OPPORTUNITY, *Closer to Home*



20 ANNUAL IMPACT 26 REPORT

NORTHWEST WISCONSIN
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD
A proud partner of the AmericanJobCenter network

Creating a stronger, more skilled community for all

Opportunity, Closer to Home.



Around here, “close to home” can still mean a pretty good drive. That’s one reason this year’s theme feels right for Northwest Wisconsin. When a training program is an hour away or the internet cuts out in the middle of a job application, a little help nearby can make a big difference.

One of my favorite things about this job is that I never quite know what the day will bring. We might be helping someone train for a new career, talking with a local employer about an opening they’ve had trouble filling, or sitting down with someone at the library to figure out why their tablet won’t do the one thing they bought it to do. (We’ve all been there.)

In 2026, we helped people prepare for new careers and supported others as they returned home after incarceration and looked for work. We brought digital help closer to where people live, including through the new JobPods at regional libraries. We also worked with partners to better connect people with health and community resources. If you’ve ever tried to fit a job interview, a medical appointment, and a ride across the county into the same day, you know how quickly those things can pile up.

As you flip through this report, I hope you’ll spend a little time with the stories. I’m proud of what our team accomplished this year, and the stories show what that work meant to the people who trusted us to help.

Thank you to our staff, board members, employers, community partners, county and Tribal leaders, and funders for showing up for this work. And to everyone who walked through a door, picked up the phone, or stopped by the library to ask for help, thank you for giving us a chance to be part of what came next.

Mari Kay-Nabozny

Mari Kay-Nabozny
Chief Executive Officer
Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board



Our Purpose

Mission

Create, and continue to improve, an innovative and quality strategic direction for the regional workforce development system.

Vision

Northwest Wisconsin will have a system that employers, workers, job seekers, and taxpayers will value as the system of choice for their workforce development needs.

Fun Facts

10 counties
5 Tribal nations
10,600 square miles of land
182,000 residents

Region Served

Counties

Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Iron, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor and Washburn

Tribal Nations

Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Indians
Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe
Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin

Staff Values

Communication
Efficiency
Levity
Autonomy



A New Career for ROBERT

Robert was excited to start a career in trucking. A company had offered him a job and agreed to pay for his commercial driver's license (CDL) training. He gave his two weeks' notice, eager for what the opportunity could mean for his wife and their one-year-old. Then, shortly before his start date, the company withdrew the offer. By then, it was too late to take back his resignation, and paying for CDL school on his own was out of reach. With support from the FORWD and Wisconsin Fast Forward grants, Robert was able to attend Superior CDL School and get help with transportation costs. He appreciated having someone to call when he had questions about the application or needed encouragement along the way.

After completing his training, Robert joined Halvor Lines, where his brother already worked. He found a place to build a career he's proud of, and the new job made something possible at home that he and his wife had hoped for. She could stay home with their child, something they hadn't been sure they could afford.

Robert knows how quickly a good plan can fall apart. He also knows what it meant to have someone help him get moving again. Now he encourages others who might qualify for the same support to apply.

His words...

Without it, I truly don't know where my family would be today. The grant didn't just pay for my CDL training—it gave us hope when we needed it most. It even helped cover transportation costs, something I hadn't considered until I realized I couldn't afford to get to school. Every obstacle I encountered seemed to have a solution because someone was willing to help me succeed.



PROGRAM SUCCESS

ERIC & JEFFREY

Jeffrey brought his Kindle to a CLICK & Learn session in Bayfield County with a goal: he wanted to keep reading as his vision declined. He could still make out blurry images, but the Kindle's smooth screen gave him few clues about where to tap, and its buttons felt almost identical.

Jeffrey and NWWIB Digital Navigator, Eric Faber, met several times to try different options. When the Kindle proved difficult to navigate by touch, they tried the accessibility tools on Eric's phone. Together, they explored Google Lookout, an app that uses the phone's camera to read printed text aloud and identify everyday objects.

Jeffrey came in looking for help with a Kindle. What he found, with Eric sitting beside him, was a way to explore technology that worked better for him. That gave him some reassurance that even as his vision changed, he could still find ways to read and do more on his own.

