

# Employment & Career Development Services

Informational Overview

Community Development Division

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## Executive Summary

While Madison offers a high quality of life for some residents, it faces significant racial gaps across numerous indicators including those in education and employment. 2024 5-year estimates from the American Community Survey show Madison's extreme income gaps between Black and White residents, with Black median household income at approximately \$49,715 compared to White median household income at \$85,676. These gaps are also seen in local data from the Madison Metropolitan School District's (MMSD) 2023-24 school year which shows that approximately 30% of Black and 20% of Hispanic students do not graduate high school within 4 years as compared to 6% of White students.

Given these inequities, CDD recognizes the importance of funding programs and services focused on lower-income individuals, and those that are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), immigrants, and/or individuals who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQIA+). Using Census data CDD has additionally identified key geographic equity priority areas in the City based on locations of the City of Madison that have higher proportions of BIPOC adults, low-income adults, and adults that did not graduate high school or college. CDD recognizes that these areas could benefit from expanded services and programming. In the 2026 Employment and Career Development RFP, CDD seeks to fund package of programs and services that, together, strive to address these gaps and provide a continuum of culturally responsive services for youth, young adult and, adult employment.

The 2026 RFP has up to \$1,988,536 available to award to programs and services. While the RFP is made up of four priority areas it has an overarching focus on upward mobility. Upward mobility refers to the ability of individuals to move toward family-sustaining employment, increase earnings over time, advance in their careers, and build long-term financial stability. This includes programs and services that are designed to help individuals prepare for and get a first job, advance beyond a first job, re-enter the workforce, and secure and retain a family-sustaining job. Although CDD has long recognized the importance of upward mobility, this RFP makes that commitment more explicit. This recognizes that although not all services and programs offered on the employment continuum (and funded through this RFP) lead directly to employment, each serves a critical role helping participants to gain skills and experiences needed to prepare for the next step in their employment journey.

### Priority areas:

**Youth Employment Services** supports employment training and opportunities for youth ages 14-21 who face barriers to gaining work experience. This area supports services such as employment readiness training, paid internships, summer employment, career exploration, financial empowerment education, and the City's Wanda Fullmore Internship Program. Within CDD's broader upward mobility strategy, youth employment services focus on **early exposure and first work experiences**, helping young people build foundational skills, explore career pathways, and take initial steps toward future employment. This area also includes the City's Wanda Fullmore Internship.

**Young Adult Employment Services** provides funding to partner agencies for outreach, reconnection, and employment related support for young adults ages 18-26 who are disconnected from school, employment, or training. This area supports services such as GED/HSED completion, career navigation, occupational training, and other support that leads to upward mobility and stable employment. Within the continuum of upward mobility, young adult employment services focus on **reconnection and**

**credentialing**, supporting individuals in re-engaging with education, training, and employment pathways that lead to stable, long-term opportunities.

**Adult Employment Services** provides funding to partner agencies for employment services and support to unemployed or underemployed adults, with priority to parents and residents who face multiple barriers to gaining and retaining employment. This area supports services such as literacy for employment, GED/HSED attainment, job training, reentry employment supports, financial counseling, and connections to or coordination with other services that address barriers to upward mobility and gaining of family-supporting employment. Within this framework, adult employment services focus on **advancement and retention**, supporting individuals in securing, maintaining, and progressing within employment that leads to family-sustaining wages and long-term financial stability.

**Southwest Employment Center** seeks an agency to operate the Center and coordinate place-based employment services that promote upward mobility by helping residents access stable employment, skill-building opportunities, financial counseling, and career advancement supports. The Center will serve as an **employment hub and will host the City's Financial Empowerment Center**, which will offer free, professional, one-on-one financial counseling. Within CDD's broader upward mobility strategy, the Southwest Employment Center will function as a **centralized access point** that prioritizes residents, employers, and service partnerships in and around southwest Madison. The operator will also be expected to develop a plan for building relationships with partner organizations, such as neighborhood centers, public libraries, and other trusted community locations, to co-locate financial counseling services at critical access points across the city.

