



**mke tech**

*2025 Impact Report*



# Activating Our Momentum

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2025 was a year of exciting growth and impactful transitions. After five years of tireless work building our coalition from the ground up, Kathy Henrich retired as CEO. Kathy fostered meaningful connections across our region and left us with a solid foundation and real momentum. You'll see it throughout this report.

This momentum is not new to our tech ecosystem. It's been building for years. Like Kathy demonstrated, it comes from people showing up, sharing knowledge, taking risks, and investing in something bigger than their own organizations.

### The opportunity ahead: turning our momentum into lasting economic impact.

Our strong business climate needs activated networks, visible leadership, and a trusted community that embraces new people and bold ideas. We need to listen carefully, act intentionally, and drive pragmatic growth. When we do this, companies are more confident to build here, talent is more likely to stay here, and innovation is more likely to thrive here. We all win.

In 2026, we're excited to sharpen our shared vision, build sustainable models that scale impact, and deepen partnerships that allow the ecosystem to move faster than any one organization could alone. If we want to go far, we must go together.

We're grateful for your trust, engagement, and help with shaping what comes next. The opportunities in front of us are real, and this cross-sector coalition isn't waiting for growth - we're actively creating it.

Cheers to what's ahead,



**Joe Poeschl**  
Executive Director, MKE Tech Hub Coalition



**Molly Mulroy**  
Board Chair

## Regional Mission

Together, we drive catalytic change & vibrant growth for southeast Wisconsin's tech-powered economy



As indicated in the table of contents, we have structured the Impact Report by our three strategy lanes:

- 1. Shining a Spotlight on the Region:** A focus on establishing southeast Wisconsin as a nationally recognized hub for tech and innovation.
- 2. Strengthening Tech Talent Pipelines:** A focus on bridging the talent gap by shaping tomorrow's tech talent, developing non-traditional pathways into tech, and continually skilling our talent in advanced technologies, while increasing racial and gender equity in tech.
- 3. Scaling the Innovation Ecosystem:** A focus on supporting startups and driving adoption of advanced technologies to grow a thriving tech hub and innovation economy.

## The Power of the Collective: Regional Progression

This Impact Report is a walkthrough of the progression of our tech-powered economy at the macro and micro levels. Creating an inclusive tech ecosystem must be measured at a macro level to understand overall regional strengths and progress. Congratulations to all regional organizations for contributing to our collective growth.

**27%**

higher density scientists/engineering  
talent than national average

(WI Policy Forum)

**8.6%**

growth in region's  
tech businesses in 2025

(CompTIA)

## Milwaukee #2 destination

for young professionals

(ADP Research)

## Milwaukee classified as “Nascent Adopter” for AI

(Brookings Report)

