



2022

ANNUAL REPORT

We bring to light new knowledge on policy issues important to state government, local governments, schools, Metro Milwaukee, and Wisconsin's economy, then disseminate it to thought leaders and decision-makers.

We analyze and publish information about the finances of state and local governments and school districts to increase awareness of fiscal and service-level challenges and promote efficient, effective, and equitable use of taxpayer dollars.

We conduct impartial public policy research and analysis to drive informed debate and effective decision-making in the state of Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Policy Forum is a statewide nonpartisan, independent policy research organization. We provide informed analysis of critical policy issues affecting local governments, school districts, and the state of Wisconsin. Through research and facilitation activities, we encourage elected officials and community leaders to find effective, data-driven solutions to pressing policy challenges, and promote productive discussion among the public and private sectors.



As I begin my two-year term as WPF Board Chair in 2023, I am proud to reflect on our many accomplishments in 2022 and our increased influence as state and local leaders confront important policy challenges across Wisconsin.

It is telling that when Milwaukee's political and business leadership convened state legislative leaders in Milwaukee on two occasions in 2022 to discuss the huge financial challenges facing our city and county governments, they turned to the Forum to lead off their program. This serves as a testament to the broad value the Forum provides to both business and civic leaders across our state.

Increasingly, the impact of our research is being felt not only in Milwaukee but statewide, as shown by new fire department consolidation efforts in Ozaukee, Racine, and La Crosse counties, as well as the Governor's decision to provide special state aids to EMS agencies across Wisconsin. Each of these developments stemmed, in part, from Forum reports.

We also had another exceptional showing at last summer's annual Governmental Research Association conference, taking home five awards and showing again that we stand out not only in Wisconsin, but also among our national peers.

Our return to in-person programming also was a resounding success, as our Salute to Local Government enjoyed record-breaking attendance of more than 420 people, while our Milwaukee mayoral debate drew more than 200. We also resumed our popular "Policy in a Pub" with a program about the city of Milwaukee's finances at Merriment Social in September.

Finally, on the financial front, while our healthy reserves took a hit from the market downfall, we ended 2022 with a nearly \$50,000 operating surplus thanks to strong membership, sponsor, contract, grant, and event income. That's a tribute to our hundreds of generous supporters, who share a passion for nonpartisanship, objectivity, and data-driven decision-making.

My goal, as Chairman, is to work with our outstanding staff to continue to expand our reach and influence, which matters more than ever as state and national politics grow more divisive. I look forward to working with all of our members, and I thank you for all you do to support Wisconsin's premier policy think tank!

Sincerely,



Grady L. Crosby
Chair



BY THE NUMBERS





The Forum urges local governments to measure performance and share results and applies the same principle to itself. Forum staff and the executive committee establish performance objectives and use these metrics – and many others – to gauge our impact and effectiveness.

