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# Wisconsin Senior Employment (WISE) Program



## Participant Handbook

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# Wisconsin Senior Employment (WISE) Program

## Program Overview

WISE stands for **W**ISCONSIN **S**ENIOR **E**MPLOYMENT.

- The Wisconsin Senior Employment Program is also known as the **Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP)** or Title V of the Older American's Act.

The State of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development contracts with private, non-profit agencies to provide the WISE Program in various locations in Wisconsin. The contracted agencies or sub-grantees the State of Wisconsin works with are:

- **Employment & Training Association, Inc.**
  - Serves Dane & Columbia Counties
- **Employ Milwaukee Workforce Development Board**
  - *Serves Milwaukee County*
- **Southwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Board**
  - Serves Green, Lafayette & Rock Counties.
- **Workforce Connections**
  - *Serves Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, & Vernon Counties.*

## What we do:

The WISE Program is a federally funded employment and training program designed to help eligible seniors gain valuable work experience to enhance their prospects for employment.

## Who is eligible:

To be eligible for the WISE program, a person must meet the following qualifications:

- **Age:** 55 years of age or older.
- **Income:** Family income may not exceed 125% of the Federal Poverty Level.
- **Unemployed:** At the time of enrollment and throughout participation in the WISE program, must be without a job, want to work, and be available to work.
- **Residency:** Live in the State of Wisconsin and eligible to work in the USA.

## Who is suitable:

Various additional factors contribute to make a person a good match for the program, some of these factors are:

- Access to regular, reliable transportation (e.g. car or bus)
- Access and use of reliable communication (e.g. phone or email)
- Willingness to work
- Possess basic work skills, work ethic, and work edict
- Manageable physical and mental health to facilitate independent work
- Suitable to work in a community nonprofit organization or government agency

## Program Purpose

- Help older adults develop a recent work history and update job skills to increase their employment opportunities.
- Support our community through the service of WISE program participants.

## **How the WISE Program works:**

- During the application and enrollment process, the WISE Program Coordinator gathers information from applicants to determine their eligibility and suitability for the WISE Program.
- Once participants are determined eligible and suitable for the WISE Program, they receive a program orientation and assessment from the WISE Program Coordinator to determine their job interests, their current job skills, and their job skill needs. Then participants work with the WISE Program Coordinator to find a community-based organization, 501(c)3, or government entity where they can work to develop job skills and work experience.
- By working at a community-based organization or government entity, WISE participants gain practical work experience, update their job skills, receive training and supervision, and contribute to the general welfare of the community.
- When the WISE participants are ready, they begin the job search process with the support of the WISE Program Coordinator. WISE participants can remain in the WISE program no more than 4 years.

## **Components of the WISE Program:**

### ***Application and Initial Assessment***

The application and assessment are used to provide career guidance, selection of an appropriate host agency worksite and to determine any barriers to employment.

### ***Individual Employment Plan***

The Individual Employment Plan (IEP) consists of specific needs, goals, and action steps with associated timeframes to achieve your employment goals.

The IEP is reviewed periodically with you or when you have completed a goal. This can be as often as every 30 days, quarterly or every six months. The IEP can be revised during each review. A copy the IEP can be provided to you so you can monitor your own progress.

### ***Host Agency***

A “host agency” is a community-based organization, 501(c)3, or government entity that provides WISE participants with a work opportunity to develop job skills and work experience. The host agency supervisor and other assigned staff will help direct you in daily activities and assigned tasks, but they are not legally responsible for your participation in the program. The WISE Program Coordinator works with the host agency to monitor your participation in the program. Questions and concerns about your host agency, including job tasks and schedule, should be addressed to the WISE program coordinator.

- The host agency should provide an orientation for the WISE participant with:
  - A job description.
  - A work schedule (WISE participants can work between 10 and 20 hours at their host agency).
  - A supervisor and that person’s contact information.
  - An overview of the agency and its policies and expectations before you begin your assignment.

### **Responsibilities of a WISE Participant at a Host Agency:**

- Abide by host agency and WISE Program personnel policies.
- Arrive on time; neat, clean, and appropriately dressed.
- Work the schedule assigned for your community service assignment.
  - Work hours per week should be between 10 and 20 hours.
- Contact the WISE Program Coordinator and Host Agency Supervisor if you will be late or cannot work on the scheduled day.
  - A no-show without contacting the coordinator or supervisor may jeopardize your participation in the program. You can be terminated.
- Perform the assigned duties of your community service assignment to the best of your ability.
- Report changes in your duties or any concerns about your placement to the WISE Program Coordinator.
- Be professional and maintain a positive attitude.