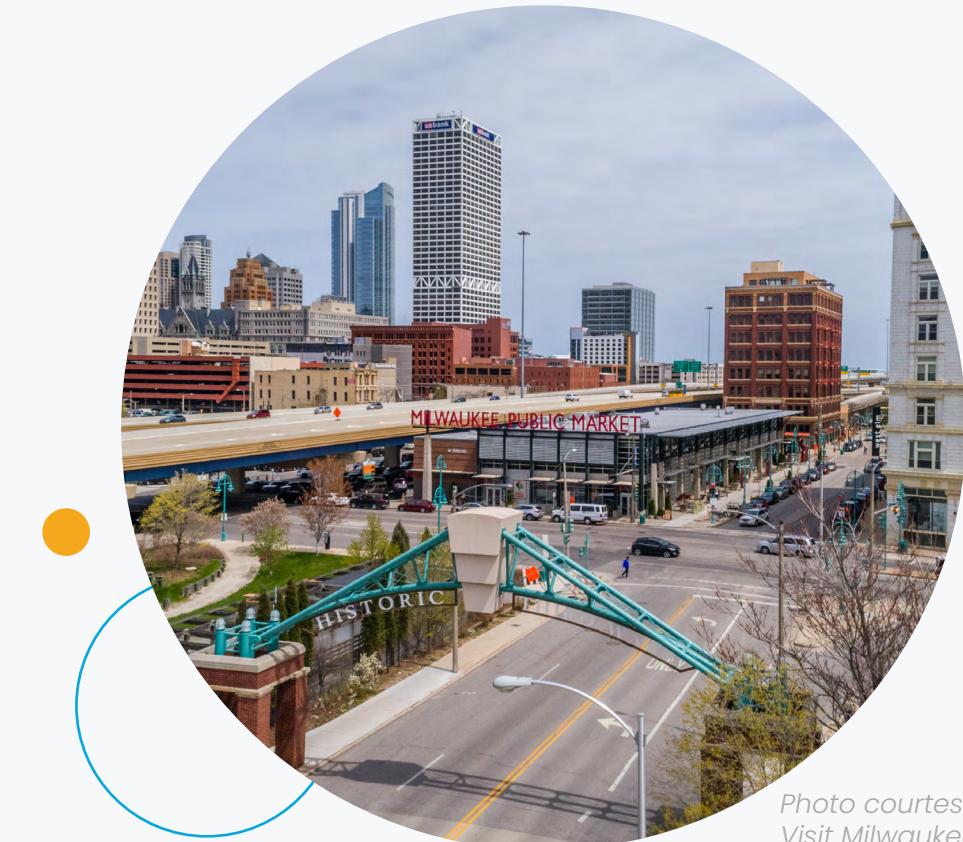


Photo courtesy of  
Visit Milwaukee

## Milwaukee #5 fastest growing metro

in country for jobs and new talent

(LinkedIn News)

## Wisconsin #1 in regional workforce development

rankings

(Site Selection)

# Shining a Spotlight on the Region



Shining a Spotlight on the Region

## Showcasing the Identity of the MKE Tech Ecosystem

We believe Milwaukee is a great place to live and work, and we want to see it thrive, which is why we are helping answer the question, "Why Milwaukee for tech?" ChooseMKTech.org serves as a guide for those in tech looking for a job, relocation, and connection in the MKE Tech Ecosystem. The support for these efforts came from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation.



**49,000+**  
site visitors

**25,000+**  
jobs featured on  
job board

**100+**  
events featured on  
community calendar

**1M+**  
individuals reached through  
social media advertising

**300+**  
attraction email signups  
since launch in 2H



Click here to read  
the ebook

## INNOVATE® Milwaukee book launched

50+ ecosystem stories



## Shining a Spotlight on the Region

# The Power of Connection

To foster and share the stories of our community, we need to create environments where stories can be shared, connections can be made, and impact can be created. We do this through initiatives that allow us to facilitate meaningful touchpoints that allow the community to thrive.

## Founders Day

Founders Day exists to create more accessibility and connection in the region, which is critical to strengthening a growing startup ecosystem. This monthly gathering of local startup founders and professionals allows the community to engage in mentoring, coworking, and networking. The program is made possible through partnerships with local community organizations: Ward4, CSA Partners, Midwest Founders Community, MKE Startup News, and We Pivot.

**8**

Founders Day sessions hosted in 2025

**400+**

founders and mentors participated

**1,249**

collective hours spent mentoring, networking, and coworking

**30**

mentors donated

**175+**

mentorship hours



*"Founders Day creates a rare balance between relaxed networking and the real work we're all juggling, and I appreciate the way Ward4 flexes their space to invite this community in. I've shared my expertise in branding and marketing through mentoring other founders, and I've met select founders that have turned into business relationships."*

*—Drew Mueske, Creative Director, Founder, and Consultant of Hype Visual*

## Gather & Grow Dinners

We invited our members and the community to a new initiative where we curate small group dinners, creating a space for new connections, deeper conversations, and celebration of the momentum within our tech ecosystem. In one evening, **100+ folks in the community came together to share a meal across 16 local restaurants** in the Milwaukee region.

In a time when digital connection often overshadows human connection and interaction, these dinners remind us that real change starts at the table. By breaking bread together in small gatherings, we create space for trust to form, ideas to spark, and cross-sector connections to develop. Each meal becomes a moment of cultivation to help grow our region's collective impact.

Special thanks to our Gather & Grow sponsors in helping make this happen: Johnson Financial Group, Molson Coors Beverage Company, Godfrey & Kahn, and Connective.