55 RESEARCH REPORTS PUBLISHED → **36** ON STATEWIDE ISSUES
18 ON SOUTHEAST WISCONSIN ISSUES **513** MEDIA STORIES

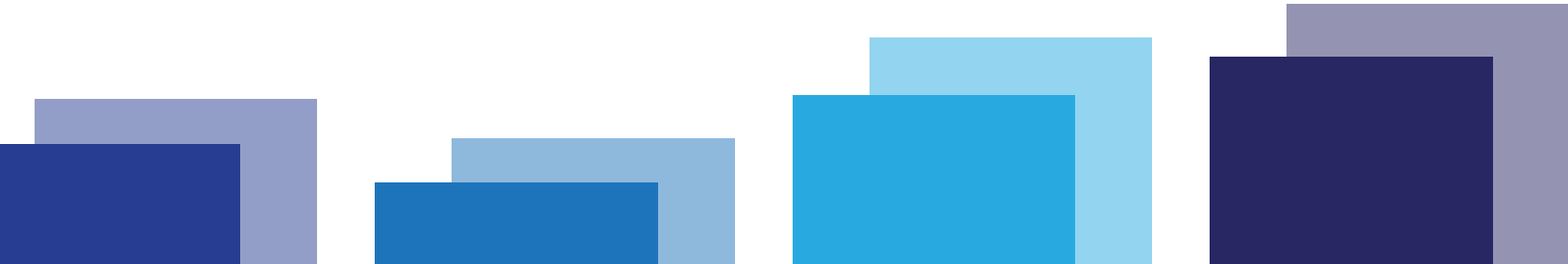
3 FORUM FRIDAY VIRTUAL EVENTS

2 VIEWPOINT LUNCHEONS

1 POLICY IN A PUB EVENT

  **2%**
 **7%** GROWTH IN SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS
 **41%**

130,000+ UNIQUE WEBSITE VISITS



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raSmith

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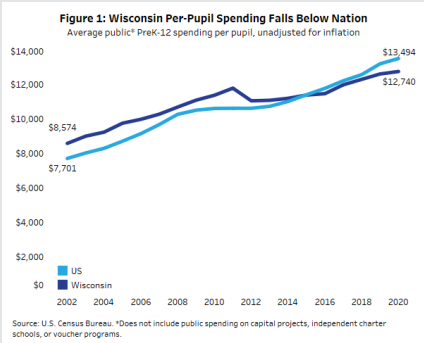
Our research publications address timely issues and promote informed and fact-based public policy decision-making. Our portfolio includes in-depth reports, *Focus* policy briefs, and *The Wisconsin Taxpayer* magazine-style pieces that cover a range of topics. Per our strategic plan, our priority research areas include government finance, workforce and economic development, and education. Also, we maintain the traditions of our two legacy organizations — the Public Policy Forum and Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance — by emphasizing both issues of statewide importance and those with particular relevance to southeast Wisconsin.

As the COVID-19 pandemic entered its third year, our focus on its impacts continued, including an in-depth report on options to improve public health services in Milwaukee County and shorter briefs on the pandemic's consequences on key economic sectors. Our wide range of topics included reports on Wisconsin's large statewide racial gaps in homeownership, use of the state's record budget surplus, the financial challenges facing towns, reviews of local room tax revenues, and postsecondary education readiness in Milwaukee. Local government service sharing was a prominent focus again in 2022 as we looked at opportunities for fire department collaboration in the Fox Valley and police consolidation in Milwaukee County's North Shore.

On the following pages, we highlight report covers from some of our most highly publicized in-depth reports in 2022 as well as key visuals from several *Focus* and *Taxpayer* publications.

A decorative pattern at the bottom of the page consisting of various overlapping squares and rectangles in different shades of blue and teal.

Wisconsin's Ranks in School Spending, Tax Burden Fall Together

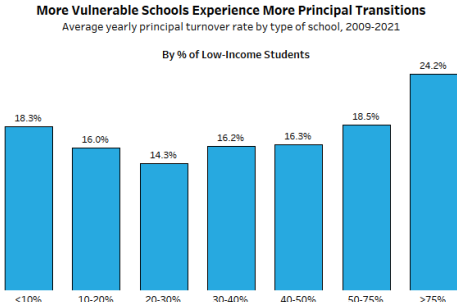


“I found the content to be valuable and greatly appreciated the opportunity to connect with a diverse set of colleagues.””

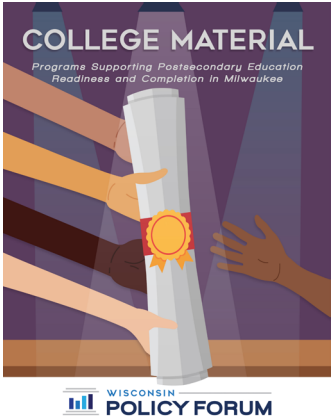
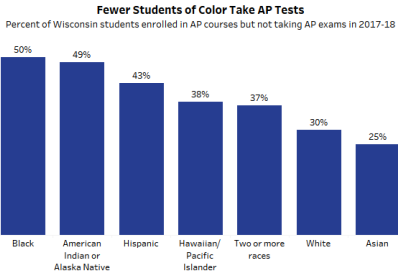
MELINDA HEINRITZ

Madison Public Schools Foundation President, after participating in her first WPF Education Policy Committee Meeting.