"THE WAI 2.0 AND FORWD GRANTS HAVE MADE THIS CAREER CHANGE POSSIBLE AND GIVEN ME THE CONFIDENCE AND SUPPORT I NEEDED TO PURSUE MY GOALS."

—Mary
WAI 2.0 & FORWD
Participant

We Love Our Supporters!

Associated Bank

Hayward Area Chamber of Commerce

The Development Association

Cable Area

Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe University

ENBRIDGE

Spooner Health

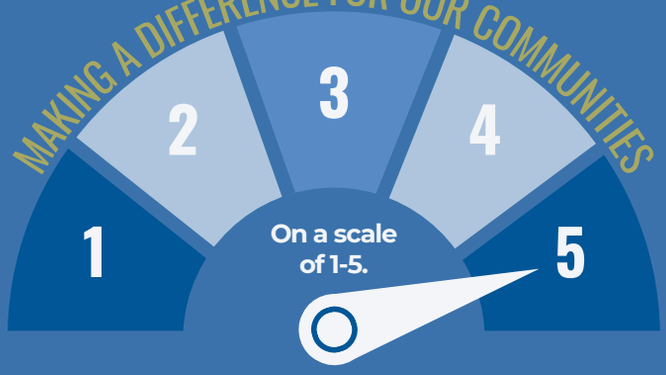
Tamarack Health

NB

Find yourself next to the water.
Ashland
Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce



CUSTOMER Satisfaction



The Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board helps people gain skills and find meaningful work, and helps local employers find and train the workers they need.

93% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that staff treated them with respect and provided helpful guidance.

66% of those who completed the survey saw a connection between the services they received and their current work.

41% reported at least one improvement in their quality of life, whether that be food security, stable housing, access to healthcare, reliable transportation, or childcare.

66% reported they were working full-time, part-time, seasonally, or self-employed at the time of the survey.

"This grant didn't just help me financially—it gave me hope again. It reminded me that even in tough times, with the right support and determination, it's possible to rise, rebuild, and move forward stronger than before."