*"What a wonderful evening with wonderful people! From organic, riveting conversations to incredible food, last night's MKE Tech Hub Coalition's Gather & Grow holiday dinner was unforgettable."*

*—Punita Miller, Technology Consultant Manager at Rockwell Automation*



# Strengthening Tech Talent Pipelines

## Powering Students' Futures: Early Exposure to Programming & Skilling

As AI shapes our future, it's important to account for our rising talent. During National Computer Science Education Week (CSEdWeek), we asked **five folks** in the community to highlight their stories in the tech space, gathering their experiences and lessons learned to share with our region's early talent, creating meaningful touchpoints for **114 high school students** exploring the tech and AI space.

This initiative is a strategic restructuring of our annual Hour of Tech program, which historically focused on pulling together as many schools and volunteers as possible for one week of classroom visits, in honor of the national Hour of Code movement. This year's approach created meaningful touchpoints that resonated with the learning environment students are in today.

In 2026, this initiative will continue to transform, focusing on providing catalytic experiences throughout the year, showcasing inspiring stories about Milwaukee's growing tech community.

Special thanks to the local schools who opened their doors for our speakers to connect and share with students. We extend gratitude to Karen Green of MPS for partnering and getting us connected.



*"It's powerful watching the students connect with what they're passionate about with technology, realizing that tech becomes meaningful when it's personal — when it serves their lives, their communities, and the people they care about."*

*—Tiffany Barta, Founder & Sovereign Architect at EXTOL3*



## Strengthening Tech Talent Pipelines

# The Power of FUSE

The FUSE program exists to prepare students for work in the era of AI, particularly those who are historically underrepresented in tech. For seven weeks during the summer, FUSE engages students in technical education, professional development workshops, and interdisciplinary projects, which focus on data visualization, Python, and AI. This program is free and offered to students of all majors and industry backgrounds with no prior experience necessary. It augments higher education to prepare students for the future of work.

Each student has access to program mentors, who guide them in impactful coaching conversations and networking. Upon completion of the program, participants earn a Higher Education Regional Alliance (HERA) learning badge, are eligible for a college credit, and are offered continued networking opportunities. Additionally, FUSE students and alumni are offered continued resources throughout the year through virtual workshops, with topics ranging from AI chatbots to career planning.

Thanks to this year's sponsors: Associated Bank, Molson Coors, Northwestern Mutual, Rockwell Automation, and WEC Energy Group. Special thanks to Associated Bank and Wish Born for hosting workshops for students ahead of the bootcamp. We extend gratitude to Marquette University, Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE), and Gabe Wright for their contributions in bringing this program together.

**73**  
total participants from

**22**  
colleges/universities/  
high schools

**81%**  
overall diversity

**60%**  
HERA badge  
completion rate

**24**  
industry mentors with

**30+**  
hours of coaching



### Nonprofit Collaboration of the Year:

FUSE – MKE Tech Hub, Higher Education Regional Alliance, MSOE, Marquette University, UW-Milwaukee, Associated Bank, Northwestern Mutual, Molson Coors, Rockwell Automation, WEC Energy Group, Northwestern Mutual Data Science Institute

# FUSE



*"Participating in FUSE boosted my confidence in my foundational knowledge of AI and Machine Learning. I was able to launch a personal project and a business focused on educating healthcare communities about the use of AI and apps in healthcare ecosystems."*

—Sir Lawrence Tender, FUSE Alumni



*"In FUSE, I learned how to communicate my ideas more clearly, take initiative, and think in a more entrepreneurial way. Being surrounded by driven and passionate individuals encouraged me to step outside my comfort zone and trust my abilities more. I loved learning from people with very different professional backgrounds and hearing their personal stories."*

—Setayesh Abiazi Shalmani, FUSE Alumni



*"We want people in our communities to see a real, accessible path to a great career. Programs such as FUSE provide local support, training, and opportunities that help turn that vision into reality."*

—Mercedes Olson, Senior HR Consultant – Talent Acquisition at WEC Energy Group

## Evolving the Nontraditional Pathways into Tech: Meeting the Needs of Employers

When employers need talent, they can draw from a range of sources and hiring models. The MKE Tech Hub Coalition's role is to work alongside employers to look beyond immediate vacancies and toward long-term talent strategies that are both inclusive and sustainable. This means developing pathways that tap overlooked talent pools, support advancement for existing workers, and align closely with how technology is actually used inside organizations.

