

# STRONG ECONOMIES, RESILIENT COUNTIES

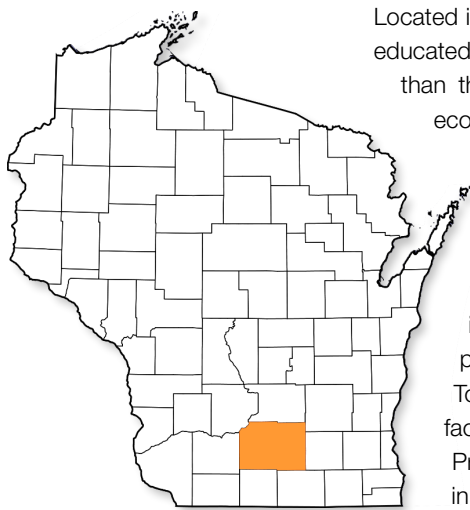
The Role of Counties in Economic Development



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## DANE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

### Improving Economic Outcomes for All County Residents



Located in south central Wisconsin, Dane County benefits from a strong economy with an educated workforce. The county enjoys a 3.8 percent unemployment rate, much lower than the 5.8 percent statewide unemployment rate, as of April 2014. The county economy is strong in industries with high human capital requirements such as education and health, given the county's highly educated workforce — nearly 46 percent of county residents over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher, considerably greater than the 26.4 percent state rate. These measures of economic and educational performance, however, do not capture some of the economic development challenges within the county. For example, in 2011, the unemployment rate among African-American residents was 25.2 percent, higher than the 5.1 percent unemployment rate for the county as a whole. To address this situation and identify the challenges that workers and businesses face, Dane County Executive, Joe Parisi, founded the Dane County Jobs and Prosperity Project in 2011 and the Office of Economic and Workforce Development in 2013.

### Dane County Jobs and Prosperity Project

In 2011, County Executive Joe Parisi initiated the Dane County Jobs and Prosperity Project to evaluate the county government's economic development services and to improve county economic development efforts. More than 300 representatives from key industries such as biotech, manufacturing, agriculture, health care, green energy and small and minority businesses attended six meetings held between July and August of 2011. Industry leaders

helped assess the role the county should play in economic development. The Dane County Jobs and Prosperity Project revealed employment opportunities existed within the county, but the lack of alignment between the available workforce and vacant jobs created challenges. The discussions also pointed towards a need for developing training programs for potential workers in key industries that could help job seekers access available positions.

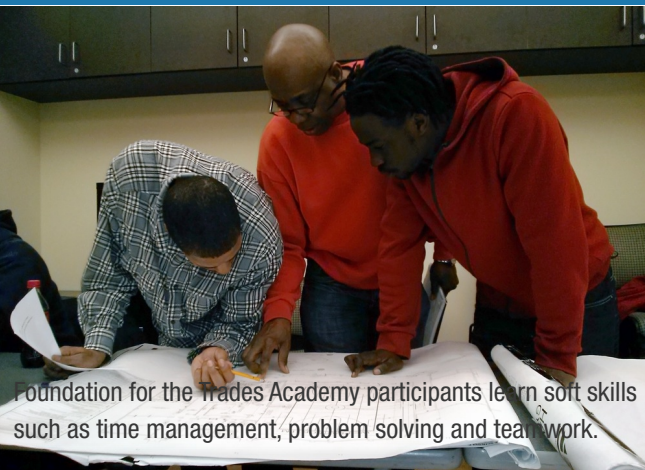
- Population, 2013: 509,939
- County Board size: 37
- County Executive
- County Director of Administration

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## The Office of Economic and Workforce Development

As a result of the Dane County Jobs and Prosperity Project, the County Executive created the Office of Economic and Workforce Development in 2013. The office focuses on workforce development strategies to ensure the skills of the eligible workforce help meet the needs of current and potential employers; and the coordination of the county's economic development efforts including job creation, business recruitment and retention, low interest financing through the county's revolving loan funds. The office also serves as a liaison between existing public and private sector economic development efforts, including existing economic development initiatives in county

government such as the Institutional Food Market Coalition, the Community Development Block Grant program, Dane County/UW Extension, Minority Business Outreach and the University of Wisconsin Small Business Development Center Answer Line. As of June 2014, the office had three employees and a Director of Office of Economic and workforce Development who reports directly to the County Executive.

## Big Step

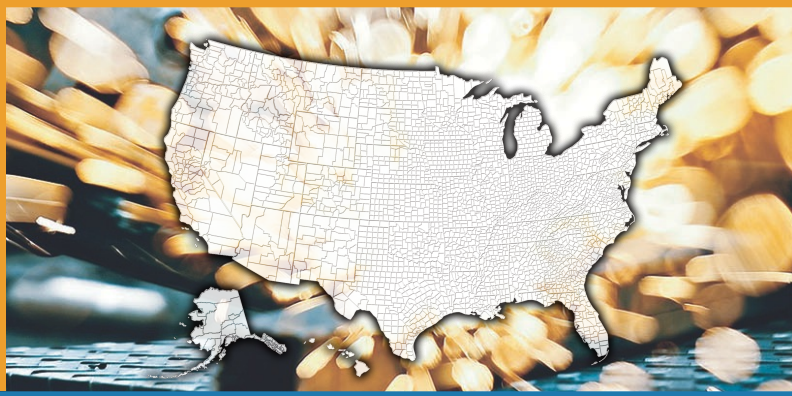
In 2014, Dane County's newly created Office of Economic and Workforce Development is working with Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP)/Big Step to increase access to jobs for under-represented groups, including minorities and women and meet the local construction industry's demand for skilled workers. Modeled after the successful WRTP/Big Step in Milwaukee, Wis., this project has multiple phases, involving a number of local partners. The Office of Economic and Workforce Development, together with the Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin and other community partners, collaborates with the building trades and contractors to identify their needs for employees for upcoming projects. WRTP/Big Step then partners with community-based organizations to recruit and train individuals to fill those needs, including Construction Training Inc./START, Operation Fresh Start, Nehemiah Community Development Association, the Urban League of Greater Madison and Madison College. The Dane County 2014 budget dedicated \$30,000 to administering the program. With a series of major building projects ahead, including a new \$18 million expansion at the Alliant Energy Center, Dane County is uniquely positioned to work with key stakeholders to fulfill these goals.

Through engagement of different stakeholders in the county, Dane County identified the labor needs in the economy, current misalignments and took action by creating the Office of Economic and Workforce Development. Although relatively new, the office has already begun to organize key players, take steps to address economic disparities and help match businesses with skilled workers. As the office continues to develop, officials expect it to build additional partnerships that will provide the training necessary to better align job opportunities with job seekers in the community.



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During the Foundations for the Trades Academy's six-week program, participants focus on learning important industry skills and concepts and put their new skills into practice during a hands-on experience on a work site.