, provide information in response to inquiries about products and services, handle and resolve complaints, take orders, determine charges and oversee billing payments, or process returns. They are often the first point of contact with the customer.

Customer service representative jobs are among the highest number of posted job openings on JobCenterofWisconsin.com (JCW). As of the week of October 21, 2013, there were over 2,000 customer service occupation openings posted on JCW and over 3,500 openings posted for sales and related occupations.

Occupational projections prepared by DWD’s Office of Economic Advisors (OEA) indicate that customer service representatives will continue to present attractive job opportunities. The projections show a 15% increase in customer service representative jobs through 2020, with 2,200 job openings expected each year. The average wage for Customer Service Representatives in Wisconsin is \$16.15 per hour.

The following industries employed the most customer service representatives in 2010¹:

Industry Sector	NAICS Code	Percentage
Administrative and support services	56	15%
Retail trade	44-45	11%
Credit intermediation and related activities	52	9%
Wholesale trade	42	8%
Insurance carriers	52	7%

The Occupational Information Network and the U.S. Department of Labor classify Customer Service Representative as an employment classification with a Bright Outlook, which means the classification is expected to grow rapidly in the next several years, will have large numbers of job openings, or are new and emerging occupations.

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook (2012)

Grant Program Announcement Summary

OSD provides financial and technical assistance to businesses to meet their labor needs in partnership with worker training organizations throughout the state. As the administrator for Wisconsin Fast Forward worker training funds, OSD is responsible for establishing funding priorities, developing application criteria, awarding and disseminating grants, monitoring grant outcomes and assessing program goals.

Through this grant announcement, OSD is seeking grant applications from Wisconsin businesses that have a specific workforce need that is not met through another education or training program. The demand should be supported by localized labor market information. The grant funds may not be used to supplant existing, routine business training, but should focus on employer's skill gaps in the occupations identified in this GPA. Eligible projects should demonstrate that funds will help to increase the number of new jobs, reduce layoffs and/or increase overall employment in the state by increasing worker skills to better match employer needs. The primary product(s) of a grant application should be curriculum development and training delivery.

Funds available through this GPA will enable businesses, in partnership with a workforce training provider or providers, to deliver customized training in customer service occupations to incumbent workers and/or job seekers. These grants provide a flexible funding source to respond to the workforce needs of Wisconsin businesses with customized training solutions. OSD will ensure accountability and transparency of outcomes by tracking training completions, job placements, wage increases, and overall return on public investment.

Administrative Rules: The rules governing the Wisconsin Fast Forward program are included in Chapter DWD 801 which are available on the website: WisconsinFastForward.com.

Targeted Business Size: Any

Type of Trainees: Incumbent workers (includes new hires), Underemployed, Unemployed as defined in Chapter DWD 801.

Duration of Training Courses: Short to medium-term training with each course or module lasting no longer than 12 months.

Training Project Period: The training project period, including curriculum development, training, pre- and post-training activities, and closeout, can be no longer than 2 years.

Grant Amount: From \$5,000 to \$400,000 per Grantee. Grant and match expenditures must be incurred during the training project period. All eligible grant expenditures will be reimbursed when grant and match expenses are documented by the Grantee and approved by OSD. If awarded, a percentage of the grant may be retained until Grantee is in compliance with all conditions of the grant as stipulated in the contract.

Match/Cost Sharing Requirement: Cash or in-kind match equal to the amount of the grant is required. Letters of commitment from the employers, partners and/or applicant documenting match will be required in the application.

Description: Applications must include a training plan for incumbent workers and/or currently unemployed/underemployed workers. Training programs for unemployed/underemployed workers must be in response to a documented skilled worker shortage in a business or consortium of businesses. Incumbent training programs should demonstrate that they will provide the education and skills determined necessary by the employer(s) to enhance the stability and growth of the business and provide opportunities for income and career growth for trainees.

Successful training applications will be defined by employers and may include partnerships with local or regional economic development organizations, workforce development boards, public or private post-secondary institutions and/or private training providers. OSD recommends that training focus on skills attainment. Skills attainment develops skills that directly benefit the workers receiving the training by increasing their mastery of their occupation in their field of employment and/or provide new skills for new product lines or business expansion.