The MKE Tech Hub Coalition's Tech Skilling Program efforts are designed to help employers qualify, upskill, and retain diverse talent in southeast Wisconsin. Grounded in an employer-first, market-responsive approach, these programs reduce costs and risk for employers while expanding access to tech career pathways for individuals who might otherwise be excluded from traditional pipelines. The result is a stronger, more resilient regional workforce aligned to market demands and data trends.

### Non-traditional reskilling pathways for tech roles

Skills to Build is an Employ MKE program funded by the US DOL Building Pathways to Infrastructure Jobs Grant Program. The initiative invests in public-private partnerships that develop and scale worker-centered training strategies in H-1B industries critical to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).

The MKE Tech Hub Coalition serves as a referral partner to Employ MKE on this program, enabling us to connect member employers and local startups to Tech Skilling Grants that support workforce development across four eligible training models: Internships, Registered Apprenticeships, Incumbent Worker Training and Upskilling, and New Hire-On-the-Job Training.



**50**  
2025 participants at  
**15**  
employers from small  
early-stage startups to  
large companies

**52%**  
overall diversity

**100%**  
retention since  
inception of program

**200+**  
overall participants at  
**25+**  
employers

(aggregate inclusive of Skills to Build, pre-S2B registered apprenticeships, AI Academy, Brooksource Elevate)



*"At Komatsu, I am encouraged to collaborate with engineers and analysts to develop Python automation scripts and create real time data visualizations, providing actionable insights through Power BI. I gained hands on experience optimizing data workflows and tackling real-world problem-solving challenges. Beyond the technical development, this experience has equipped me with the skills and confidence to take the next step in my career."*

*—Beatrice Alvares, Komatsu Skilling Program Intern*

# Employer Insights Shaping the Next Phase of Workforce Development

In 2025, the MKE Tech Hub Coalition deepened its employer engagement to better understand how workforce needs are shifting, particularly for experienced technologists. Across Summerfest TechAI and three employer convenings, including a featured keynote with Kelly Palmer, former Chief Learning Officer at LinkedIn, more than 200 employers, educators, and workforce leaders shared candid insights about talent development challenges.

Several themes consistently emerged:

- Mid-career technologists are eager to advance with emerging technologies but often face stalled progression due to unclear pathways and uneven employer support.
- Employers are seeking applied, project-based upskilling that delivers measurable capability, rather than isolated or theoretical training.
- Cross-sector collaboration remains the region's strongest lever. When industry, education, and community partners align, talent mobility increases and retention improves.

These insights are directly shaping the MKE Tech Hub Coalition's 2026 workforce strategy. In response, the organization convened a **Workforce Advisory Committee** composed of regional employers, educators, and community leaders to guide program development and ensure relevance across sectors.

One early outcome of this work is the **development of the Mid-Career Tech Talent Upskilling Program**. Aimed to launch in spring of 2026, the program focuses on advancing experienced technologists into senior and enterprise roles through cohort-based applied learning, emerging technology literacy, and business-relevant skill development.

Together, our investments in Skills to Build, the Workforce Advisory Committee, and the Mid-Career Tech Talent Upskilling Program reflect a **shift from isolated training initiatives toward a coordinated regional approach**. This approach equips both early and mid-career professionals to grow alongside technology while enabling employers to build internal capability at scale.





# Scaling the Innovation Ecosystem

## The Impact of FOR-M on the Startup Community

From idea to startup, FOR-M is a network designed to support the entrepreneurial journey. The program, powered by We Pivot, is free to increase community access. By participating in the program, alumni have been able to compete for financial awards of \$10K. These awards are determined by a panel of investors from the MKE Tech community, providing expert feedback to all applicants to help them understand the steps required in receiving funding.

