

# Public/Private Partnerships

**An Interview with Reed E. Hall,  
Secretary and Chief Executive Officer, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation**

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Reed Hall served as Executive Director of the Marshfield Clinic from 2000 until his retirement in 2010. From 1976 until 2000, he served as General Counsel to the Marshfield Clinic. Hall received an M.S. degree in health law from the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health in 1974, a J.D. degree from the University of North Dakota in 1973, and a B.A. degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1970. He formerly served as a member of the Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC) Board of Directors, WMC Executive Committee; Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters Board of Directors; WisconsinEye Board of Directors; Employee Benefits Corporation Board of Directors; and 7th Congressional District Health Care Advisory Council.*



Reed E. Hall

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** *As Wisconsin's lead economic development agency, with more than 600 regional and local partners, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (in Wisconsin.com; WEDC) fosters the cooperation necessary to support sustainable business growth and job creation. Their model is customer-service focused and aligns with the needs of businesses. To ensure they are effective and efficient, they collaborate with their state economic development network to deploy tools, provide financial and technical support, encourage entrepreneurship, and advance industries.*

**What is the mission of WEDC?**

We were formed in July of 2011 as an initiative of the governor and the legislature to transition what used to be the Department of Commerce more exclusively into economic development. The Department of Commerce formerly had a regulatory function as well as a development function.

It's a public/private partnership – we have a 15-member board chaired by Governor Scott Walker and made up of legislators from both sides of the aisle, as well as public members from the state of Wisconsin. It's a great model that is paying dividends for the state.

**What more can be done to further publicize all that Wisconsin has to offer?**

Wisconsin's value is understood in the business community, but maybe not throughout the state. Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce recently conducted a survey, and 95 percent of the

executives surveyed across the state felt that Wisconsin was headed in the right direction. This is up from 10 percent before Governor Walker came into office.

We just don't advertise all of our successes as much as we should. One of the things we hope to do at WEDC is to talk about the good things that are being accomplished with new companies coming here and jobs being created.

**How do you define the Wisconsin advantage?**

First and foremost, Wisconsin is a great place to live and work. We have a very productive business climate in the state and that has turned around with our new governor in place. We have a political and regulatory environment that is positive.

We are also able to offer a highly skilled and dedicated workforce. It's not just kids coming off the farm, but those from across the state. Those in manufacturing are skilled tradesmen, which has been an advantage for a long time.

We also have an outstanding university system across the entire state. Complementing that is an exceptional technical college system, so we're training the future workforce of Wisconsin right here. Our goal is to keep as many of these bright young people as possible here after they graduate.

We are also blessed with an excellent health care system.

Additionally, we're reducing taxes further in the state; our bond rating is excellent; and our deficit has been turned around to a surplus.

**How has WEDC supported and driven entrepreneurship throughout the state?**

We know statistically that most new jobs come from start-up organizations, so we have a full complement of people in our entrepreneur division that work on that. Start-ups across the state are critical to our success.

We have had success with the Water Council and the Capital Catalyst Program, which we're going to be moving more money into. One of the avenues that is fertile for us to enhance is our relationship with the university system across the state – tapping into that vast resource of faculty with great ideas that need nourishment and reimbursement for costs.

**Are there clear metrics to track impact and measure results?**

We require that the companies we deal with report pertinent data to us.

Jobs are one of the major tests we have as well as more bricks-and-mortar, and having more equipment available. Tax credits are very popular right now, in addition to our loan programs.

The tax programs we offer require job creation or retention. These are the most important metrics we use in reporting to the legislature.

Last year, we impacted more than 37,000 jobs through our own organization as well as through some of our partners.

**Are you happy with how the business community has supported WEDC?**

There were some growing pains in our organization during the first few years. We have since moved the organization in a direction where it operates more like a bank. If you're making loans and giving out tax credits, you have to track those just like a bank does.

The business community has appreciated that. I also believe the joint finance committee in our state has been comfortable with what we have done here.

**How has the organization promoted opportunities for minority businesses?**

We knew we needed to help out that segment of our community. The minority chambers of commerce make loans to that segment with the money we provide after their own internal review process. They are adding jobs, and that is probably the best way to move forward communities that have struggled for so long.

**What is it about the governor's leadership that has contributed to the state's success?**

It starts with the legislative agenda and making sure our budget is balanced as opposed to deficit financing. This instills confidence in the entire state, especially within the business community.

Our bond rating is important; because we don't have the deficits other states have, we are much advanced over our neighboring states.

When it comes to where you want to locate a business, certainty about the future is part of what companies look for. Wisconsin and several other states have struggled with job growth based in part on the uncertainty of what the expenses of the Affordable Care Act would be, especially for smaller businesses that have experienced thin margins since the 2008 economic crisis.

The uncertainty of health care costs and concern as to the federal budget has chilled job creation and growth. Hopefully, this is behind us and, with more certainty in Wisconsin, we can help move the state forward. ●