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Jobs With a Future: Building a Stronger Workforce System for South Central Wisconsin

What is JWF?

Created in 1996, Jobs With a Future (JWF) brings together leading stakeholders in South Central Wisconsin — including the City of Madison, Dane County, Madison Area Technical College, the Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison — to build and pursue a strategic vision for workforce development in the region. Ultimately, the partners are investing together in building “jobs with a future” for all residents of the region. The partners know that such work requires both stronger shared vision among the institutions, and a stronger role for the region’s leading employers in implementing it.

First, then, JWF is a *strategic collaboration of leading institutions in the region*. JWF provides a forum for institutional partners to discuss diverse programs and bring them into better alignment. JWF provides the infrastructure for those institutions to develop and implement a stronger strategic vision for skills development in South Central Wisconsin. JWF allows partners to pursue joint efforts to make our workforce development system more efficient and responsive to area workers and employers. To date, JWF partners have dedicated over \$1 million to this effort.

Understanding that employers need to be brought into the system, JWF partners have invested heavily in building stronger employer organization in the region. Since its inception, JWF has built partnerships of employers to: 1) develop solutions to workforce problems common to area firms; 2) design training programs that provide local workers with relevant skills; 3) implement strategies for linking skilled workers to quality jobs; and 4) provide a forum for strategic discussions on regional economic and industry trends.

So JWF is a strategic collaboration of leading institutions, but it is also *partnerships of local employers and leading industries* — health care and manufacturing most recently — that are working with leading institutions on solving

practical skill, training, recruitment, and retention problems. This dual infrastructure of institutional and employer-based collaboration and partnership leads to tangible results for the region’s employers and workforce.

JWF helps the region’s employers by facilitating dialogue designed to identify industry-wide problems (such as occupational shortages) that would have gone unnoticed by individual firms, and by providing the infrastructure to implement agreed-upon solutions to those problems (such as jointly purchased training) that many firms would find difficult to undertake on their own.

JWF helps the region’s workers as well, by increasing the availability and relevance of training, allowing more workers a chance to move up, providing workers with better information on labor market opportunities.

From strategic discussion to on-the-ground training development, JWF is building a stronger workforce system for South Central Wisconsin.

JWF Key Strategic Collaborators

- City of Madison
- Dane County
- Madison Area Technical College
- South Central Federation of Labor
- University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin
- Regional employers

JWF Operational Team

- Job Centers
- Madison Area Technical College
- Moraine Park Technical College
- School-to-Work programs
- University of Wisconsin-Madison Center on Wisconsin Strategy
- Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin

JWF Priority Outcomes

These leading institutions have developed strong agreement on the following priority outcomes for the region:

1. Promoting Job Quality and Job Access

JWF collaboration puts the issue of job quality and job access at the forefront of workforce development discussions. The mutual priority of all partners is the development of training and joint learning strategies that simultaneously help employers respond to economic challenges and help workers move into or up in the labor market.

2. Making Lifelong Learning a Reality: A Robust Training System

JWF's second priority is to build a training infrastructure, both public and private, that is increasingly responsive, efficient, and user-friendly for workers and employers. To achieve this goal, we work to strengthen the partnerships among all participants in the workforce development system, including workers, employers, local Job Centers, technical colleges, and other training providers.

3. Increasing Private-Sector Input and Leadership

Progress on the priorities described above requires increasing employer commitment and connection to shaping the regional workforce development system. Private-sector leadership is key to linking workforce development initiatives to workplace decisions such as hiring and process improvements.

JWF and the Industry Partnerships Project

Currently, JWF supports industry partnerships in health care and manufacturing. We have focused on these particular sectors because their share of employment in the region is significant, a range of jobs is available in each field, and both industries have brought strong leadership to the table.

With grant assistance from the U.S. Department of Labor, JWF launched an ambitious project in 2003 — "Industry Partnerships: Developing Workers for Jobs with a Future" — to expand and strengthen our partnerships in these two sectors. As a result, JWF extended its reach from Dane County to a six-county region in South Central Wisconsin. Between March 2003 and June 30, 2004, this project enlisted the partnership of 100 firms and, with DOL resources and the commitment of training partners (including Madison Area and Moraine Park Technical College), provided skills training at no charge to more than 725 workers in the region, many of whom had little

or no education beyond high school and held relatively low-wage positions not typically associated with upward mobility.

JWF: An Effective Model

The region's leading institutions that have forged JWF have built a strong infrastructure for strategic and practical discussions. Innovations in training, in resource development, and in support to workers continue to grow out of the work of institutional partners. Businesses participating in the JWF partnerships report high levels of satisfaction with the training their employees have received, the cost savings they have gained, and the opportunity they have had to exchange information and ideas with peer firms. Participating workers report wage gains, promotions, increased confidence, and the ability to better perform their jobs. These benefits have not gone unnoticed: in the last few years, JWF has received national attention for its innovative approach to solving employer problems while building pathways for workers into family-supporting jobs.

JWF Moving Forward

JWF's ambitious work continues. At the institutional level, JWF partners will continue to advance their vision for a strong regional workforce development system. At the partnership level, we have begun to work closely with the construction and skilled trades sector, where a formal partnership may soon emerge, to bring more women and minorities into the field. We expect to expand and deepen industry participation further, and to continue to implement innovative strategies for reforming the workforce development system in our region. Through these efforts, we believe that JWF can position South Central Wisconsin as a national model for regional workforce development.



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