67

FOR-M Founders  
participating in all  
four cohorts



43

coaches volunteering

98

hours of time

11

startup companies  
received a total of

**\$110,000**

in grant funding  
from the WEDC



*"The culture in FOR-M positions founders to form a meaningful community. I remain in close contact with my FOR-M cohort, exchanging ideas, supporting each other's progress, and collaborating on real work. That ongoing engagement makes contributing to Milwaukee's tech community feel substantive and energizing."*

—Katie Grillaert, FOR-M Alumni



*"Beyond supporting the company's growth, the FOR-M grant represents something even more meaningful: a clear sign of the support available within Milwaukee's growing tech ecosystem. Knowing that support like this exists has given me the confidence to keep pushing forward and to continue testing the limits of what's possible as an entrepreneur."*

—Michael Mosley, FOR-M Alumni and Grant Awardee

# The Heart of AI Innovation: A Network of Technologists & Enthusiasts

Furthering the commitment to advancing AI in southeast Wisconsin, the MKE Tech Hub Coalition has formed an AI Community. The makeup of this community includes:

- **AI Insider**, a newsletter designed to inspire and guide members' journeys in AI
- **AI Forum**, a virtual discussion on various AI topics
- **AI Quarterly**, an in-person meetup to connect, learn, inspire, and celebrate all AI efforts in the region

The goal is to create meaningful connections for enthusiasts and technical talent to explore various AI topics and build lasting relationships. This community connects with like-minded individuals, engages in thought-provoking discussions, and stays at the forefront of AI advancements.



*"Supporting the MKE Tech Hub and its AI Community means fostering a local ecosystem where enterprise excellence and grassroots talent converge to define the 'AI-native' future. Through this partnership, our goal is for aspiring local technologists to not just learn tools but also be mentored within a high-growth network that drives innovation and jobs in Milwaukee. Together, we are building the connective tissue between today's industry-leading AI deployments and the next generation of digital pioneers."*

—Sven Loberg, Managing Director at Accenture

**1,100+**  
members

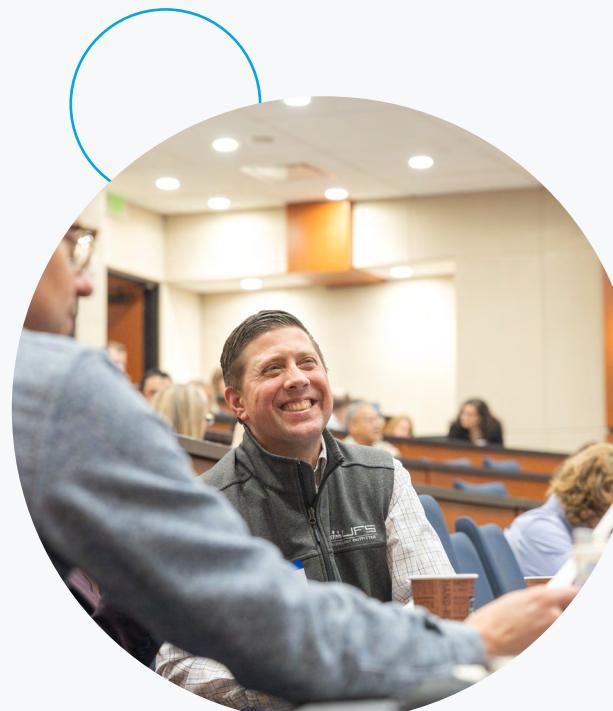


**375+**  
companies

**26%**  
community member  
growth from the  
beginning of the year



**500+**  
event registrations  
(including Quarterly  
and Forum events)



# The Power of AI Workshops for Manufacturers and Startups

With its official launch in March 2025, Synapse by MKE Tech offers a range of services to help organizations confidently navigate the complex landscape of AI and emerging technologies.

A significant component of Synapse's strategy is to create a collaborative ecosystem of participant companies that collectively create value for the broader community as well as for individual companies within the network.

In 2025, efforts focused on building and growing this ecosystem to include the following partners: **Community partners** include Economic Development Washington County, Waukesha County Business Alliance (WCBA), The New North, Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership (WMEP), Manufacturing Outreach Center (MOC), and CamAI.