—Marlon,
Windows to Work Participant



EVERY WORKER & EMPLOYER ARE *navigating* A DIFFERENT, YET *similar journey...*

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

JANUARY-DECEMBER 2026

1,994 INDIVIDUALS

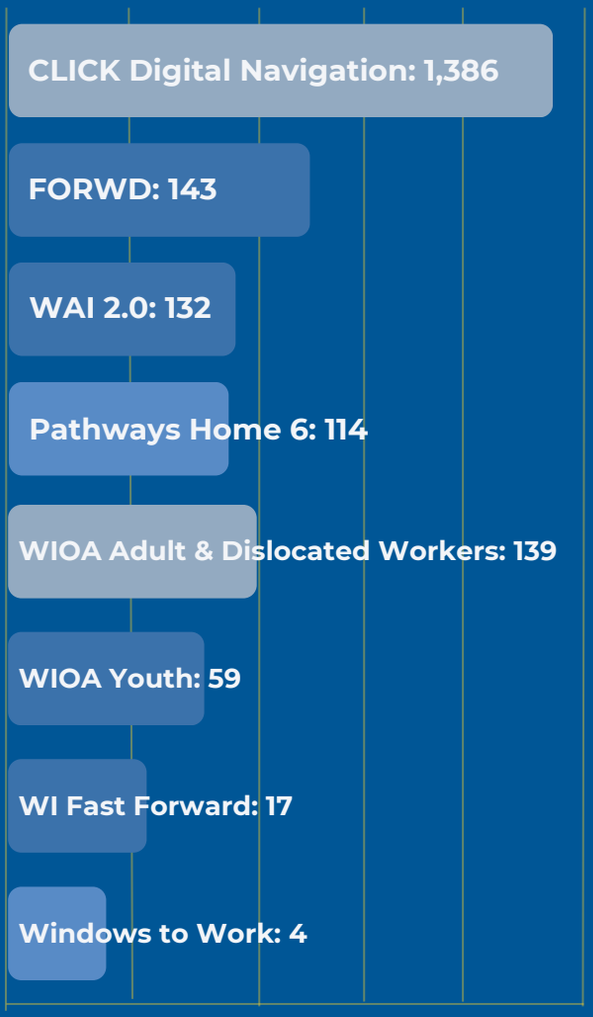
118 REENTRY PARTICIPANTS

4 JOBPOD LOCATIONS

34 YOUTH

Northwest Wisconsin IMPACT

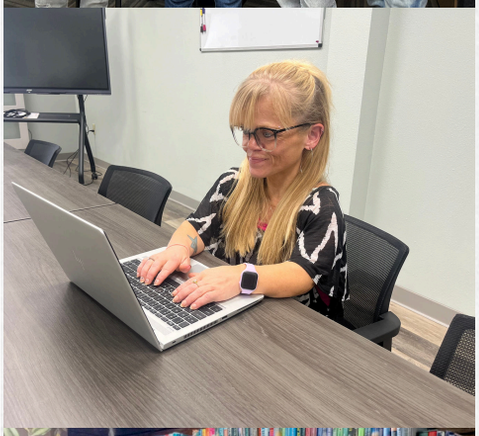
PEOPLE SERVED



5,863
DIGITAL DEVICES
Loaned to community members

290
MICRO-VISITS
Conducted with regional employers











ADDRESSING THE *Need*



BUILDING SCIENCE PRINCIPLES

Awarded to the Wisconsin Workforce Development Association, the NWWIB is supporting the project goals and implementation of this grant. The project is designed to increase the home energy efficiency workforce and connect people from disadvantaged communities to family-sustaining careers. Participants will receive Building Science Principles training focused on foundational building science and energy-efficiency knowledge. Through a partnership with Slipstream and the workforce system, training cohorts will take place statewide between August 2026 and April 2027.

BRIDGE-WI

BRIDGE-WI is a statewide reentry workforce initiative led by the Wisconsin Workforce Development Association, serving justice-involved youth and young adults ages 15-24 across 49 Wisconsin counties. Participants will receive credentialed training, Registered Apprenticeship and Certified Pre-apprenticeship opportunities, paid work experiences, job-readiness services, supportive services, and connections to employment in advanced manufacturing, transportation, shipbuilding, and information technology, including AI infrastructure. Workforce board partners, including the NWWIB, will recruit, enroll, assess, train, support, and place participants both before and after release from incarceration when applicable.

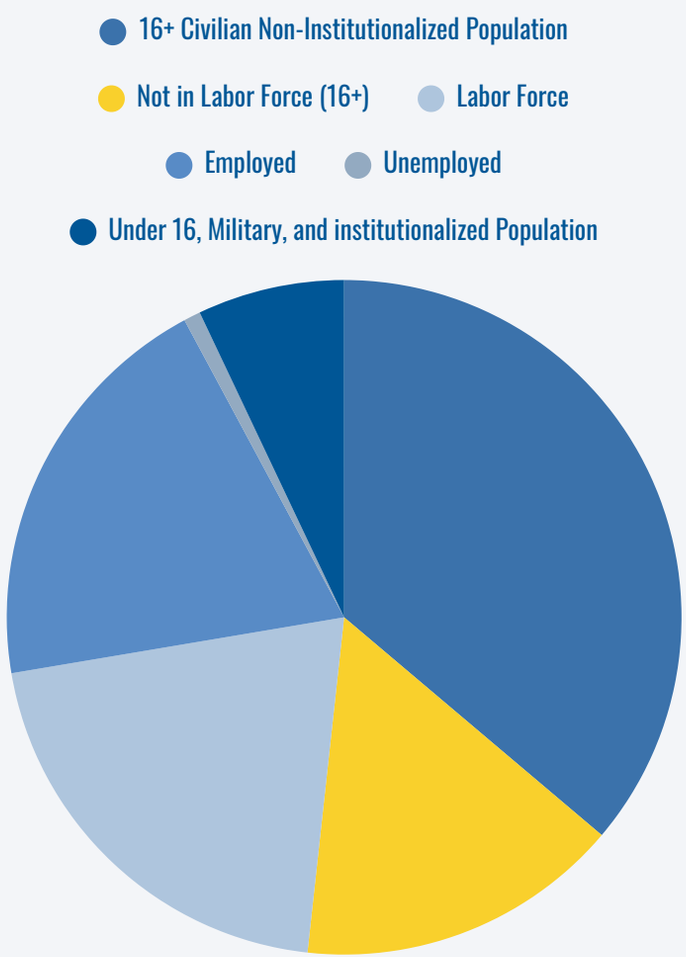
HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION SKILLS TRAINING