Follow the Leaders

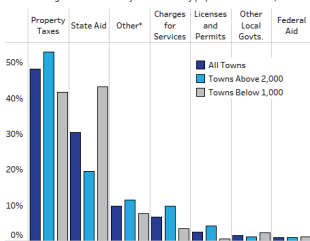


Fewer Students of Color Take Advanced Placement Exams

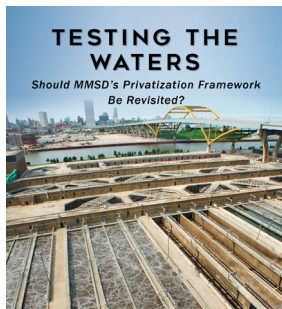


Budgets Get Tighter for Wisconsin Towns

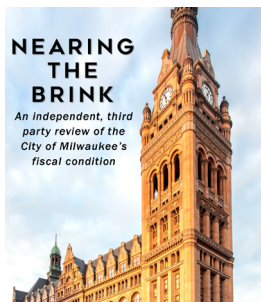
Figure 2: Property Tax, State Aid Dominate Town Revenues
Share of general revenue by source and by population of town, 2020



Source: Wisconsin Department of Revenue. *Other includes revenues such as taxes on forest land and lodging, special assessments, tax increments, interest income, fines, and other revenues.



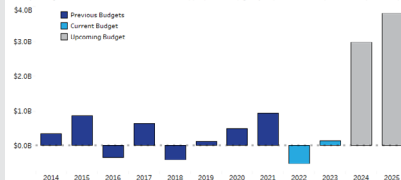
**WISCONSIN
POLICY FORUM**



**WISCONSIN
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The Astounding State Surplus

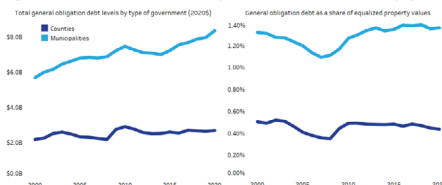
Figure 1: Budget Projections Are Best in Years for the State
Projected general fund revenues minus select net appropriations (agency requests excluded) in millions (current \$)



Sources: Wisconsin Policy Forum calculations using DOR figures, all figures based on two-year state projections made in the November of even-numbered years. Ongoing revenues do not include general fund balances left over at the end of the prior year.

Local Debt on the Rise

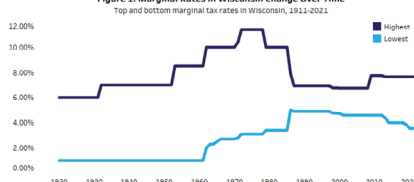
Figure 1: Debt Rises to Record Levels for Wisconsin Municipalities but Remains a More Modest Share of Property Values



Sources: WI Department of Revenue and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; debt amounts are as of Dec. 31 of each year and property values are as of Jan. 1 of that year.

Informing the Tax Debate

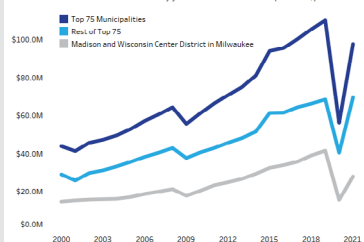
Figure 1: Marginal Rates in Wisconsin Change Over Time



Sources: Legislative Fiscal Bureau

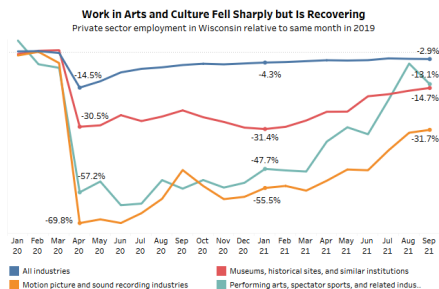
Room Tax Revenues Rebound

Figure 1: Room Tax Revenues Recovered Outside of Madison and Milwaukee
Annual room tax revenues by year 2001-2021 in millions (nominal \$)



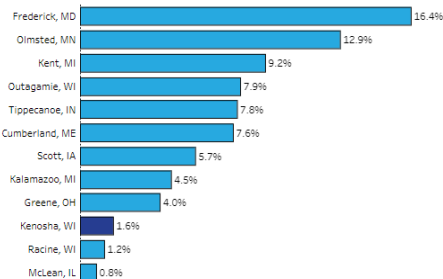
Sources: Wisconsin Department of Revenue and local government fiscal documents

State of the Arts



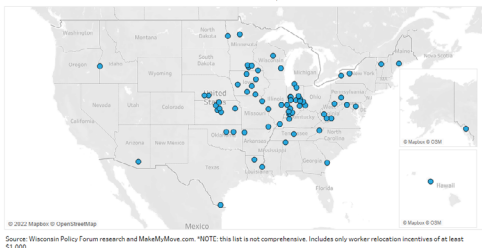
Moving the Needle?