### **Workplace expectations:**

#### ***Drug Free Workplace Act of 1988***

WISE participants are forbidden from possessing, distributing, dispensing, transferring, or using alcohol or nonprescription drugs while working at their host agency or while attending any WISE Program sponsored training or event. Any participant who has been caught and convicted of a criminal drug-related violation occurring in the workplace will be subject to termination and will be referred to a rehabilitation program.

Under the Federal Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988, an employee convicted of a criminal drug related charge must notify his/her immediate supervisor of such conviction, no later than five (5) days following the conviction if the violation occurred at the workplace. Failure to report as required may result in disciplinary action including termination.

#### ***Political Activity***

While working at their host agency or representing the WISE Program, participants cannot:

- Engage in any work to influence the legislative process.
- Engage in partisan political activity.
- Campaign for a political candidate or run for political office.

Any questions regarding allowable political activity should be directed to:

Larry D. Turner, Inspector General of the Department of Labor  
Office of Inspector General  
200 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20210  
1-800-347-3756

#### ***Volunteer Time***

You cannot volunteer additional hours per week beyond your normal training hours at your assigned host agency. To do so is a violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act. You can volunteer anywhere else in the community if it is not associated with your WISE Program worksite. If you do volunteer prior and during participation in the WISE Program, keep the WISE program coordinator informed of where and how many hours. The WISE Program is mandated by the U.S. Department of Labor to track participant volunteer activities before, during, and after enrollment.

***Time Off***

The WISE Program does not have funding to provide sick pay, vacation pay or holiday pay. Pre-planned absences such as a vacation must be requested in advance and approved by the host agency supervisor and the WISE program coordinator. The participant should work with the host agency supervisor and the WISE program coordinator to make arrangements for making up lost hours by working additional hours at other times.

## **Training Wage**

- The amount of pay you receive is the federal minimum wage and Wisconsin's minimum wage which is \$7.25 per hour.
- Your training wage is paid the by the WISE Program, not by your host agency.
- You will be paid for time spent working in your community service assignment as well as any time spent attending approved and/or required training sessions.
- Wages paid under this program are considered ordinary income for tax purposes and are subject to Federal, Social Security, Medicare, State and Local taxes.

## **Training**

Training for WISE participants is designed to teach specific skills necessary to obtain or maintain employment. Training is provided in the WISE Program through the community service assignment at the host agency and some classroom and/or remote training options.

Participants are assigned to community service assignments that provide training relevant to the occupational goals of the WISE participant. In most cases, the host agency provides job readiness or soft skills to the participant.

Additional training topics are offered and/or recommended by the WISE Program Coordinator to help develop job skills or aptitudes such as introductory computer courses, registering online at the Wisconsin Job Center, completing a resume, filling out a job, preparing for an interview.

Some advanced level training courses may be arranged through an institution of higher education for a fee if eligible or through a WIOA partner agency. It is the responsibility of the participant who is enrolled, to attend and complete the entire course.

## **Supportive Services**

WISE Program participants can receive limited support for such needs as food, transportation, or work-related supplies that will improve work performance. To request such assistance, contact the WISE program coordinator.

## **Recertification**

WISE Program participants are required to be recertified annually to determine continued eligibility for the program. If during the recertification process it is determined that you are no longer eligible, you will be terminated effective 30-days from the date of the letter mailed to you. The letter will explain why you were determined to be ineligible with the right to appeal the decision. The WISE program coordinator will refer you to other available employment and training resources to support your employment needs.

## **Responsibilities of a WISE Participant in seeking employment:**

- Attend WISE Program meetings, trainings, workshops, computer classes or other activities as instructed or mandated by the Program Coordinator or the host agency supervisor to develop job skills.
- Register with the local job center using the Wisconsin Job Center website.
- Actively pursue the job seeking activities outlined in your IEP.

## **Local Job Centers**

(<http://www.wisconsinjobcenter.org/jobseeker/>),

Participants are required to register with the Wisconsin job center within 30 days from the date of eligibility or enrollment. Registration is a simple process and can be completed from any computer at a local county job center, library, or home. If you are receiving Unemployment Compensation or services and/or assistance in the FoodShare or other WIOA programs you are automatically enrolled.

Job Centers offer career services and resources depending on the location.

In most areas these services are offered:

- Job leads through Job Fairs or Job Clubs
- Local employer and labor market information
- Computer lab for preparing or updating your resume and practicing computer skills
- Internet access
- Telephone, photocopy, and fax machines
- Referral to other services
- Screening for other programs that may provide training or assistance

## **Worker's Compensation**

The WISE Program provides Worker's Compensation insurance for participants to insure them against workplace injuries suffer during scheduled work hours and while performing duties as specified in your community services assignment training description.