To address the need for workers entering the trades, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation is currently partnering with the NWWIB and other Workforce Development Boards to fill these positions through the Highway Construction Skills Training (HCST). The HCST program includes five industry-recognized credentials, including OSHA 30, Flagger, First Aid / CPR & AED, and CDL testing. This combination of both classroom and industry-recognized certifications ensure participants are well-prepared for the varied demands of the highway construction industry. Upcoming trainings will be provided in Northwest Wisconsin by the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP).

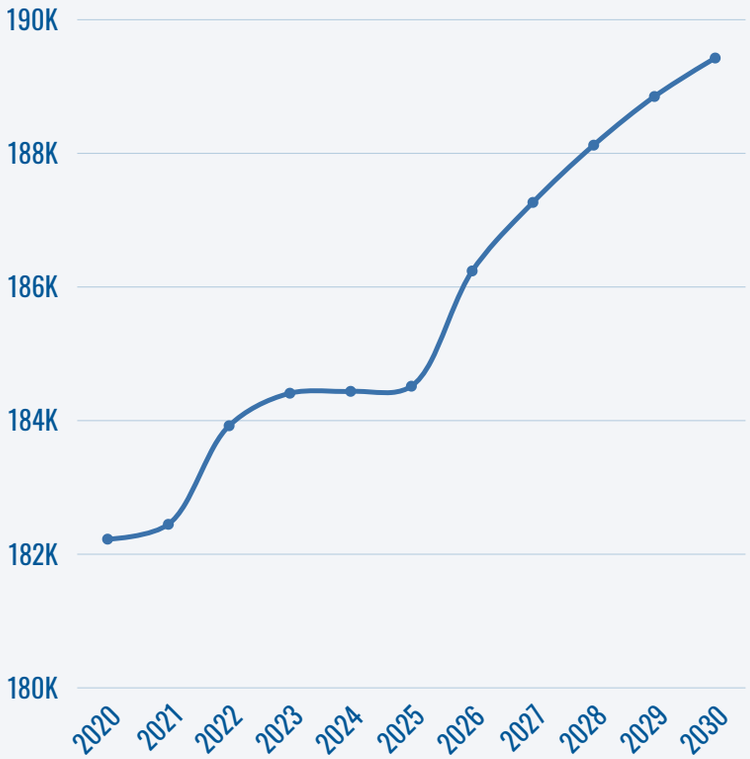
REGIONAL *Fast Facts*

- As of 2025, the region's population increased by 1.3% since 2020, growing by 2,289. Population is expected to increase by 2.7% between 2025 and 2030, adding 4,912. Total 2025 population is 184,515.
- From 2020 to 2025, jobs increased by 3.3% in our region from 72,518 to 74,931. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 10.7% by 7.4%. As the number of jobs increased, the labor force participation rate decreased from 58.0% to 55.1% between 2020 and 2025. Total regional employment is 74,931.
- Concerning educational attainment, 17.3% of the selected regions' residents possess a Bachelor's Degree (4.5% below the national average), and 13.3% hold an Associate's Degree (4.5% above the national average).
- Regional average earnings per job were $63,300 in 2025, approximately $27.3K below the national average earnings of $90.6K per job.

