



Wisconsin Economic Development Association Inc.

WEDA STATEMENT ON FORWARD WISCONSIN

April, 2007

Brief Background.

- The Wisconsin Legislature created forward Wisconsin in 1985, following a recommendation by a high level statewide task force created by then Governor Tony Earl.
- In 1985 the Wisconsin Economic Development Association (WEDA) supported and actively advocated for the creation of Forward Wisconsin.
- After its creation, Forward Wisconsin was viewed across the country as a “unique” public-private economic development partnership. To date, this model has been copied by a number of other states – many which have perfected the Wisconsin model and have adequately funded their respective organizations.
- WEDA has consistently supported Forward Wisconsin, including aggressively advocating for the preservation of the critically important public-**private** nature of the organization.

Current Considerations.

- WEDA recognizes, and a very recent survey of key members has verified, the need to re-examine and re-focus the operations and practices of Forward.
- There is no concern with the **mission** of Forward as **the** marketing and recruitment entity on behalf of the entire state of Wisconsin. This mission and Forward’s role remain critical in Wisconsin’s overall economic development strategy.
- As recognized by others who are close to the organization, the approaches, tactics and benchmarks need to be refined and updated in order to meet today’s environment and needs.
- Current funding levels are inadequate to allow Forward to fulfill its mission.

Recommendations Regarding Forward’s Proper Role in Economic Development.

- Forward Wisconsin is a rainmaker that should be marketing Wisconsin to the world developing leads to bring back to the state. There should be an increased focus on the site selector and Real Estate communities, rather than on trade shows and call trips. This focus should expand beyond the traditional Chicago and Twin Cities territories.

- Forward should work with local communities to develop the needed capacity to relate/respond to site selector's inquiries. There is currently no state program that serves as a resource for community capacity building, especially on how to attract and more importantly, land out of state companies.
- The third role of the organization should be to validate that sites being offered for development are truly **ready** for development.

Organizational Recommendations.

- As previously stated, it is critical that a true public-private framework be preserved. This framework allows significant flexibilities that units of government do not have and solidifies the involvement and commitment of the private sector partners—both investors and economic development practitioners.
- In recognition of traditional practice, have the Forward Wisconsin Board hire a President--or Marketing Director--with stated qualifications, from a list of not less than one or more than three submitted by the Governor. Further, specify that the President, or Marketing Director, shall have management control over the staff and day-to-day operations; but shall report to the Executive Committee on a regular basis. The Executive Committee could be composed of the Governor or his/her designee, the Secretary of Commerce or the Deputy if the Secretary so designates, and 3 others designated by the Bd. - including a local economic development practitioner. The President, or Marketing Director, will not be responsible for fund-raising and such function shall be contracted for or delegated to another staff person with appropriate expertise.
- Require that all of the external (out-of-state) marketing activities of the regional economic development organizations be coordinated, contracted and channeled through Forward.

Funding.

- Funding levels for Forward are lower now than when the organization was created in 1985. Beyond inhibiting the ability of Forward to adequately fulfill its mission, the level of funding for Forward and, thereby, Wisconsin's statewide marketing effort is an embarrassment.
- At an absolute minimum, the \$590,000 in the Governor's proposed budget should be added to the state's contribution to Forward and the \$325,000 funding level should be restored to at least the 1985 level of \$500,000. Allocating these new dollars to Forward would provide this already established organization the best opportunity for success on behalf of the state without duplication of programming and effort.
- Create realistic measurements for Forward based on its mission. It is not Forward's responsibility to "create" jobs.