

# McKenna Center

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## Milwaukee, WI - Milwaukee Entrepreneurship and Adversity Program

**Location:** Milwaukee, WI

**Venue:** BizStarts

BizStarts is a non-profit organization started in 2008 to provide the first seamless, region-wide approach to assisting entrepreneurs in southeastern Wisconsin. BizStarts works with a range of community partners and delivers training, mentoring, consulting, and resource connectivity. They have helped launch over 2,000 businesses in the past ten years. They joined and adopted the model UPBI in 2020, and are now focused on serving minority, women, and disadvantaged entrepreneurs in the Milwaukee area through their BizStarts Institute.

**Regional Assets:** Situated on Lake Michigan with a population of 594,548 and a 90-mile drive to Chicago, Milwaukee is an ideal location for starting a business. Wisconsin is positioned near Michigan, Illinois, Minnesota, and Iowa, giving businesses access to Midwest markets. Primary industries include manufacturing, technology, healthcare, and brewing.

**Financial and Business Resources:** Milwaukee is ranked fourth highest in Fortune 500 companies per capita. The Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) supports businesses by providing short-term "gap" financing at low interest rates. [Gener8tor](#) is an angel investment group for startups and provides mentors and advisors in addition to cash. [The Commons](#) is an innovation accelerator, connecting emerging entrepreneurs and established businesses while teaching job skills.

**Workforce:** Almost a quarter of Milwaukee residents have earned a Bachelor's degree or higher, and 52% have at least a high school degree. However, 25% of adults are at or below the lowest literacy level. Wisconsin has one of the **widest achievement gaps between African American and white students** on fourth- and eighth-grade math and reading tests in the nation. The gap in graduation rates is the largest in the nation with white students at 92.9% and African-American students at 66.1%.

**Infrastructure:** Milwaukee's local airport serves 40 US cities, as well as Canada and Mexico with non-stop service. The city is accessible by road via Highway Routes 43, 41, and 94. Port Milwaukee is located on the western shore of Lake Michigan and 1,021 nautical miles from Montreal, Quebec. Serving as a regional transportation and distribution center with a primary market including the State of Wisconsin, northern and western Illinois (including Chicago), and eastern Minnesota including Minneapolis and St. Paul. Port Milwaukee is also capable of cost-effectively reaching Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Missouri, and Indiana, and the western Canadian provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

**Underserved Communities:** Milwaukee currently ranks 4th among major cities in the US in terms of children living in poverty at 43%. One in five of the total population is living in poverty. Of those, as with our other target cities, the majority (86%) are from minority populations.

**Stakeholders Leveraged** for the UPBI program (BizStarts Institute) include the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Bader Philanthropies, St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care, Riverworks Milwaukee, Social Development Commission, Havenwoods, and MKE Black. These community partners, all working in underserved communities of color, work with us to promote, recruit and support the BizStarts Institute.

**Contact:** [BizStarts](#)

1555 N. River Center Drive  
Suite 210

Milwaukee, WI 53212

Telephone: 414.973.2334

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Notre Dame, IN 46556 USA

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