Figure 1: Change in Population by County, 2010 to 2020



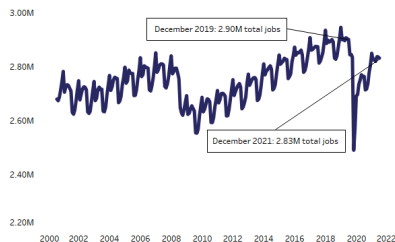
Worker Incentives Gaining Popularity in Midwest, But Still Rare in Wisconsin

Figure 1: Worker Relocation Incentives Clustered in Midwest

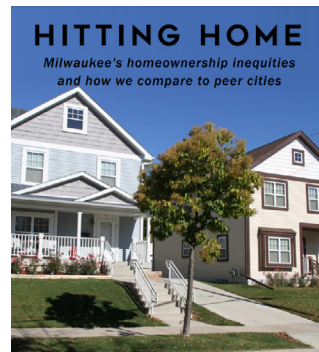


An Uneven Recovery for Wisconsin Jobs

Figure 1: Wisconsin Employment Rebounds, But Not All The Way
Total employment in Wisconsin by month, January 2001 to December 2021



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics - Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages.



WISCONSIN
POLICY FORUM

“I thank the Policy Forum for the incredible research that you all do. I actually use a lot of those reports and briefings that you provide to local government. That helps inform a lot of my legislation.”

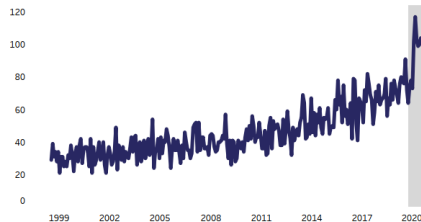
MARCELIA NICHOLSON

Chairperson, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

A Sobering Trend: Alcohol Deaths up Sharply in Wisconsin

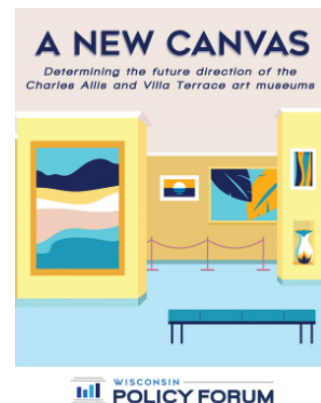
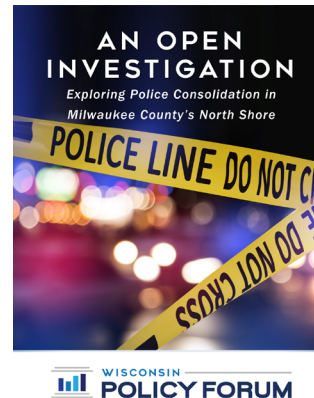
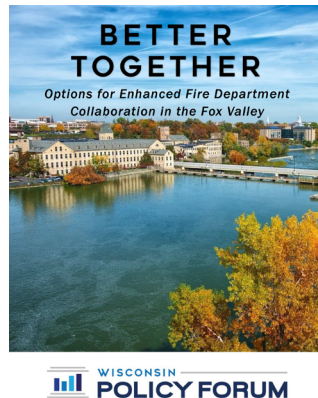
Deaths from Alcohol in WI Trend Steadily Upwards, Even Before COVID

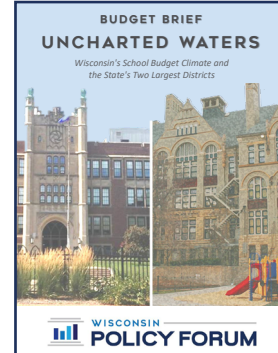
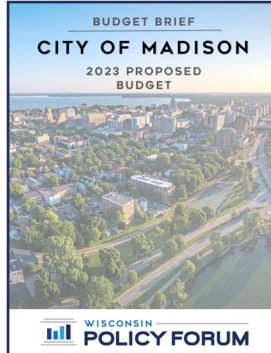
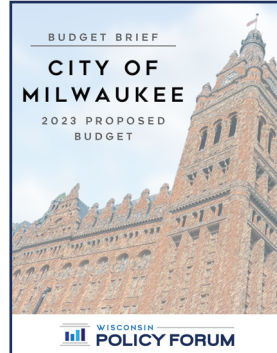
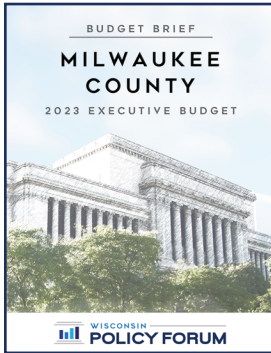
Total monthly alcohol-induced deaths, January 1999 to December 2020
Gray band represents months after COVID-19 public health emergency declared



“Thank you for helping the Ozaukee County communities take the first step with the WPF study (on fire and EMS service sharing). I believe it started us down the path to where we are today.””