**Educational institutions** include MSOE, Carroll University, and WCTC. **Technology partners** include Golgix, Concurrency, Nvisia, Ensylon, 100Joules, and Midpoint Consulting. **Financial institutions** include WBD. **Strategy advisors** include a pool of consulting advisors who bring significant industry expertise and convene on demand to meet manufacturing companies' needs.



Part of the Synapse by MKE Tech model is to host AI workshops. In 2025, these workshops were made possible by the generous support of WBD. These workshops are designed to provide business leaders in manufacturing with practical knowledge and strategic guidance on the application of AI in their operations. The workshops are made up of four components: AI Strategy Roadmap Guidelines, Industry Applications, Interactive Sessions, and Implementing AI in Your Businesses.

Over the year, Synapse delivered **five workshops** that covered **88 participants** across **30 mid-market manufacturers** in the state of Wisconsin. The year culminated in high-impact client delivery and partnership development. Synapse successfully helped deliver MKE Tech Hub's first comprehensive strategic planning workshop for a mid-market manufacturer, demonstrating the market viability of the structured methodology beyond AI-specific engagements. Simultaneously, Synapse advanced critical partnership negotiations with WMEP, and UW-Stout MOC, delivering the inaugural AI training workshop to WMEP consultants and deepening collaborative commitments with their leadership team.



*"The workshop was relieving because of the pressure leaders feel on keeping up with all the AI narrative that is everywhere we turn. For the first time I felt like I had a clear picture as to how and when to use AI."*

*—Nicholas Passint, CEO of Mixer Systems, Inc.*



*"It was a great experience—fun, insightful, and energizing. We came back to the office ready to keep pushing forward on our continuous improvement journey using AI as a positive catalyst."*

*—Gonzalo Martinez, President & CEO of Schaefer Brush Manufacturing, LLC.*

A photograph of a group of people in an auditorium or theater. They are seated in rows of dark-colored seats, facing towards the left of the frame. Many individuals are clapping their hands, and the overall atmosphere appears to be one of appreciation or conclusion. The background shows the interior of the venue with white walls and a balcony level.

# Summary of Impact

## Summary of Impact

# 2025 Summary of Impact

Milwaukee has a high density of innovators advancing traditional industries. The MKE Tech Hub Coalition worked as a change agent with its members and partners to achieve the following results in 2025:

**\$350K+**  
distributed in grants

**1,750+**  
initiative event registrations

**145+**  
coalition members/partners

**1,700+**  
mentorship and  
coaching hours



## Summary of Impact

# Celebrating Kathy Henrich

Kathy Henrich led the MKE Tech Hub Coalition since the beginning, fostering meaningful connections and building on the organization's mission of building a vibrant tech ecosystem.

We honored the contributions of Kathy by reflecting on her legacy of impact and announcing the "Connection Catalysts" initiative. This initiative will continue her goal of uniting people across the region.

After five years of tireless work, we sincerely thank Kathy for her dedication and efforts to better our #mketech ecosystem.



## Summary of Impact

# Coalition Impact Over the Last Six Years



**250K+**  
ChooseMKETech visits

**40K+**  
jobs featured

**700+**  
podcasts, story features,  
including *INNOVATE®*  
Milwaukee book



**475+**  
FUSE bootcamp  
participants

**300+**  
apprentices &  
re/upskillers



**325+**  
FOR-M tech startup  
alumni

**1,200+**  
AI Community members

**\$670K+**  
grants and loans  
awarded to founders



# Acknowledgments

*Thank you to our members and partners for your continued support. Our work can only be accomplished through your generosity and engagement.*

## Board

Molly Mulroy, Chair, WEC Energy Group  
Mara Lord, Vice Chair, Medical College of Wisconsin  
Dan Renouard, Treasurer, Baird  
Steve Radke, Northwestern Mutual  
Bradley Crotty, Inception Health & Froedtert Health  
Gwenn Peters, Rockwell Automation  
Wendy Schafer, Advocate Aurora Health  
Matt Moeser, Continuus Technologies  
Gordon Nameni, PhD, August Brown  
Dr. Victor Amaya, Data You Can Use