July 2026 Labor Force Breakdown



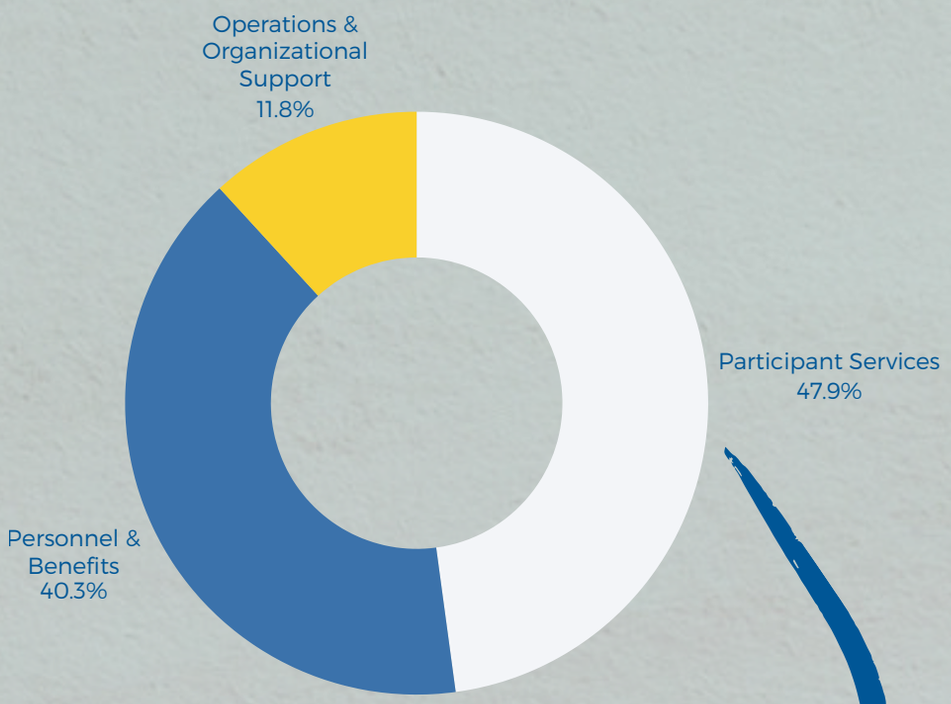
Regional Population Trends & Projections



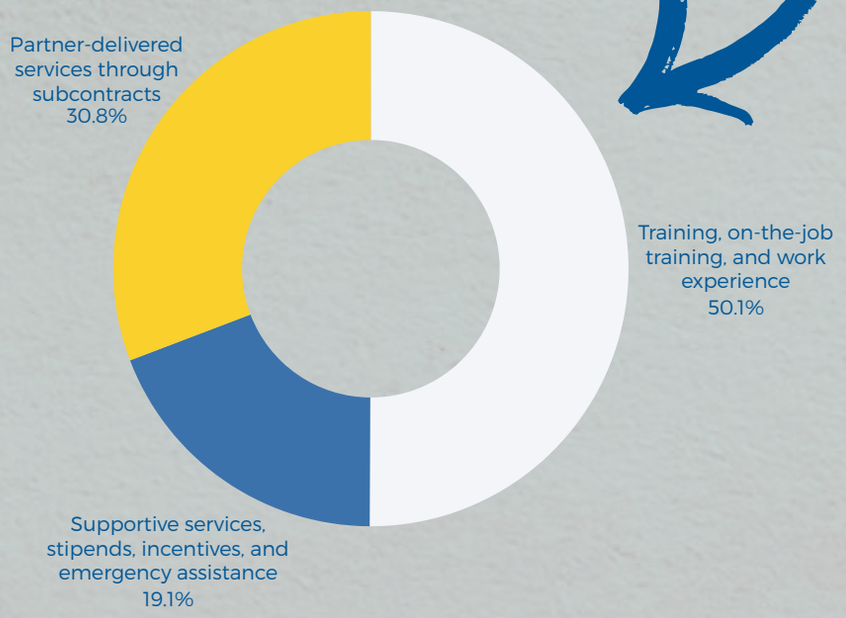
Community Investment

During the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, NWWIB invested nearly $2.4 million in workforce development across Northwest Wisconsin. More than $1.1 million supported participant training, work experiences, supportive assistance, and services delivered through our partners. Our staff provided the guidance, connections, and follow-through that helped people put those resources to work.

Fiscal Year July 2025–June 2026: Total Revenue $2,349,288



Participant Services Break Down



With Gratitude
2026 BOARD MEMBERS

We are so grateful for our board members and the time, insight, and heart they bring to NWWIB. Their leadership helps connect people with opportunities and strengthens the communities we call home. Thank you for believing in our work and helping move it forward.