COLLEEN LANDISCH-HANSEN
Administrator, Village of Thiensville





Our budget briefs **provide information about the government's basic financial framework, the specific expenditure and revenue challenges facing the government that year, and how the proposed budget resolves them.** We objectively frame the key issues and decisions that are at the heart of the budget - not only for citizens, but also for policymakers themselves. We add a brief on the Governor's proposed state budget in each odd-numbered year.



Our collection of DataTools bolsters the Forum's role as a go-to source for understanding local and state government policy and workforce issues in Wisconsin. Our Municipal DataTool includes data on all 601 cities and villages in the state, while our Property Values and Taxes DataTool shows how property values change from year to year in municipalities and counties across the state and how those changes are impacting the taxes levied by local units of government. Our School DataTool compiles academic performance and financial data for Wisconsin public school districts and allows users to run their own comparative reports. Our Metro Milwaukee Innovation Datatool enables users to gauge the area's performance on indicators tied to innovation and economic growth.





Senior Research Associate Ari Brown is interviewed by Channel 26 Green Bay for the *A Sobering Trend: Alcohol Deaths Up Sharply in Wisconsin* report.



Vice President & Research Director Jason Stein is interviewed by PBS Wisconsin for the *The Astounding State Surplus* report.

Connecting our work with the broadest possible audience – which we do through the news media and social media – maximizes our impact and furthers our goal of anchoring state policy deliberations in impartial facts and data. In 2022, our research was cited more than 500 times in local, state, and national news outlets, and news media routinely sought out Forum researchers as expert sources. Our social media accounts had more than 6,200 followers combined at the end of 2022.



NETWORK & LEARN

We communicate our research in many ways, including via presentations to our members. Forum members, civic groups, elected officials, and advocacy groups request Forum staff to speak on our research or related policy issues.

We organize exclusive policy discussions and brown bag lunches for our members, and our researchers always are available to answer policy-related questions.



President Rob Henken speaks to state legislators about the fierce financial challenges facing Milwaukee's city and county governments.



Communications Director Mark Sommerhauser discusses how broadcast media covers elections with TMJ4 anchor Charles Benson at the fall Board of Directors meeting.

We connect our members with individuals in government, academia, and elsewhere to obtain policy information and analysis that is critical to their work.

We encourage Forum members to serve on our policy committees: Government Finance, Economic Development, Education, and Social Services. Our policy committees meet a few times each year to review research findings and discuss potential new research topics with Forum staff.

More than 200 people registered for our virtual 2022 annual meeting on February 3rd. Our program included a panel discussion moderated by Vice President and Research Director Jason Stein on the use of federal pandemic relief funds featuring Green Bay Mayor Eric Genrich, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Marcelia Nicholson, and Washington County Executive Josh Schoemann.



FORUM FRIDAY

Our virtual webinar series, Forum Friday, engages public policy leaders on recently released Forum reports and timely policy issues. We hosted three Forum Friday installations in 2022 and will continue the series to augment our in-person events going forward.

Responding to Growing Behavioral Health Challenges

President Rob Henken discussed our report on the rise in alcohol deaths and usage in the state. Wisconsin Department of Health Services Secretary Karen Timberlake, Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services Director Shakita LaGrant-McClain, and Dr. Maria Perez, Chairwoman of the Milwaukee County Mental Health Board, helped explore the nature and breadth of the emerging challenges.