Examples of training include, but are not limited to:

- Identification of the Needs of the Customer
- The Importance of Expectations
- Attitudes
- Communication Skills for Excellent Customer Service
- The Stages of Active Listening
- Questioning Techniques
- Telephone Techniques
- Steps to Resolve Conflict
- Tools for Elimination of Customer Service Problems
- Best Practices in Quality Customer Service
- Measuring Customer Satisfaction and Customer Service Performance
- Effective Management Skills for Quality Customer Service

Application Forms, Instructions, Checklists, and Process: Applications must be submitted online. You can access the online application, along with the sample application form, instructions, budget guidelines and checklists at: WisconsinFastForward.com.

Opportunity Category: Competitive

Important Dates:

Grant Application Due Date: **October 14, 2014 (11:59 PM CDT)**

Anticipated "Intent to Award" announcements: **Within 60 days from Grant Application due date**

Eligibility: Each application must include training for individuals in customer service occupations. The applicant must have at least one Wisconsin location. Applications may include one or more partners, including local or regional economic development organizations, workforce development boards, and post-secondary educational institutions or private training providers. The Applicant may be any one of the above listed organizations in this subsection and must designate a fiscal agent in the application.

Eligible Expenses: Wisconsin Fast Forward funds shall be used for training-related expenses, which may include personnel salaries and fringe benefits for instructors or trainers, consultant/contractual expenses and supplies. See the website for the application instructions, budget guidelines, and related rules in Chapter DWD 801 for details on eligible expenses.

All expenses must be new and cannot replace existing federal, state or local government funding. Substituting existing funds with state grant funds will result in additional fiscal monitoring and may result in an audit. Violations of permissible expenses may result in suspension of current or future funds under this program, repayment of monies awarded under this grant and possible civil and/or criminal penalties.

Ineligible Expenses: Wisconsin Fast Forward funds may not be used for the purchase of real estate or other capital expenses, construction or remodeling, Kindergarten–12th grade education, tuition, or trainees’ wages, stipends or fringe benefits. See the website for the application instructions, budget guidelines, and related rules in Chapter DWD 801 for details on ineligible expenses.

Outcomes: The training project should produce quantifiable outcomes and impacts for the employer, training participants and the state of Wisconsin. Successful training projects will result in training graduates finding or retaining employment, earning higher wages, increasing their skill attainment, and/or receiving industry-recognized credentials,. Wisconsin taxpayers should realize higher state revenues from increased individual income and sales tax receipts and increased corporate income and property tax receipts.

The Grantee will be responsible for tracking and monitoring individual workers receiving training under the grant through the completion of pre- and post-training reports and a final report on the net jobs filled by unemployed, underemployed and/or incumbent workers and related wage increases. The anticipated result is a skilled workforce that is well-suited for employment and advancement opportunities in Wisconsin.

Components of a Successful Application:

- Grant applications should outline a training program that mitigates an employer’s critical workforce problem, addresses a documented workforce demand, is supported by local, regional, or statewide labor data and results in training participants finding and retaining employment and/or earning higher wages.
- The application must include an appropriate training provider. Factors to consider in selecting an appropriate training provider include a demonstrated history of:
 - Successful training through its placement, retention, and evaluation rates.
 - Collaboration with the targeted industry in the development of the training program curriculum.
 - Use of current industry standards as the basis for programs utilized to train students in the targeted industry.
- Applicants should consider consulting with local or regional economic or workforce development organizations to assess current skill deficits in the local labor market area, the potential impact of the proposed skill training in alleviating that deficit and the potential for other businesses within the region to benefit from the up-skilled workforce.
- Applicants should also consider inclusion of a performance-based assessment of the trainees’ skills, competencies and trainability to measure the training impact.
- Applications should include quantitative method(s) to collect and report data regarding the individuals selected to participate in the training, both pre- and post-training, and the provision of any business information necessary for program evaluation.