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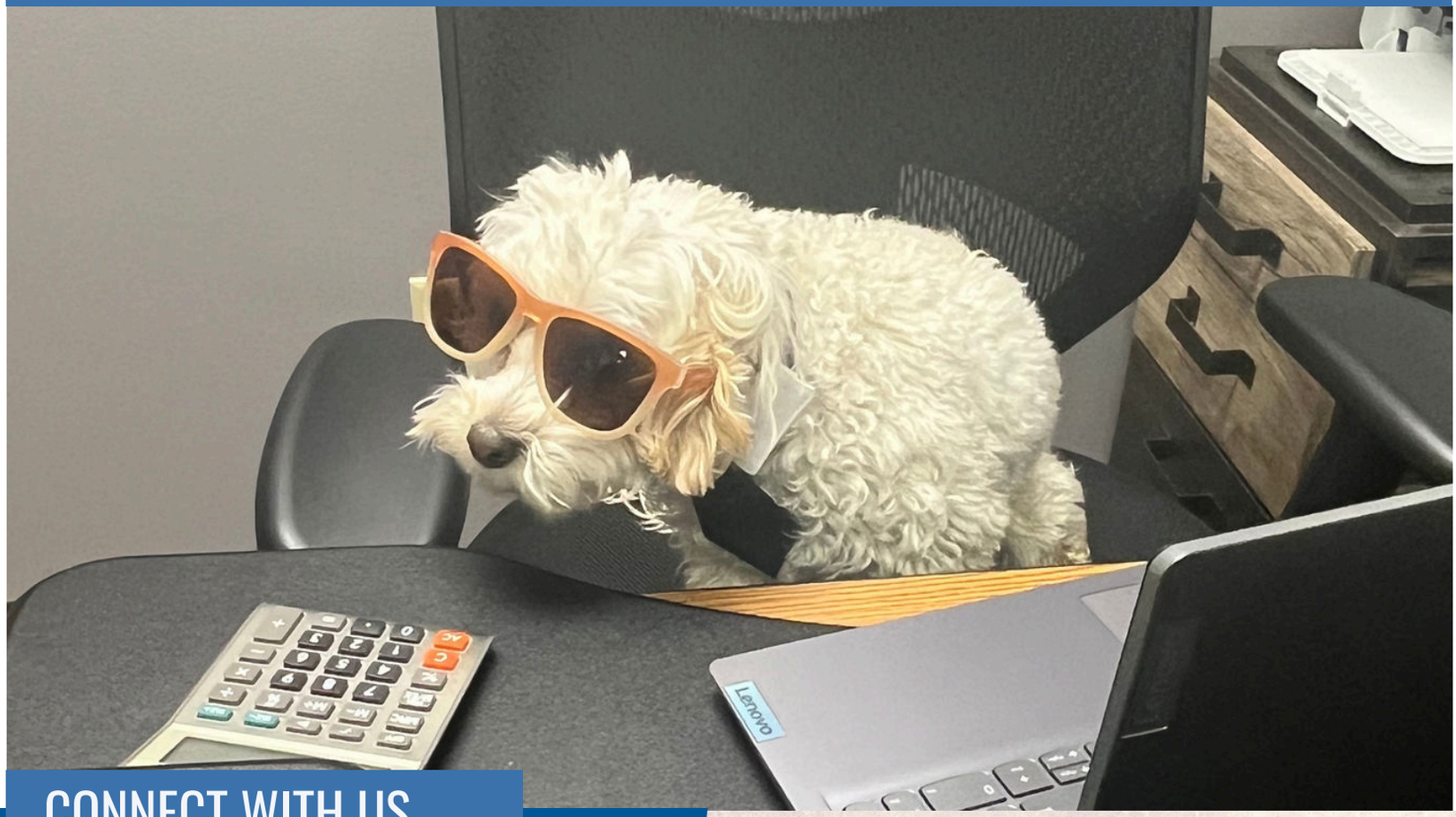
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MARK KILLIAN
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RYCE DAVIS
Special Projects Case Coordinator

KAZDION MOUNT
Manager of Workforce Strategy & Innovation

ERIC FABER
Digital Navigator

JAKE KOVAL
Digital Navigator

BEAU STAHNKE
Digital Navigator

LAYNE BRACKEEN
Data Systems Coordinator

ANNIE BRUNN
Re-Entry Coach

MATTHEW FILIPEK
Re-Entry Coach

FRIDAY
Head of Barketing

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