PANELISTS:

Karen Timberlake, *Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Health Services*

Shakita LaGrant-McClain, *Director, Milwaukee County DHHS*

Dr. Maria Perez, *Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Mental Health Board*



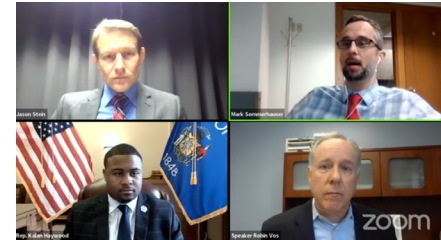
A Look Ahead: Wisconsin's 2023 Legislative Session

Vice President and Research Director Jason Stein discussed our research on the state budget and surplus and what that means for the 2023-2024 legislative session. Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Robin Vos and Assistant Minority Leader Kalan Haywood joined to discuss their priorities over the next two years.

PANELISTS:

Robin Vos, *Wisconsin Assembly Speaker*

Kalan Haywood, *Wisconsin Assembly Assistant Minority Leader*



Not pictured: Our Forum Friday program on “Pandemic Recovery in Wisconsin’s Arts and Cultural Sector”

VIEWPOINT LUNCHEONS / POLICY IN A PUB

City of Milwaukee Mayoral Debate



In March, we partnered with the Greater Milwaukee Committee and Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce to host a Milwaukee mayoral debate with Cavalier Johnson and Bob Donovan. Both candidates spoke on key issues that have been raised by Forum research and addressed policy and fiscal matters facing the city.

Can Downtowns Thrive in the New Normal?



Our June Viewpoint Luncheon discussed the challenges of downtowns in the aftermath of the pandemic. Jason Illstrup from Downtown Madison Inc., Anne Neujahr Morrison from New Year Investments, Beth Weirick from Milwaukee Downtown, and Joshua Jeffers from J. Jeffers & Company were our panelists and Milwaukee DCD Commissioner Lafayette Crump was the event's keynote speaker.

Policy in a Pub: City of Milwaukee Budget



Our popular Policy in a Pub event returned in September at the Merriment Social. President Rob Henken reviewed the Forum's research on the City of Milwaukee's fiscal condition and Mayor Cavalier Johnson and Budget Director Nik Kovak previewed the 2023 City Budget.

The Salute to Local Government is one of the few events in our state that highlights the value of public sector performance and the benefits that public sector innovation and excellence bring to taxpayers and our state as a whole. More than 420 people from across the state attended the 30th annual Salute to Local Government on November 16th to join us in celebrating excellence in government and to hear from our keynote speaker, Wisconsin State Senator Dale Kooyenga. Our awards recognized governments and school districts for innovation, partnership, cooperation, and efforts to advance racial equity, as well as individuals in the public sector for excellence and lifetime achievement.



JEAN B. TYLER LEADER OF THE FUTURE AWARD

Noah Wiedenfeld

*Administrator & Utilities Manager,
City of New Richmond*



JAMES R. RYAN LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Tony Pérez

*Retired, Director of the Housing Authority of the
City of Milwaukee*



NORMAN N. GILL AWARD FOR INDIVIDUAL EXCELLENCE

Vera Westphal

Deputy Director, Milwaukee County Zoo



INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO PROBLEM SOLVING
Embedded Mental Health Professional Program | *Waukesha County*



PUBLIC-PRIVATE COOPERATION
Mental Health Emergency Center | *Milwaukee County*



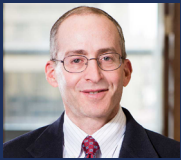
EFFORT TO ADVANCE RACIAL EQUITY
UniverCity Year | *Village of Waukegan*



PUBLIC-PRIVATE COOPERATION
Milwaukee's Collective Affordable Housing Plan | *Community Development Alliance*

FELLOWSHIPS

The Wisconsin Policy Forum awards fellowships annually to two graduate students who are studying in Wisconsin to conduct research projects. The fellows work under the guidance of Forum staff and their work is published as Forum research products.



Rob Henken
President



Jason Stein
*Vice President &
Research Director*



Katie Hofman
*Fund Development &
Membership Director*



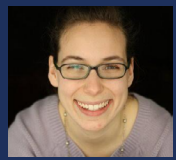
Mark Sommerhauser
*Communications Director/
Policy Researcher*



Jeffrey Schmidt
*Data & Technology
Director*



Joe Peterangelo
Senior Researcher



Sara Shaw
Senior Researcher



Ari Brown
*Senior Research
Associate*



Betsy Mueller
Researcher



Tyler Byrnes
Researcher



Don Cramer
Researcher



Alyssa Doman
*Membership &
Operations Coordinator*

Report design credits: Ragusin Design; Alyssa Doman Photo credits: Landre Photography