### Proposed Changes:

The 2026 Employment and Career Development RFP proposes only minor refinements to the 2022 RFP structure while maintaining the core focus on youth, young adult, and adult employment services. These changes include:

- The inclusion of the Southwest Madison Employment Center Operator (which was subject to its own RFP in 2015).
- Strengthening the connection between employment services and financial security through the implementation of a Financial Empowerment Center at the Southwest Madison Employment Center.
- Making the City's commitment to upward mobility more explicit across all priority areas. Upward mobility includes services the City has historically funded, such as: GED/HSED attainment, literacy for employment, and financial education. In making this commitment to upward mobility more explicit CDD is recognizing that not all services and programs offered on the employment continuum (and funded through this RFP) lead directly to employment. Some are a step in that direction, helping participants to gain needed skills to prepare for more direct employment training.

These changes are intended to clarify the purpose and desired impact of the City's employment investments. The 2026 RFP builds on CDD's existing employment services portfolio while more clearly naming the role these services play in helping residents move toward stable employment, family-supporting wages, and financial security.

## Community Voice:

CDD reviewed data and feedback from multiple local sources to better understand employment, education, and economic mobility trends in Madison. These sources included a survey done by the City's Economic Development Division (with a final report forthcoming), local surveys done by our community partners, workforce analyses, focus groups, as well as reports covering topics on employment, financial stability, and barriers to opportunity. Together, these sources reaffirm the importance of funding employment and career development services that are accessible to youth, young adults, and adults; responsive to the experiences of BIPOC residents and other communities facing barriers; and focused on helping residents achieve upward mobility, moving them towards stable employment, family-supporting wages, and financial security.

Sources reviewed include:

- City of Madison 2025 Economic Development Department Community Survey (Draft report), developed with Fourth Economy and EQT By Design
- Dane County Youth Assessment
- Kids Forward's *Race to Equity 10-Year Report*
- City of Madison CDD focus group with By Youth For Youth teens
- UW–Madison Extension's *Perspectives on the Madison Labor Market 2026* presented by Matt Kures
- Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin's *2025 Community Needs Assessment*
- Corporation for a Skilled Workforce's *Young Adult Workforce Landscape Analysis*
- High Road Strategy Center's *State of Working Wisconsin 2025*
- the National Youth Employment Coalition's *The Intersections Between Youth Experiencing Homelessness, Youth Supports and Employment*.

Across these sources, several themes emerged:

Specific communities continue to face the greatest barriers and challenges:

- BIPOC respondents report experiencing four times higher financial stress than White residents (2025 City of Madison Economic Development Survey).
- 36% of respondents experience financial anxiety, with BIPOC and Spanish-speaking communities reporting the highest rates of financial instability (2025 City of Madison Economic Development Survey Draft).

Community members seek more economic mobility:

- Survey respondents rank improving economic mobility as their top priority in the 2025 Economic Development Survey (Draft report).
- Residents rank access to available jobs, higher wages, and career preparation and advancement as their most critical needs (2025 Community Action Coalition Report)

Young people need low-barrier youth employment programs that provide first work experiences, career exploration, connection to supportive adults, and exposure to multiple career pathways.

- In a focus group led by CDD with By Youth For Youth (BYFY), teen leaders offered useful insight into how young people understand employment, opportunity, and barriers among their peers. BYFY teens emphasized that meaningful employment opportunities should be paid, flexible, skill-building, and engaging. They also identified transportation, low household income, limited prior

work experience, and disconnection from school as barriers that can prevent youth from accessing employment.

## Employment and Career Development Priority Areas:

The priority areas in the 2026 RFP largely mirror those included in the 2022 Employment and Career Development RFP. While there is some overlap in age ranges across the priority areas, these categories reflect distinct service needs, program models, and stages along the employment continuum. The most significant changes are the inclusion of the Southwest Madison Employment Center Operator and a clearer, more intentional emphasis on upward mobility across all priority areas. CDD has historically funded services that support upward mobility, including GED/HSED attainment, literacy for employment, and financial empowerment education. The 2026 RFP makes this commitment more explicit by naming these activities as part of a coordinated employment and economic mobility strategy.