## MKE Tech Hub Team

Joe Poeschl, Executive Director  
Sanjay Mohan, Executive Director of AI  
Erik Kennedy, Director of Engagement  
Casey O'Brien, Director of Workforce  
Aaron Drews, Director of Grants and Operations  
Gwen Viegut, Digital Marketing Manager  
Vanessa Ratini, Program and Event Management Specialist

## A Special Thanks to

Ahmed Azam, Antonio Davis, Jason Fields, Samer Ghani, Kathy Henrich, Rebecca Janutis, Kelly Palmer, Joe Zaccaria, and John Zeratsky

# Members

## Gold

Northwestern Mutual  
Advocate Health  
WEC Energy Group

## Silver

Froedtert Health  
Rockwell Automation

## Bronze

100 Joules  
Accenture  
AWS  
Badger Meter  
Baird  
Brooksource  
Children's Hospital Wisconsin  
Clarios  
Concurrency  
Data Holdings  
Deloitte  
Ensylon  
Ernst & Young  
GalaxE.Solutions  
GE Healthcare  
Godfrey & Kahn  
HSA Bank  
Johnson Financial Group  
Komatsu  
Landmark Credit Union  
Medical College of Wisconsin  
Milwaukee Bucks  
Molson Coors Brewing  
Company  
nvisia  
PwC  
Skygen USA  
SysLogic  
TEKsystems  
UFS  
Verizon  
West Bend Insurance

## Community

Alliant Energy  
Associated Bank  
August Brown  
Aurora WDC  
Bader Rutter & Associates  
Beyond STEM  
BioForward  
Block Time Financial  
BoothCentral  
Carroll University  
Cascade Asset Management

## Community (cont.)

CGI  
Cirrus Change Readiness  
City of Milwaukee  
Clifton Larson Allen  
Codeworks  
Collabera  
Comcentia  
Concordia University  
Connective Consulting  
Continuus Technologies  
Cushman & Wakefield  
Customertimes  
CyberRisk Alliance  
Data You Can Use  
Dev10  
Digital Intelligence  
Dinvy LLC  
Educational Credential Evaluators  
Edustaff  
Eliassen Group  
Employ Milwaukee  
Expedient Holdings USA  
Experis  
Farwell  
Findorff  
Formlabs  
Gearbox Labs Inc  
Golgix  
Health Payment Systems  
HPGM  
Husch Blackwell LLP  
Ideawake  
Journey House  
Lanex  
M3 Insurance  
MARS IT Corp  
Maydm  
Michael Best  
Milwaukee Area Technical College  
Milwaukee Business Journal  
Milwaukee County  
Milwaukee School of Engineering  
MMAC/M7  
MSI Data  
Multiple Listing Service  
Naviant  
NCWIT-WI  
New Resources Consulting  
NEWaukee  
Newscape Consulting  
Northwoods  
NVNG  
Penrod  
Penta Technologies

## Community (cont.)

Pyramid Consulting  
Randstad USA  
Rex Academy  
River Run Computers  
Sabhya Technologies  
SDI  
Sentry  
Serving Older Adults of SE Wisconsin  
SHARP Literacy  
Signalwire  
Silver Linings Systems  
Skills Pipeline  
Slalom  
Society for Information Management  
Source-Right  
STEM Forward  
Summerfest  
SSR Total IT  
Talimer  
Taureau Group  
TEALS  
The Water Council  
Tier4 Group  
TKO Miller  
Tutatara  
United Way of Greater Milwaukee  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
University of Wisconsin-Stout  
UW Extention  
Vaco  
Versiti  
VISIT Milwaukee  
Wisconsin IOT Council  
Wisconsin Technology Council  
Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce  
Women in Technology Wisconsin  
Xorbix Technologies  
Yahara Software  
Young Enterprising Society  
Zizzl  
Zywave

**Learn More About Membership**

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Brookings: Mapping the AI economy: Which regions are ready for the next technology leap

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LinkedIn Cities on the Rise 2025: The 25 fastest-growing U.S. metros for jobs and new talent

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/linkedin-cities-rise-2025-25-fastest-growing-us-metros-jobs-jqiqc/?trackingId=4tp%2B6U5%2BR2oU0cFHOTz5ag%3D%3D>

The 2025 Regional Workforce Development Rankings

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