Not pictured: Davida Amenta: *Researcher*; Ashley Fisher: *Senior Research Associate*; Mandy Potapenko: *Director, Milwaukee Community Justice Council*; Erin Perkins: *Project Manager, Milwaukee Community Justice Council*; Isaiah Garcia-Morton & Noah Bartelt: *Research Interns*



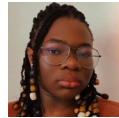
2021-2022
Todd A. Berry Fellow
Julia Smucker



2021-2022
Norman N. Gill Fellow
Ned Littlefield



2022-2023
Todd A. Berry Fellow
John Zordani



2022-2023
Norman N. Gill Fellow
Maria Hamidu

GOVERNMENTAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

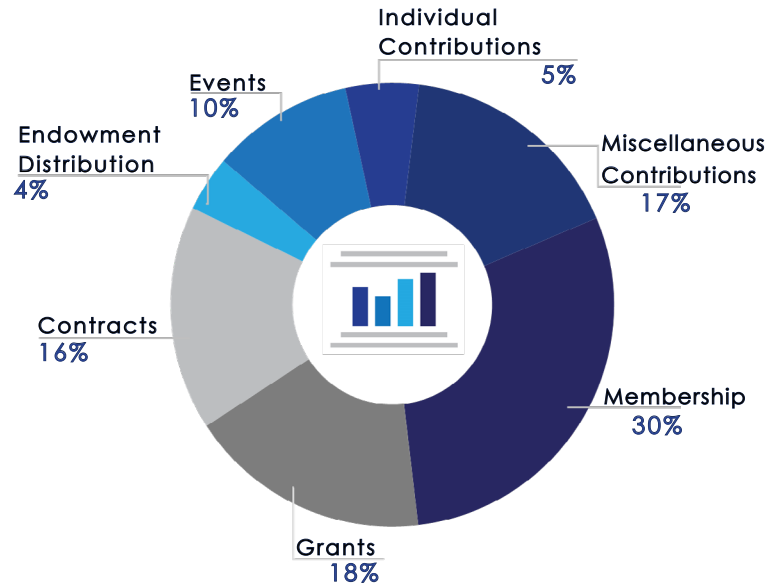
The Forum is an active member of the Governmental Research Association (GRA), which was founded in 1914 as the national organization of entities engaged in governmental research. Vice President and Research Director Jason Stein serves on the GRA board of directors and President Rob Henken is a past president of GRA.

FINANCES

The Wisconsin Policy Forum had a mixed year financially in 2022. On the positive side, the easing of COVID-19 allowed us to return to in-person events and re-initiate our aggressive pursuit of new members, and we were able to surpass our budgeted revenues in both areas by wide margins. Grant and contract income also remained strong, and we benefited from \$176,000 in income from the federal pandemic-related employee retention tax credit. Unfortunately, that good news was countered by investment losses in our healthy reserves from the sharp stock market downturn.

Overall, our unaudited results show we ran a \$116,000 operating deficit in 2022, with about \$1.25 million in unaudited operating revenue and \$1.4 million in unaudited operating expenditures. However, a caveat was our decision not to make our typical 4% withdrawal from our healthy reserves given our positive cash flow and the desire not to do so while our investments had declined. Had we made our typical withdrawal, then we would have run an operating surplus of about \$50,000. Unfortunately, with about \$850,000 of investment losses, our overall unaudited financial statements show a sizable deficit, though investment gains the previous two years more than offset the 2022 losses.

The budget is overseen by the Forum's Finance and Executive Committees, which receive frequent and periodic reports. Unaudited totals show that in 2022, about 34% of the Forum's operating revenue came from grants and contracts from foundations, governments, and other entities, which support specific research projects or areas of research. Roughly 30% of operating revenue came from membership dues, which support discretionary research projects and activities deemed important by the staff and directors.



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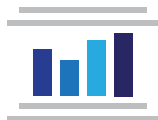
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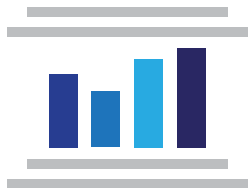
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The Chairman's Club was established in 2016 to help build financial capacity to support the Forum's core mission and enhance its communications. These generous supporters receive complimentary admission to all Forum events and are invited to private receptions at great venues featuring prominent speakers. Many thanks to these members who support the Forum through direct donations or bequests.

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