### Funding Available

The 2026 RFP anticipates allocating up to \$1,988,536 across the following areas:

Area	Anticipated Funding Allocated in 2026 RFP
Youth, Young Adult, and Adult Employment Programs and Services	\$1,614,536
Wanda Fullmore Internship Program	\$95,000
Southwest Madison Employment Center	\$279,000

## Youth Employment Services:

### Purpose:

Youth Employment Services provides funding to partner agencies for internship and employment opportunities as well as career exploration for youth (ages 14-21) who face multiple barriers to accessing these opportunities. This area supports services such as employment readiness training, paid internships, summer employment, career exploration, financial empowerment education, and the City’s Wanda Fullmore Internship Program. Within CDD’s broader upward mobility strategy, youth employment services focus on **early exposure and first work experiences**, helping young people build foundational skills, explore career pathways, and take initial steps toward future employment.

Data from CDD-funded youth employment programs shows that approximately 63% of participants are low-income. A demographic breakdown shows participants are approximately 46% Black, 10% Asian, 10% multiracial, 23% White and 30% Hispanic or LatinX.<sup>1</sup>

### What we have learned:

Below is data from CDD-funded youth employment programs in 2024 and 2025, programs funded through the 2026 RFP will be expected to track similar indicators.

2024	2025	Youth Employment Indicators
564	533	Number of youth participants
417	368	Youth completed programs

<sup>1</sup> Participants may identify across multiple categories; cumulative percentages may exceed 100%

19,022	31,962	Hours of youth programming
224	146	Educational credit / industry recognized certificates earned
\$102,500	\$125,115	Youth wages paid by City funds
275	265	Youth participated in financial empowerment education
225	240	Youth paid by Direct deposit into newly opened account

While youth participation and overall programming hours remain strong, there has been a decline in the number of educational credits and industry-recognized certificates earned from 2024 to 2025. This could be due to programs reaching young people with higher needs, requiring more intensive and longer support to complete educational credits and industry recognized certificates. This suggests that programs are reaching the youth with numerous barriers that could benefit most from programming. Additionally, because educational crediting is optional for students to sign up for during programs, some participants are opting out of this, not understanding the benefits. This suggests an opportunity to strengthen connections between employment experiences and credential attainment including the suggestion that the educational crediting in programs is built-in (and not an opt-in). This ensures youth are not only participating in programs but also gaining skills and qualifications that support long-term upward mobility.

### 2026 Funding Priorities

- Providing opportunities for youth who are traditionally left out of or unable to access internships, career exploration, leadership development, and other critical aspects of youth employment.
- Providing opportunities to explore local careers through summer programming, internships and after school activities.
- Expanding career exploration programming in STEM, health, and media technology for youth in grades 8- 10 supported by information and recommendations for pre-career advising programming linked to MMSD classes.
- Providing summer programming for youth who may not have a summer plan in place prior to the end of the school year.
- Expanding connections to MMSD and Workforce Development Board of South-Central Wisconsin for the Youth Apprenticeship program for students in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

### Wanda Fullmore Internship Program:

#### Purpose

The City of Madison Wanda Fullmore Youth Internship Program provides high school-age youth facing multiple barriers to employment with work experience and career awareness through internship placements in a City Department agencies or partnering neighborhood center. Youth internship programming provides the opportunity for participants to gain meaningful and relevant experience that will support their educational or career goals and increase future earning potential.

#### What we have learned

Below is data from the 2024 and 2025 Wanda Fullmore internship, the Operator will be expected to gather data on similar indicators in 2027.

2024	2025	Wanda Fullmore City Internship Indicators
120	128	Number of youth applicants

32	30	Number of youth participants
15	10	Number of City agencies with internship placements
30	30	Number of youth who completed program
\$65,000	\$65,000	Youth wages paid by City contract

While interest in the Wanda Fullmore Internship Program continues to grow, tripling from 50 youth applicants in 2022 to 150 in 2026, placement capacity continues to be constrained. This highlights the need to expand internship opportunities beyond City departments by strengthening partnerships with Neighborhood Centers and other community-based organizations, ensuring more youth can access meaningful, skill-building work experiences.