If you experience a work-related accident or occupational illness, you are to immediately notify your host agency supervisor. The host agency supervisor will contact the program coordinator and provide complete information on the nature of the injury or illness, exact date and time of the occurrence, an explanation of the injury or illness and if any medical attention was sought and/or provided. If medical attention is sought and/or provided a copy of the accident or illness from the administering medical facility should be provided to the program coordinator especially if the participant is advised to take time off from the worksite.

## **Non-discrimination Policy**

Given the WISE Program eligibility requirements, no person can be excluded from participation in the WISE program or be subject to discrimination in connection with the WISE Program because of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, religion, creed, political affiliation, sex, age, handicap, or other developmental disability.

## **Exiting the WISE Program**

WISE Participants are exited from the program for the following reasons:

- Gained employment
- Voluntarily leave the WISE Program at any time for any reason.
- Move from the area. (In the event that you are moving, notify the program coordinator immediately. They can put you in contact or transfer you to another agency administering the Senior Community Services Employment Program.)
- Health or medical issues or caregiving responsibilities that preclude working
- Reached your time limit in the WISE/SCSEP program
- No longer meet income eligibility requirements of the program.

## **Termination**

WISE Participants can be terminated from the program for the following reasons:

- Refusing to cooperate, insubordination.
- Providing false information to establish eligibility.
- Falsifying time sheets or any other records
- Repeated tardiness or absences
- Failing to perform reasonable assigned duties.
- Disrespecting or harassing WISE staff, other participants, or people at host sites.
- Reporting to WISE events or host sites under the influence of or in possession of alcohol or drugs not prescribed by your doctor.
- Violent behavior
- Intentional destruction of property
- Using obscene or prejudicial language.
- Non-compliance with WISE or host agency policies
- Sexual harassment.
- Obscene, abusive, harassing, or threatening language or behavior.
- Causing an imminent threat to health or safety.
- Failure to register with Wisconsin Job Service
- Failure to attend any meetings, trainings, workshops and/or classes required by the WISE Program.
- Failure/refusal to cooperate with the recertification, assessment, or IEP process (participating in any of the activities identified in your Individual Employment Plan).
- Failure/refusal to engage in the job seeking process.

*Additional grounds for dismissal may apply.*

Severe breaches of conduct can result in immediate termination. In instances where a participant has threatened another person or created a hostile situation, termination is immediate. With lesser cases the WISE Program Coordinator will warn the participant that they are going to be let go in person or by phone, then forward a termination letter. Dismissal will be effective 30 days from the date of the letter. The letter will explain reasons why you have been terminated along with information on how to appeal the decision to the Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health, Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources Senior Employment Program Coordinator.

## **Grievance**

If you experience problems at your host agency, reach out to the WISE Program coordinator to help you resolve these issues. This may include recommendations for changes in your behavior. If the situation does not improve, some options could include moving the WISE Participant to another host agency or terminating the WISE Participant. Termination would happen with a warning and only after a 30-day notification.

## **Benefits and the WISE Program**

### ***Unemployment Benefits***

The WISE Program is a federal training program and not an employer. Since participation in the WISE Program is not considered employment but rather training a participant terminated can file for unemployment but will not receive benefits under the WISE Program if terminated. The Unemployment Compensation Unit will look at any employment prior to enrollment in the WISE Program.

### ***Effects on Other Benefits***

Wages paid as a result of your participation in this program do not affect eligibility for federally subsidized housing assistance or food stamps, however, they will reduce any Unemployment Compensation benefit you may be receiving as well as other benefits such as Social Security Disability. If you receive federal benefits such as Medicaid, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) check with a Benefits Specialist to determine the impact of the WISE Program training wage on any benefits you receive. The WISE program coordinator can supply documentation to verify that your WISE training wage should not impact food stamps or subsidized housing.

### ***Elder Benefit Specialist Program***

Participants who are 60-years of age and over and need assistance in connecting to benefit programs, should contact a Benefit Specialist. The Benefit Specialist Program can be found by contacting the local Aging and Disability Resource Center.

A benefit specialist is a person who is trained to help older persons who are having a problem with their private or government benefits. They help determine what benefits are available and how to apply. Benefit specialists are continually trained and monitored by attorneys knowledgeable in elderly law.

### ***Veteran Benefits and Services***

The U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs offers a variety of benefits to individuals, and in some instances family members who have served in the armed forces. Benefits can include cash payments, health care, education, home loans, etc. Contact your County Veteran's Service office for more information.

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## Wisconsin Senior Employment Program (WISE) Participant Rights and Responsibilities Handbook Acknowledgement

### Responsibilities of a WISE Participant at a Host Agency:

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- Register with the local job center using the Wisconsin Job Center website.
- Actively pursue the job seeking activities outlined in your IEP.

This agreement reinforces the participant's understanding of the WISE Program as a training program as well as the participant's responsibility to cooperate with all job development efforts made in his/her behalf.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Program Coordinator/Staff Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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