Additional Considerations for Projects focusing on Unemployed or Underemployed Workers:

- Trainee testing and assessment is provided to ensure training and employability plans are in place **prior** to instruction.
- Instruction is task-specific and designed to prepare the individual for a customer service occupation in the shortest time possible.
- Instruction is based on job task analysis and is performance-based.
- Specific employers and available jobs are identified prior to instruction.
- Certificates of proficiency or industry-recognized credentials are provided to all trainees completing training and demonstrating the required competency(s).
- The applicant will provide trainee follow-up to determine success after training.
- Provide a clear statement of placement goals that are supported by letters from the employer(s). OSD recommends that organizations strive for 85% placement in jobs, when competencies are demonstrated, that pay at least 200% of individual federal poverty level (\$11.05) wages.

Employer Letters of Commitment:

The objective of the Wisconsin Fast Forward program is to hire unemployed trainees that demonstrate the required skill set or competency after training or to increase the wages of underemployed or incumbent workers who acquire additional skill sets. Letters of commitment to hire graduates or raise wages will be required from the participating employers to indicate the extent of job placements or wage increases. The employer's letter should also include commitment to any match funding and/or participation in the planning and implementation of the training program.

Partner Letters of Commitment and Support:

Partner letters of commitment should include an attestation regarding match resources that are available to contribute to the project. In addition, employers or partners who are not willing to commit to job placements, wage increases, or match funding, but support the training model, may submit a letter of support for the project.

Grant Scoring and Evaluation:

OSD will rate applications on a 100 point scale, based upon the following point values:

- Project Need (up to 20 points)
- Training Program Design, Cost and Implementation (up to 25 points)
- Goal and Objectives (up to 20 points)
- Economic Impact (up to 10 points)
- Capacity Building (up to 10 points)
- Economic Opportunity Enhancements (up to 15 points)

OSD will review each application submitted to ensure compliance with application instructions and relevant state and federal regulations. Each grant application must satisfy basic criteria as set out in the application instructions to be considered. All compliant grant applications will be scored. Applicants may be required to attend the Grant Evaluation Committee meeting to allow committee members to ask questions prior to completing their evaluation. In addition to the scores and Evaluation Committee Recommendations, OSD may consider underserved populations, strategic priorities, financial viability, past performance, underserved geographic areas, the potential to replicate the program, and available funding. The applications will be presented to DWD leadership for final review and concurrence. In summary, each grant application will be evaluated on the merits of the training program and the intent to hire graduates or raise the wages of employees who successfully demonstrate the required competencies.

Post-Award Terms and Conditions/Reporting Requirements:

Grant applications that are funded under this announcement will be required to execute a binding contract with DWD. Grantees will also be required to submit regular project updates with reimbursement requests, documentation of match contributions, progress reports, pre- and post-training reports, and a final project report.

The schedule for reporting will be included in the grant award materials or contract. Please review all grant award special conditions and reporting requirements. In addition to any special conditions described in the award documents and reporting requirements, please note the following:

1. All grant applications funded under this announcement will be subject to program evaluation by OSD. Grantees must comply with all reporting, data collection, and evaluation requirements, as determined by OSD.
2. All grant funds will be reimbursed through an Automatic Clearing House (ACH) payment (direct deposit). ACH payments will be deposited into the grantee's account. To begin receiving ACH payment, you will be required to complete an ACH set-up form which will be provided with your grant award materials. Grant expenditures will be reimbursed at 95 percent of the total amount claimed. After the applicant has achieved their contracted performance objectives, the remaining 5 percent of the grant award will be made available for reimbursement.
3. All grant recipients are subject to audit of related expenditures by DWD staff and/or by an independent certified public accountant acceptable to OSD. All grants of \$250,000 or more will require an audit from an independent certified public accountant.
4. To the extent feasible and permissible by law, OSD will honor an applicant's request that trade secrets or other confidential information submitted to OSD remain confidential. OSD will treat the information as confidential only if: (i) the information is in fact protected confidential information such as trade secrets or privileged information, (ii) the information is specifically identified as confidential by the applicant, and (iii) no disclosure of the information is required by law or judicial order. If the application results in a grant, the honoring of confidentiality of identified information shall not limit OSD's right to disclose the details and results of this award to the public.
5. Unless otherwise specified in the contract, the training curriculum developed with Wisconsin Fast Forward grant monies will become the property of the State of Wisconsin.