### 2026 Funding Priorities

- Recruiting and hiring approximately 25 high school age City of Madison residents, with a preference to youth entering 11th and 12th grade, who face barriers to employment and higher education due to economic or racial inequity.
- Assessing youths’ interests and skills, identifying youth whose interests and skills match the needs identified by placement options.
- Providing Civic Engagement programming and project-based work that allows for youth voice and perspective around community topics.
- Supporting leadership programming along with other educational activities that build on the internship experience and provide life skills that support positive youth development.

### Young Adult Employment Services:

#### Purpose

This priority area was added to the Employment and Career Development RFP in 2022 with a goal of reconnecting the approximately 4000 youth age 18-26 in Dane County that were disconnected from education and employment (Data from Measure of America). Measure of America indicates that this number has likely grown in the years following the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, making programming even more critical today. This area focuses on supportive services that increase opportunities for employment, training, and educational experiences. Services include GED/HSED completion, career navigation, occupational training, and other support that leads to upward mobility and stable employment. Within the continuum of upward mobility, young adult employment services focus on **reconnection and credentialing**, supporting individuals in re-engaging with education, training, and employment pathways that lead to stable, long-term opportunities.

Data from CDD-funded young adult employment programs shows that approximately 89% of participants are low-income. A demographic breakdown shows participants are approximately 44% Black, 10% Asian, 28% multiracial, 16% White and 72% Hispanic or LatinX.<sup>2</sup>

#### What we have learned

Below is data from CDD-funded young adult employment programs in 2024 and 2025, programs funded through the 2026 RFP will be expected to track similar indicators.

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<sup>2</sup> Participants may identify across multiple categories; cumulative percentages may exceed 100%.

2024	2025	Young Adult Employment Indicators
623	396	Young adults served
297	349	Young adults that completed the program/service
48%	88%	Percent of young adults that complete program/service
39,536	29,260	Hours of programming
155	119	Industry certificates gained
29	16	GED/HSED completed
81	151	Disconnected youth that were reconnected to education or employment

While completion rates have significantly improved from 48% of participants in 2024 to 88% of participants in 2025, there was a notable decrease in the number of young adults served between 2024 (623 participants) and 2025 (396 participants). Even given this, the young adult programs far exceeded the 154 young adult participants that the City contracts required in 2025. Programs continue to try and reach disconnected youth and are having greater success reaching this specific population growing from 81 disconnected youth served in 2024 up to 151 disconnected youth in 2025. These trends highlight both the high need for programming and the importance of continued outreach, reconnection strategies, and accessible program design to ensure young adults who are disconnected from education and employment are being effectively reached and engaged.

**2026 Funding Priorities:**

- Facilitating connections to trusted adults/mentors to help connect young adults to education, employment, and social support services.
- Assisting young adults in career navigation to attain good wage jobs in local industries.
- Providing quality paid training and educational options for nontraditional learners.
- Offering participants financial counseling and credit checking.
- Providing programming that aids in upward mobility such as GED/HSED completion, tutoring in general education and specialized certifications to meet job requirements.

**Adult Employment Services:**

**Purpose**

The Adult Employment Services priority area seeks to increase employment and training opportunities for adults ages 18 or older, who face barriers to obtaining employment and who are being left behind during a changing local employment economy. Programming seeks to increase the number of residents obtaining and retaining family sustaining jobs. CDD anticipates funding programs at every level of the employment continuum from soft skills to attaining family sustaining wages. Data from CDD-funded adult employment programs shows that approximately 88% of participants are low-income. A demographic breakdown shows participants are approximately 34% Black, 4% Asian, 23% multiracial, 39% White and 42% Hispanic or LatinX.<sup>3</sup>

**What we have learned:**

Below is data from CDD-funded adult employment programs in 2024 and 2025, programs funded through the 2026 RFP will be expected to track similar indicators.

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<sup>3</sup> Participants may identify across multiple categories; cumulative percentages may exceed 100%.

