**Fiscal Facts: STEM Workers a Strength but Metro Milwaukee Lags in Other Innovation Metrics**

Metro Milwaukee’s concentration of workers employed in STEM occupations is a competitive strength, but it lags peer metros on other metrics including productivity, household income, exports, and venture capital funding.

These are among the key findings of the Wisconsin’s Policy Forum’s newly updated Metro Milwaukee Innovation DataTool. [This online interactive, available to all at the Forum website](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/2022-metro-milwaukee-innovation-datatool/), is meant to help the region identify its economic strengths and weaknesses, and set priorities for improvement.

The interactive tool tracks metro Milwaukee’s performance over the last decade on 17 indicators tied to innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. To understand how metro Milwaukee is doing relative to its peers, the tool also provides data for 10 other metro areas: Austin, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Oklahoma City, Pittsburgh, and Portland.

Areas of innovation strength for metro Milwaukee include:

**STEM talent a long-term plus:** In 2021, metro Milwaukee had a higher concentration of scientists and engineers than all but two comparison metros included in our DataTool, even outpacing Austin, TX – a national standout for economic growth. Metro Milwaukee also performs well on overall technology talent, ranking fourth among our 11 comparison metro areas and well above the national average.

**Education, business growth improving:** The share of the Metro Milwaukee region’s adults (ages 25 and over) with bachelor’s degrees or higher increased 7.4 percentage points between 2011 and 2021, outpacing more than half of our comparison metros. Metro Milwaukee also stands out for its progress on the ratio of business openings and closures.

Areas where improvement is possible, and may be needed for metro Milwaukee to compete, include:

**Venture capital funding, productivity continue to lag:** Venture capital (VC) investing typically supports startup companies with strong growth potential. While VC investing is concentrated in a few coastal metro areas, metro Milwaukee trails even most Midwestern peers on a per-capita basis and has for many years. Meanwhile, until recently, metro Milwaukee was competitive with peers in its per-employee gross domestic product (GDP). The region’s productivity has slid, however, and it now ranks 10th among the 11 comparison metros.

**Recent downturn in exports, income:** One troubling trend is the region’s steady decline in global exports per employee over the last decade. Adjusted for inflation, the value of metro Milwaukee’s global exports was 27.1% lower in 2020 than in 2010. Only three comparison metros saw the real value of their global exports decline faster during that period. And while the median income of metro Milwaukee households has increased modestly in the last decade, it has grown at a slower pace than in all but two of our comparison metros.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at* [*wispolicyforum.org*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*