2024	2025	Adult Employment Indicators
1,757	1,652	Participants in programs and services
855	815	Participants that completed programming
20,593	23,344	Hours of programming
388	344	Industry recognized certificates gained
79	48	GED /HSED completed (180+ in process)
294	354	Participants who gained employment post program

While participation and employment outcomes remain relatively consistent, there has been a decrease in GED/HSEs and gaining industry certificates. This could be due to programs reaching higher-needs adult participants that require more intensive and longer supports to complete GED/HSEs and other certificates. GED/HSED attainment can be a 2+ year process and in 2025 there were over 180 participants in the process of attaining a GED/HSED. This data reinforces the need to strengthen pathways that connect foundational education with employment and career advancement opportunities.

#### 2026 Funding Priorities

- Providing programming that aids in upward mobility such as GED/HSED completion linked with career and educational counseling including individual career development plans.
- Introducing financial counseling services that help participants improve financial stability, strengthen credit, reduce debt, increase savings, and address financial barriers to employment and upward mobility.
- Promoting quality training and educational options for non-traditional learners.
- Providing paid employment training opportunities.
- Supporting residents who face barriers to employment, including individuals with limited work history, justice involvement, transportation barriers, limited English proficiency, or other challenges.

#### Southwest Madison Employment Center Operator:

##### Purpose

Since 2015, CDD has contracted with an operator for the Southwest Madison Employment Center (SWEC) to provide employment-focused programming for youth and adults, as well as space for community gatherings, partner services, and neighborhood-based supports. The Center serves as a place-based resource for Southwest Madison residents who face barriers to employment, financial stability, and upward mobility.

In the 2026 RFP, CDD seeks an Operator to position SWEC as both an employment and financial empowerment center. The Operator will implement the City’s Financial Empowerment Center model, providing free, professional, one-on-one financial counseling alongside employment services, career navigation, partner referral, and barrier-removal supports. This approach aligns with the CDD’s broader upward mobility strategy by helping residents obtain employment, increase wages, and build long-term financial security.

What we have learned:

Below is data from the Southwest Madison Employment Center in 2025, the Operator funded through the 2026 RFP will be expected to track similar indicators.

2024	2025	Southwest Madison Employment Center Indicators
289	269	Individuals served
482	684	Hours of employment services
176	190	Hours of employment programming by other organizations
313	248	Hours of 1:1 programming
41	40	Total # of people who obtained new or better employment
39	40	Total # of people who attained wages of \$15 or more per hour
32	31	Total # of people who attained wages of \$18 or more per hour

While the Center served a significant number of residents and expanded the hours of employment services from 2024 to 2025, overall reach remains limited relative to community need. This highlights an opportunity to expand visibility, strengthen partnerships, and enhance the Center’s role as a centralized access point for employment, training, financial counseling, and upward mobility services in Southwest Madison.

2026 Funding Priorities:

- Operating SWEC as a welcoming, accessible, place-based employment and financial empowerment center for Southwest Madison residents.
- Overseeing the implementation of the City’s Financial Empowerment Center to provide free, professional, one-on-one financial counseling to help residents reduce debt, improve credit, increase savings, access safe banking products, and strengthen financial stability.
- Providing employment services, career navigation, work readiness training, job search assistance, resume support, interview preparation, and job placement support.
- Connecting residents to industry-specific training, career academies, apprenticeships, internships, and other pathways that lead to family-sustaining wages.
- Building strong partnerships enabling the Center to serve as a connection point for additional agencies that provide on-site or regularly scheduled services that support employment, financial stability, and upward mobility.
- Expanding outreach and visibility so that Southwest Madison residents, community partners, and employers understand the services available through the Center.

Timeline

Tentative RFP Timeline	
Introduction of Service Area Overview to Common Council	5/19/26
Community Resources Committee	5/20/26

Finance Committee	6/1/26
Common Council Approval	6/9/26
RFP Published	Early June
Employment & Career Development workshop (Required)	Week of June 22
Letter of Intent Due (Required)	June 29
Center for Financial Empowerment site visit	Week of July 6
RFP Due	Late July – August
Community Resources Committee – Agency presentations	August – September
Community Resources Committee – Final recommendation	9/23/26
Funding Recommendations Introduction to Common Council	10/20/26
Finance Committee Approval	10/26/26
Common Council Approval	11/24/26